

Making Connections: A
Conversation with Dean Schwab

America's Challenge:
Domestic Security after 9/11

Vice Dean Siliciano to
Become Cornell Vice Provost

Cornell Law Forum

Spring 2004



Cornell Law Forum

Volume 30, Number 3
Spring 2004

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Jay W. Waks '71

Talk about focus. Jay W. Waks '71, a partner at Kaye Scholer LLP in Manhattan, has been at his firm for over three decades. When he's not at work, he's still thinking about law. His list of professional involvements consists of fellowships, chairs, and past chairs of dozens of organizations within the legal profession, as well as pro bono commitments; he's a board member of Legal Momentum (formerly the NOW Legal Defense and Education Fund), and chair of the Work In America Institute. At times he has taught law; at times he has written about it. Even in print he keeps company with fellow attorneys, racking up listings in volumes from *Guide to the World's Leading Labour and Employment Lawyers* to *Who's Who (in the World, mind you, not just in America)*. Then there's the spate of rankings and articles in which he is featured, with titles like "The Best Lawyers in New York" and "Top Lawyers in Employment Litigation." What does a man like this do in his leisure time—that is, besides loving his time with wife, Harriet, and children, Jonathan (Yale '04) and Allison (Cornell '08)? Mr. Waks likes to read. Currently, he's reading Yale law professor Stephen L. Carter's *The Emperor of Ocean Park*. It's *about* a law professor. To be fair, Mr. Waks recently finished reading Walter Isaacson's book on Benjamin Franklin—"who was, in a sense, a major practitioner of alternative dispute resolution," says Mr. Waks. He alternated between *Benjamin Franklin* and Cornell math professor Steven Strogatz's *Sync: The Emerging Science of Spontaneous Order*. The latter Mr. Waks found to be "fascinating in explaining aspects of my employment and labor cases."

Mr. Waks grew up in Paterson, New Jersey, and was exposed to civic and world affairs under the tutelage of a favorite high school teacher, and through dinner table discussions with his father, who was active in local and state politics. The elder Mr. Waks was an attorney, and a brother, David (now a judge) joined the family practice. By choosing instead to work for a large firm, "I was the renegade," Mr. Waks notes. During his senior year in high school, he entered a debate competition sponsored by the *New York Herald-Tribune*. As a finalist, he was rewarded with two months in Europe, touring the continent and meeting political and industry leaders. The experience proved to be seminal, strengthening the young student's resolve to engage the realm of politics and law. Mr. Waks stayed with a family in Berlin, and has maintained a friendship with his student host, who is now a supervising lawyer for the European Union. The two friends' most recent reunion was during the Law School's 2001 *International Forum* in Paris.

If his path to law seemed preordained, his path to Cornell was not. At the recommendation of a high school teacher, Mr. Waks applied to the upstate Ivy League school, but didn't see the campus until after he'd been accepted. "I liked what I saw and decided to go," he says simply. He started out expecting to be a government major in the College of Arts and Sciences, but quickly took an interest in workplace issues. "I wanted to apply knowledge of subjects such as government, history, and economics to an industrial society." Despite the protests of his Arts dean, Mr. Waks transferred into the School of Industrial and Labor Relations.

When it came time to choose a law school, "I decided to buck the trend and stay in Ithaca," says Mr. Waks. "It didn't have the distractions of a big city, yet Cornell offered everything I could ever want. I saw the Law School as a cloister, allowing me to immerse myself in law amid a small-town environment. I truly enjoyed virtually every class I took." A close friend and classmate, Ira Shepard, stayed on as well. "Even though we knew we'd end up practicing law in a large urban center, we were in no rush," says Mr. Waks.

It turns out there was another compelling reason to stay in Ithaca. "I had met Harriet as an undergraduate, the summer before my sophomore year," he explains. His future wife was attending Brooklyn College at the time. The two met as counselors at a summer camp in High Falls, New York. "It was love at first sight—for me anyway. Now it feels more like we've been together five years rather than thirty-five. We joke that our marriage has lasted so long because, between college years and demanding careers, we've spent so much time apart!" To stay near her future husband, Harriet Siedman chose to go to graduate school in Syracuse. She has been a member of the biology faculty of Barnard College for the past twenty-three years. "Once we married, Harriet paid for much of my law education by teaching biology at Ithaca College," Mr. Waks warmly recalls.

