



Insights: News

2022 Georgia Legal Awards | Lifetime Achiever: Michael Tyler

June 30, 2022



PROFESSIONAL EXCELLENCE

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MICHAEL TYLER, a partner at Kilpatrick Townsend & Stockton in Atlanta, specializes in cases involving complex commercial litigation, eminent domain and condemnation law, environment and product regulation, franchising, litigation, and product liability.

He was honored for a "40-year career [that] has forever changed Atlanta," according to his nominator essay. Tyler is Kilpatrick Townsend's first African-American



partner and for years has been a firm leader as a member of its complex commercial litigation team and chair of its land use practice group.

In the latter role, the essay said, “he represented Bell South and its successor AT&T in zoning litigation for the development of their cell-tower network throughout Georgia. He also represented Fulton County in numerous projects, including the development of Olympic Stadium for the Centennial Games, and the Atlanta Committee for the Olympic Games in building the Olympic athletes’ village and acquiring underutilized land for the Centennial Olympic Park.”

Tyler has also given back by devoting thousands of hours to pro bono work, focusing on civil rights matters and death penalty cases. “One endeavor he’s most proud of is heading the election protection program of the Lawyers Committee for Civil Rights Under Law since its inception in 2000,” the essay said.

Tyler has also been involved in his community. His volunteer duties include holding leadership roles with the State Bar of Georgia’s disciplinary and access to justice committees and creating a pre-law mentorship program at his alma mater, Morehouse College.

The Daily Report asked Tyler the following questions:

What inspired you to become a lawyer, and what would you credit with maintaining that inspiration?

I came of age during the height of the civil rights movement. I was born in 1954, just seven months after the landmark *Brown v. Board of Education* decision. My childhood heroes were Thurgood Marshall, Constance Baker Motley and the other legendary NAACP Legal Defense Fund lawyers. I envisioned becoming a lawyer as early as the fourth grade of elementary school. However, when I was permanently expelled from high school for organizing a demonstration in support of celebrating the birthday of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and was unable to retain a lawyer to vindicate the blatant violation of my First Amendment rights, my decision to become a lawyer became definitive and unalterable.

Could you please describe work on a case or issue that has made you proud to be a lawyer during the past year?

This past year, I was honored to be retained by the Fulton County Board of Registration and Elections to represent it in connection with its efforts to prevent the potential takeover of the Fulton County election process by the Georgia State Elections Board, pursuant to Senate Bill 202. This representation goes to the very heart of the preservation of local control of the democratic process. During the past year, I have also been extremely proud to be a part of the team of lawyers at my firm representing Jamil Al-Amin (formerly known as H. Rap Brown) in his quest to overturn his 2002 conviction for murder. For the past decade, my firm has represented Mr. Al-Amin on a pro bono basis and two years ago obtained a ruling from the 11th Circuit Court of Appeals that Mr. Al-Amin’s conviction was tainted by blatant prosecutorial misconduct which violated his constitutional rights.

What qualities should a lawyer possess to become a successful and effective leader?

For a lawyer to become a successful and effective leader the most important quality to have is a willingness to give of oneself in service. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. said that “everyone can be great, because everyone can serve.” Servant leadership is what is most effective and inspiring to others. This includes dedicated zealous service to our clients, to our colleagues and to the civic community. In addition to a willingness to serve, the most important attribute of any successful lawyer who aspires to lead, is a willingness to put in the hard work and long hours necessary to achieve exceptional results in every endeavor that she or he undertakes.

How do you see the field of law evolving in the next five to 10 years?

Over the next five to 10 years I see the legal field continuing to become more diverse. In my law school class in 1981 probably only about 25% were women and now nationally women constitute at least 50% of the entering law school classes. In addition to women continuing to grow in the profession, I envision continued growth in the number of attorneys of color entering the ranks of law firms and corporate legal departments. When I graduated from law school there were virtually no African American partners (and very few associates) in any of the major firms in Atlanta or nationally. While that number is still woefully inadequate, I do see it continuing to grow.

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