



## Rick Deane: A Great Lawyer, Innovator, and Friend

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“I’m glad to work at a Firm that has a Rick Deane.” This is the sentiment expressed by many when asked about recently retired Jones Day lawyer Rick Deane. During his remarkable career—which includes 25 years at the Firm—Rick broke barriers and achieved a level of success few ever reach, all while remaining soft-spoken, humble, and (we should add) impeccably dressed.

Raised in central Georgia at the end of the Jim Crow era, Rick was one of the first Black students to integrate Macon public schools—and one of only six Black students in his law school class at his alma mater, the University of Georgia. Rick went on to become one of the first Black Assistant U.S. Attorneys in the Northern District of Georgia, and later the Criminal Chief, before being selected as a magistrate judge. In 1998, he returned as the U.S. Attorney—a role he proudly held for three years—after being nominated by President Clinton and confirmed by the Senate.

*Time* magazine named Rick one of its 100 Innovators of the Year in 2001 for his unprecedented use of the federal RICO statute to prosecute numerous defendants as felons for sex trafficking underage girls. This was at a time when state law made trafficking teenagers merely a misdemeanor.

The list of Rick’s many achievements continues. He received one of the State Bar of Georgia’s highest honors for professionalism—the Chief Justice Thomas O. Marshall Professionalism Award—and was selected to be a Fellow of the American College of Trial Lawyers. Ever the game-changer, Rick went on to become that group’s president, the first Black president in its history.

In 2001, after leaving the DOJ, Rick joined Jones Day, where he served a number of leadership roles, including Partner-in-Charge of the Atlanta Office, co-chair of the Investigations & White Collar Defense Practice, and a member of the Advisory Committee.

Rick is a fantastic lawyer, but above all, he is a great friend and mentor to many, and he will continue to inspire generations to come.

Before he retired, Rick sat down with partner Yvette McGee Brown for a wide-ranging conversation, where, among other topics, he talked about joining Jones Day 25 years ago, the changes he’s seen in the legal profession, and his advice to the next generation of lawyers. The excerpted text is below.

We wish Rick all the best in the next chapter of his life.

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**Yvette McGee Brown:** Let’s start with: How did you find yourself at Jones Day?

**Rick Deane:** Well, it’s been quite a while, but I remember I was leaving government and starting to look around at what was the next thing to do. Deb Sudbury was a partner here at the Firm, and when I was on the bench, she actually had cases in front of me. And I just remember thinking that the work that she was doing was interesting and the quality of the work that she was doing was very, very interesting as well. I recall her reaching out and asking what was I doing next or did I have any plans, and she asked if I would speak with the person who was then the partner in charge

of the Atlanta Office, which was George Manning. I met with George, and we really hit it off. He turned out to be a kindred spirit in many ways, and that led me to Jones Day.

**YMB:** You told me once that when you walked into your first partners meeting with 800 or 900 of your closest partners, you were the only Black partner in the room. That had to be incredibly intimidating. How did you navigate that?

**RD:** Well, you just did. I had no qualms actually, because I've been the only Black person in the room a number of different times in my career. I was chief of the criminal division in Atlanta at a time when there were very few African Americans in the department, and certainly fewer still in the leadership ranks. When I went to the University of Georgia, I think there were roughly 20 thousand students on campus, and less than a hundred of them were African-American students. So I've been in a lot of rooms where I've been the only person of color there.

**YMB:** What's the advice you'd give to the lawyers who are developing their craft? What are the top skills you think young lawyers should develop?

**RD:** Well, I would certainly recommend and urge, frankly, that they find a mentor in the Firm, somebody who will help them to navigate the place. The other is: At every opportunity, do your very best. Never take a day off, never take an approach to an issue or a problem or an assignment that's anything less than your best

effort. Because first of all, the client's interests demand that. But more than that, your reputation within the Firm is being established by everything that you do.

**YMB:** And now, if you look back over your career at Jones Day, what do you think are the most significant changes in the Firm that you joined 25 years ago and the Firm that you're leaving today?

**RD:** The technology is just phenomenal. What we're able to do now, simply by virtue of technology available to us, is just the start. That's probably the biggest difference, and it's made us a lot more efficient. It's made us a lot more nimble in how we're able to handle our clients' affairs.

But the constant over all of that time, which I think is probably more important, is that the culture of the Firm has remained exactly the same. The collaborative spirit of Jones Day is just as strong now as ever, in my judgment. The commitment to promoting the Firm's interest over the individual interest is, I think, just as strong as ever. The Firm has been wonderful. I've so enjoyed working here. The people are great. The culture is, I find, very satisfying, and I find it to be very real. I've not encountered a partner who genuinely wouldn't help you in anything that you ever needed of them, all for the benefit of a client, and all for the benefit of the Firm itself.

So it's been a great journey, and I've really enjoyed it.

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