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LIFETIME ACHIEVERS

Our 13th annual awards honor lawyers who have had an extraordinary impact on society and their profession.

LIFETIME ACHIEVERS 2016



Anton Valukas | JENNER & BLOCK

ANTON VALUKAS HAS SEEN SOME OF THE NATION'S MOST POWERFUL institutions at their worst. As the U.S. Attorney for the Northern District of Illinois in the 1980s, he presided over Operation Greylord, an undercover investigation that exposed rampant corruption in the county's local courts. As a special examiner in the Lehman Brothers Holdings Inc. bankruptcy after the 2008 financial crisis, he saw how unchecked greed poisoned the financial system.

But it didn't make him cynical, he says. "It left me wary," Valukas, now 73, says about the experiences. "What I'm troubled by," he says, "is pretending that things are other than what they are."

Valukas was inspired to become a lawyer by the civil rights movement of the 1960s. As a new lawyer, through the National Defender Project, he helped establish public defender offices in Mississippi and elsewhere. In 1971 he became an assistant U.S. attorney in his hometown of Chicago, then moved to Jenner & Block in 1976.

In 1985 he became U.S. Attorney for the Northern District of Illinois, and took the reins of the Greylord investigation, already underway. Close to 100 people were convicted or took pleas, including 15 judges and 50 lawyers. Valukas personally tried two cases, winning convictions of two judges and nine others.

"It amazed me that lawyers had stood by and done nothing about it," he says. "There was a conspiracy of silence."

Upon returning to Jenner in 1989, Valukas handled a range of civil matters: He represented American Airlines in airplane crash litigation, Honeywell International Inc. in a major contract dispute and H&R Block Inc. in a consumer class action. For General Motors Co., he recently led an internal investigation into ignition switch failures. He continued his commitment to public service, including leading an Illinois task force on prison conditions that led to reform legislation in 1993. He has been Jenner's chair since 2007.

In an era obsessed with profits, Valukas has preached that a firm can thrive without losing its soul. "We have to be committed to each



TIM KLEIN

other, to pro bono and to public service," he says. (Jenner ranked No. 1 in our pro bono survey seven times since 1999)

Best known for leading massive investigations, Valukas now believes that he can do more good working with individuals. In 1990 he began mentoring four sixth-grade African-American boys through a program at the Cabrini Green housing project. One left the program, but Valukas has continued his relationship with the other three. All finished college and have jobs and families. One works in Jenner's accounting department.

"I am the man I am today because of Tony Valukas," says one of the three, Kevin Boens, now a 38-year-old police officer with the Cook County Sheriff's Department. "He taught me basic things, like how to tie a tie and be respectful and dream dreams."

Says Valukas: "If you asked me, 'Did I do more by being a U.S. attorney or mentoring to three young men?' I would say, 'Mentoring three young men.'"

—SUSAN BECK

ADVICE TO YOUNG LAWYERS:

Ask yourself why you're doing this. If you have a clear vision, it's worth the time and effort. But if you say, "I'm not sure what I want to do," maybe you shouldn't be a lawyer.