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Lifetime Achievers

Our fourth annual awards to honor distinctive careers and public service.

Two former Cabinet members and a Kennedy administration insider. An NAACP lawyer who helped the civil rights movement defend and expand its gains in the seventies, and a pair of big-firm litigators who have been passionate about indigent defense and capital work for decades. A corporate governance pioneer, and a general counsel who used his position at General Motors as an engine for change. This is our fourth annual set of Lifetime Achievers, and over the next 16 pages, we tell their stories. These are senior lawyers who have made outsize contributions to public life while building outstanding practices at firms, in corporations, at public interest groups, or on the bench. Throughout their careers, these lawyers have exemplified the legal profession's twin values of client service and public duty. To those who follow them, their work stands as both an inspiration and a challenge.

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Photography Portfolio By Michael J.N. Bowles

JEROLD SOLOVY
Jenner & Block





THOMAS SULLIVAN
Jenner & Block

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THOMAS SULLIVAN STARTED PRACTICING LAW AT JENNER & Block in 1954. Jerold Solovy followed the next year. According to Solovy, that gave Sullivan an unfair advantage. “Tom is like the little rabbit that the dog chases around the track,” says Solovy, who is Jenner’s chairman. “I’ve been chasing Tom my entire life.”

If so, Sullivan gave Solovy a great target. Over the last half-century, the two 77-year-old men have compiled astonishing records of public service and pro bono accomplishments, including representing scores of indigent criminal defendants and devoting themselves to capital punishment reform. And their example is followed throughout their firm: For 15 years, Jenner has ranked in the top ten in *The American Lawyer’s* pro bono survey. “The tradition of pro bono is in the DNA of that law firm,” says Winston & Strawn partner Dan Webb. “They’re recognized in the Chicago legal community as real standard-bearers for pro bono.”

As young lawyers at Jenner, both men took a stream of court-appointed indigent criminal cases. “Robbery, rape, child molestation, murder, you name it, we did it,” Sullivan recalls. From that unheralded start they rose to play essential roles in the criminal justice system. Sullivan went on to become U.S. attorney for the Northern District of Illinois from 1977 to 1981. During his tenure, he began the far-reaching probe into judicial corruption in the Cook County courts known as Operation Greylord. On a different front, Solovy advanced the effort to clean up Chicago’s courts by heading a commission that identified ways to avoid another Greylord-type scandal.

During his career, Solovy argued five cases before the U.S. Supreme Court, including three for indigent defendants. He notes that he lost those three, including *Kirby v. Illinois*, in which the Court held in 1972 that an indigent is not entitled to counsel for a pre-indictment lineup.

Solovy cites another Supreme Court case he worked on (but did not argue) as one of the proudest achievements of his career. In *Witherspoon v. Illinois*, Solovy, Sullivan, and Albert Jenner, Jr., were appointed counsel to Bill Witherspoon a few weeks before his scheduled execution. The Jenner lawyers got a postponement of the execution, and in 1968 Jenner convinced the high court to reverse the death sentence because prosecutors had excluded any juror who opposed capital punishment. “That stopped the march of the death penalty for about ten years,” Solovy says. An estimated 350 people on death row were resentenced following the decision.

Recently, Sullivan continued his work on capital punishment reform by serving as cochair of the Illinois governor’s Commission on Capital Punishment, started by former governor George Ryan. In 2002 the commission issued a report with specific recommendations to make Illinois’s capital punishment system more “just, fair, and accurate.” Since then, Illinois has adopted several of these recommendations, including the nation’s first law requiring the elec-



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tronic recording of custodial interviews in potential capital cases.

Author and lawyer Scott Turow—whom Sullivan hired out of law school as a federal prosecutor—served on that commission and praises Sullivan’s dedication. “Tom Sullivan worked the hardest of all,” Turow says. “Tom really set the standard for all of us. He truly is really, really special.”

The commission’s work has made a difference. From 2003 to 2006, only ten individuals have been sentenced to death row in Illinois—the same number sentenced in 2000 alone. Sullivan continues to campaign for recording of interviews across the country. Today, six other states and the District of Columbia require them, and hundreds of local police departments have voluntarily adopted recording rules. Sullivan, who is currently serving as chairman of the Illinois Capital Punishment Study Commission, is blunt about his feelings regarding the death penalty: “It’s stupid.”

Sullivan is similarly outspoken about Guantánamo Bay: “It’s a scandal.” He and other Jenner lawyers represent 18 prisoners at the military prison, which he’s visited four times. (He is scheduled to return in September.) He describes these cases as “terribly, terribly frustrating” because of the absence of due process protections and the harsh conditions of confinement. Solovy also maintains an “indigent stable” of cases, including representation of a woman who lost her house in a tax sale, and supervision of several appeals at the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Seventh Circuit.

Despite the similarities in their careers, Solovy and Sullivan are “dead opposites,” Solovy says. Webb describes the two: “Sullivan is one of the most dedicated, serious lawyers you’ll ever run into. He’s very soft-spoken and modest and unassuming. . . . Solovy is more outgoing and is a great salesman for his firm.” Webb, who considers both to be his friends, adds, “Both are real decent people.”

Representing clients whose liberty or life is at stake takes an emotional toll. Solovy recalls the gut-wrenching ordeal of having his client, Hernando Williams, executed: “Although this guy was a really bad guy, it’s hard to lose somebody that way.” Solovy is still troubled by the “Baby Richard” case, in which he represented pro bono the adoptive parents of a child whose natural father sued to reclaim custody. Four years after the adoption, in 1995, the Illinois Supreme Court sided with the natural father. “I still think about that,” says Solovy. “Poor adoptive parents. That was awful.”

Sullivan is succinct when he explains how he balanced a lifelong commitment to public interest work with a practice for paying clients: “I worked a lot.” He adds, “When I look back on my career of 54 years, the cases I remember are not the big-money cases for big-money companies, but the pro bono cases.” The cases for which he’s billing fat fees and immersed in document production are “drudgery work,” he says. “But when you can get into a case for people who are desperate—some of whom have been accused of horrible crimes, but they need a lawyer—that’s more significant.”

—SUSAN BECK