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Biography

Professor Sullivan is a leading theorist in the areas of criminal law, criminal procedure, trial practice and techniques, legal ethics, and race theory. He is the faculty director of the Harvard Criminal Justice Institute and the Harvard Trial Advocacy Workshop. Professor Sullivan also serves as Faculty Dean (formerly, “Master”) of Winthrop House at Harvard College. In 2009, he became the first African American ever appointed Master in Harvard's history.

Professor Sullivan has merged legal theory and practice over the course of his career in unique and cutting-edge ways. Indeed, he is sought out to represent clients in cases that many in the legal community deem “impossible.” Illustratively, Professor Sullivan secured an acquittal in the double murder case of former New England Patriot Aaron Hernandez. He successfully represented the family of Michael Brown in reaching a settlement with the city of Ferguson on a wrongful death claim, even after the U.S. Department of Justice declined to prosecute the case. He secured an acquittal in one of the country’s

largest Residential Mortgage Backed Securities Fraud cases – a six count federal indictment. Finally, Professor. Sullivan was recently hired as a special prosecutor to lead the prosecution of the former Governor of Missouri, who ultimately resigned from office.

Professor Sullivan, to be sure, spends the lion's share of his work, outside of teaching and research, in service of underserved communities around the country and world. In fact, the Huffington Post dubbed him "The Man Who Dealt the Biggest Blow to Mass Incarceration," noting that several media reported that Professor Sullivan won the release of more wrongfully incarcerated persons – over 6000 – than anyone in U.S. history.

Professor Sullivan's work merging the legal academy and the "real world" is long and varied: In 2014, Professor Sullivan was tasked to design and implement a Conviction Review Unit ("CRU") for the newly elected Brooklyn District Attorney, the late Ken Thompson. The CRU, designed to identify and exonerate wrongfully convicted persons, quickly became regarded as the model conviction integrity program in the nation. In the wake of the success of Brooklyn's Conviction Review Unit, Professor Sullivan delivered one of that year's most watched Ted Talks, https://www.ted.com/talks/ronald_sullivan_how_i_help_free_innocent_people_from_prison²⁸. Since 2014, Professor Sullivan has advised prosecutor's offices throughout the country in implementing meaningful conviction integrity programs.

In 2008, Professor Sullivan served as Chair, Criminal Justice Advisory Committee for then-Senator Barack Obama's presidential campaign. In this capacity, Professor Sullivan's committee made policy recommendations on a range of issues in an effort to put into practice some of the best research in the field. He also served as a member of the National Legal Advisory Group for the Barack Obama Presidential Campaign. Finally, Professor Sullivan was appointed Advisor to the Department of Justice Presidential Transition Team.

In 2007, in the wake of Hurricane Katrina, Professor Sullivan was asked to create a system to solve a criminal justice crisis. Thousands of citizens were incarcerated in and around New Orleans without representation and with all official records destroyed by Hurricane Katrina. Professor Sullivan designed an indigent defense delivery system that resulted in the release of all the thousands of wrongfully incarcerated inmates.

In 1994, Professor Sullivan was a visiting scholar for the Law Society of Kenya, where he sat on a committee charged with drafting a new constitution for Kenya. He also worked with the Kenyan Human Rights Commission on monitoring and challenging human rights abuses in Kenya.

Prior to joining Harvard's faculty, Professor Sullivan was on the Yale Law School faculty where he won the award for outstanding teaching after his first year. Before joining the legal academy, he served as the Director of the Public Defender Service for the District of Columbia. He also spent several years in private practice in two major Washington, D.C. law firms where he specialized in white-collar criminal defense and complex commercial litigation.

Professor Sullivan has provided legal commentary for CNN, FoxNews, PBS, and all other major networks. He has been quoted in the nation's leading newspapers and periodicals, and he has testified before the United States Senate and House of Representatives on numerous occasions.

Professor Sullivan is a Phi Beta Kappa graduate of Morehouse College and the Harvard Law School, where he served as President of the Harvard Black Law Students Association and as General Editor of the Harvard BlackLetter Law Journal.

Areas of Interest

- Civil Rights and Civil Liberties
- Criminal Law and Procedure: Indigent Defense Delivery Systems
- Criminal Law and Procedure: Criminal Trials and Appeals

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