

# THE AMERICAN LAWYER

An **ALM** Publication

www.americanlawyer.com September 2010

## LIFETIME ACHIEVERS

*Our seventh annual awards honor outstanding private sector success and a devotion to public service.*

*AT THE AMERICAN LAWYER*, we keep a running list of men and women we might like to recognize at some point as Lifetime Achievers. This year, our final roster includes eight lawyers who met our standards for exemplary public service and outstanding professional success.

The 2010 list honors a former judge, Skadden, Arps, Slate, Meagher & Flom's Judith Kaye; a civil rights icon, Columbia Law School's Jack Greenberg; a pathbreaking managing partner, Alston & Bird's Ben Johnson III (winner of our second Law Firm Distinguished Leader Award); a former governor, Winston & Strawn's James Thompson; and three men who have put their civic duties at the core of their professional work: Hogan Lovells's Joseph Bell; Fried, Frank, Harris, Shriver & Jacobson's Robert Juceam; and Sonnenschein Nath & Rosenthal's Errol Stone.

Robert Joffe, Cravath, Swaine & Moore's former presiding partner, was on our running list from the beginning; in fact, he helped create the list with some wise advice about using this process to remind lawyers that it was possible to have a distinguished career at the private bar and make important contributions to public life. Joffe was still very active, and we planned to get to him later. Sadly, he died last winter from cancer at age 66. We've never made a posthumous award before. But here, as in life, Joffe was exceptional.

---

PHOTOGRAPHY PORTFOLIO BY MICHAEL J.N. BOWLES

---

Robert Joffe  
*Cravath, Swaine & Moore*



In Memoriam  
 1943–2010

BY ANY ACCOUNT, ROBERT JOFFE was a man of impressive accomplishments: A Harvard Law School grad, he served as the presiding partner of Cravath, Swaine & Moore for eight years, and the primary outside counsel to Time Warner for more than three decades. He was a preeminent boardroom adviser, counseling a cadre of companies—Merrill Lynch & Co., Inc., Fannie Mae, Citigroup Inc.—during some of their most troubled times. But to those who knew him, Joffe’s most distinguishing characteristic was his humanity: his devotion to fighting for the rights of others and his insistence on treating everyone he encountered with respect and dignity.

“He was the presiding partner of one of the most prestigious and high-powered law firms—he had almost a regal name and character about him—but underneath it all he was just a regular good guy,” says Richard Parsons, the chairman of Citigroup and former chairman and CEO of Time Warner. Joffe had more of a sense of his similarities to his fellow man than his differences, says Parsons. Joffe died at age 66 in January.

Shortly after joining Cravath in 1967, he spent two years on a Ford Foundation fellowship in Malawi, helping the newly independent country’s ministry of justice institute a framework for supervising local courts. Joffe rejoined Cravath in 1969 and became partner in 1975, but continued to devote time to a raft of pro bono and public service matters. He served on the board of Human Rights First for 22 years, participating in a 1989 mission to Kenya and testifying before Congress on human rights issues in the African country. He argued *Martin v. Wilks* before the U.S. Supreme Court, representing black and female municipal employees who were opposing a reverse discrimination action in Birmingham, Alabama. Joffe lost on appeal in a 5-to-4 decision. But he went on to lead Cravath’s representation of the plaintiff class as it sought to enforce consent decrees that prohibit

racial discrimination in municipal hiring in Jefferson County, Alabama, a more than 20-year project that continues today.

At Cravath, Joffe built a high-profile practice. “He was the only person in my life, other than my wife, whose judgment . . . I would rely on above my own,” says Parsons. In one of his most dramatic victories, Joffe successfully represented Time Inc. in its efforts to fend off a hostile bid from Paramount Communications, Inc., and preserve a merger with Warner Communications, Inc. That 1989 victory in Delaware Chancery Court and Delaware Supreme Court was a milestone in M&A litigation, reaffirming directors’ rights to control company affairs.

Joffe also developed a specialty advising independent directors on corporate boards, a practice that benefited from his unflappable and egoless demeanor, says Cravath presiding partner Evan Chesler, who succeeded him. Joffe went out of his way to praise the work of others and to deliver his counsel in a calm, succinct fashion.

Joffe represented the nonexecutive directors of Fannie Mae during its 2004 accounting scandal and its government takeover in September 2008. He represented Merrill Lynch’s independent directors from October 2007 through the bank’s sale to Bank of America Corporation in January 2009. He also advised the independent directors of Citigroup and General Motors Company as the former took billions in government bailouts and the latter confronted bankruptcy.

Yet these high-stakes assignments never encroached on his humanity. Joffe had “a heart that sees oneself as part of a larger world, a citizen of humanity,” said his son David at his memorial service. In the time before he was diagnosed with cancer, Joffe was contemplating the next chapter of his professional life: Not surprisingly, work relating to human rights issues in Africa was on top of that list.

—AMY KOLZ