

Yeshiva University, Cardozo School of Law **LARC @ Cardozo Law**

Articles

Faculty

2011

Dean Verkuil

Michael Herz

Benjamin N. Cardozo School of Law, herz@yu.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://larc.cardozo.yu.edu/faculty-articles>



Part of the [Law Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Michael Herz, *Dean Verkuil*, 32 Cardozo Law Review 2173 (2011).

Available at: <https://larc.cardozo.yu.edu/faculty-articles/77>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Faculty at LARC @ Cardozo Law. It has been accepted for inclusion in Articles by an authorized administrator of LARC @ Cardozo Law. For more information, please contact christine.george@yu.edu, carissa.vogel@yu.edu.

DEAN VERKUIL

*Michael Herz**

For Paul Verkuil's first three years as dean of the Cardozo School of Law, it was my privilege to serve as his associate dean. That post can be a mixed blessing; one can spend a lot of time fixing problems that should never have occurred, one does not always see one's colleagues or one's students at their best, and the intellectual delights are not quite at the level that aspiring academics imagine await them within the hallowed halls. All in all, however, the rewarding outweighs the dismal and the frustrating.

At least, the rewarding outweighs the dismal and the frustrating if one has the right dean. I did. Paul knew how to delegate without abandoning and how to guide without dictating. He supported those who worked for him. He cared about the institution's success. He set high but realistic standards. He did not give pep talks as a matter of course, but when encouragement was needed, he provided it.

Perhaps most important, I learned from his example important lessons about how to conduct oneself (and, *ever* so rarely, how not to!) as an administrator. Here is just one example. Very early in his tenure, Paul and I met with the Minority Law Students Association, which was not, at the time, a very happy group. He could not have been on the job for more than two weeks. The meeting was around a big conference table, which didn't quite hold all the attendees, some of whom were in seats along the walls. When we came into the room, the students were already there, and I assumed that Paul would take his position at the head of the table and just start the meeting. Instead, he walked all the way around the room, introducing himself and shaking hands individually with every student there. That meaningful and disarming gesture, communicating concern, respect, and mutuality, was as important as anything he said, and completely altered the tone of what might have been a pretty tense meeting.

Finally, Paul, who has seen a lot, knew how to keep things in perspective. It is not that he was cool and blasé; to the contrary, he cared and he has a temper. But he knew how to tell minor setbacks

* Arthur Kaplan Professor of Law, Benjamin N. Cardozo School of Law, Yeshiva University.

from real problems and understood that a certain amount of brickbats came with the job.

Which brings me to my text. At one point during his deanship, something had gone wrong. I honestly do not remember what. But someone was annoyed with something we had done, or had refused to cooperate in what seemed a self-serving way, or was insisting we waste time on something pointless. I was fretting and unsure. Paul was calm and confident. "It's like the Ortega poem," he said. I had no idea what he was talking about. So he pulled from his bookshelf Ted Sorensen's biography of John F. Kennedy. I would not say the book fell open to the page he was looking for, but he found it pretty quickly; this was obviously not the first time he had turned to it. The relevant passage was about Kennedy's affection for a stanza of poetry that he would invoke when it seemed he was criticized from all sides. The poem is by Domingo Ortega and, as translated by Robert Graves, the excerpt reads:

Bullfight critics ranked in rows
Crowd the enormous plaza full;
But only one is there who knows —
And he's the one who fights the bull.¹

In that spirit, as Paul leaves Cardozo for Washington, here is a poetic tribute to Dean Verkuil, the one who fights the bull.

¹ THEODORE C. SORENSEN, KENNEDY 336 (1965). Paul later invoked Kennedy, Sorensen, and Ortega in print as well. See Paul R. Verkuil, *Hitting for the Academic Cycle*, 33 U. TOL. L. REV. 245, 245 (2001).

Fighting the Bull

For four years at YU,
Not exactly the bayou,
Dean Verkuil was fighting the bull.
And beforehand and after,
With tears and with laughter,
He stared down that huge animal.

“Who or what,” you may ask,
As you warm to the task,
“Is this bull with which you’re concerned?”
It is there, you must face it,
You’ll never outrace it,
Just go ask a failed dean what he’s learned.

If you are a local,
Then you know the point focal,
But there are bulls of every description.
Competing constituents —
Students, faculty, staff, the university, the board, alums, the media,
applicants, donors, employers, accreditors (not to mention
their brothers and their sisters and their mothers and their
fathers and their cousins and their uncles and their aunts) —
It’s enough to cause a conniption!

The bull’s there, without doubt,
Stampeding about,
In that china boutique metaphorical.
But Paul R. Verkuil,
With wisdom and guile,
Proved peerless in skills matadorical.

Now Verkuil, Paul R.,
The eminent scholar,
Walks away from law school helming.
He finds himself in DC,
A/k/a “the small easy,”
Where the number of bulls: overwhelming.

He's emerged from the fracas
As Chair of the ACUS,
Accepting the call of his nation.
Both a challenge, I fear —
Got your cape? Got your spear? —
And a devoutly to be wished consummation.

As has often been noted,
Since the idea was first floated,
This new post fits Verkuil to a tee.
After years doing studies,
Of government fuddie-duddies,
PRV's got his own agency!

He'll be missed at Cardozo,
I don't *think* so I *know* so,
A rent in the fabric collegial.
But who would deny him —
Santé, L'chayim —
A post so important and prestigial.

So please raise up your glass,
In vino veritas,
To salute el toreador.
In law schools, as in show biz,
What you say as you go is,
"Always leave the audience wanting more."