After law school, Mr. Waks clerked for Judge Inzer Bass Wyatt of the United States District Court in Manhattan, a connection made through former dean Gray Thoron, who had practiced



Jay W. Waks '71

under Judge Wyatt at Sullivan & Cromwell. Another professor, Walter Oberer, had recommended the law firm Kaye Scholer for a summer, unwittingly setting the young graduate's course for the next thirty-three years. Today, Mr. Waks chairs the firm's national Employment and Labor Law practice as well as its Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) practice, and has achieved high visibility as one of the nation's top employment lawyers. Ironically, he says, "the more I am seen as an advocate of ADR, the busier I become as an employment litigator. My corporate clients know I'll advise them whether a case can and should be settled. But when necessary, I defend cases aggressively."

Law is not the only discernible theme in Mr. Waks's life; Cornell University runs a close second. Despite his busy career, Mr. Waks has maintained an active involvement with his undergraduate and professional schools in a number of different capacities. Though he had been a donor for years, his alumni volunteerism began in earnest in 1990, when the Law School tapped him to be on the Dean's Special Leadership Committee (DSLCL), its fundraising committee in New York City. That same year, he also chaired his twentieth Reunion campaign, as he has the twenty-fifth and thirtieth. He chaired the DSLCL until 2001, when he became national chair of the Law School's Annual Fund. "I have the distinct pleasure of working with Dean Harry B. Ash and the other external relations staff members, who make my job easy," he says. Cornell connections permeate his labor litigation, as well; Mr. Waks delights in having tapped the Law School, ILR, and Architecture, Art and Planning faculties for expert witnesses.

Mr. Waks also serves on the Law School Advisory Council and its Development Executive Committee, the School of Industrial and Labor Relations Advisory Council, and the Cornell University Council, where he currently chairs the Admissions and Financial Aid Committee. He co-chairs his class of '68's gift campaign, as well. A scholarship recipient himself, Mr. Waks recently re-endowed a scholarship during the Law School's challenge campaign *A Gift Through Time*. He also holds an annual reception for the Cornell Black Alumni Association (CBAA) and its Cornell Tradition Fellowship program. The latter earned him recognition at last year's annual CBAA Holiday Benefit, where he was honored for his "steadfast dedication" to the organization's mission and goals.

"People have commented that they don't know how I find time for so many alumni activities, but it's easy when you have a great deal of affection, as I do, for Cornell. Or maybe I'm just very efficient!" he laughs. "If there's one thing I learned as a Cornell student, it was how to be efficient with my time."

~Robinne Gray

Student Profiles

Robert D. Dominguez '04

For Robert Dominguez, the road to Cornell was paved with a mosaic of experiences. While Mr. Dominguez was exposed to once-in-a-lifetime educational opportunities that ultimately led to the study of law, he also witnessed how endemic social problems, such as gangs and teenage pregnancies, robbed his high school classmates of promising futures. "I guess you can say I've been blessed with two lenses through which I can view the world around me. I have had some wonderful experiences over the years, living it up in Washington, D.C., backpacking around Europe, and such; yet, as a function of growing up where I did, I can never be naïve about the existence of social ills and their effects on communities and individuals," he explains.

Mr. Dominguez was born and raised in the Inland Empire section of Southern California, an area located approximately sixty miles east of Los Angeles. "My high school was predominantly Mexican-American, with a student population of about 2,300. It wasn't terrible, but it had its share of problems. I mean, there were gangs, and there was a nursery on campus to prevent the student-mothers from dropping out, but going to school wasn't unbearable. Sadly, during my freshman year, there was a gang-related shooting that occurred on campus. Classes were locked down, and all activities were cancelled that day."

Although physically unharmed, Mr. Dominguez was deeply affected. "Those lives were wasted for nothing," he says. "One person was dead, another was wounded, and the shooter, who was on my wrestling team, went to jail." When young people sense that they cannot improve their lives, such tragedies, Mr. Dominguez believes, become more likely. He explains that most of the students at Colton High had no idea what the world beyond the Inland Empire was like, or that they might find a place in it. Realizing that better opportunities existed, Mr. Dominguez avoided the pitfalls that trapped many of his peers. "I had cousins who



Robert D. Dominguez '04