

The Appellate Strategist

INSIGHTS ON APPELLATE ISSUES, TRIAL CONSULTATIONS, AND EVALUATING APPEALS

[Retiring Chief Justice Ronald M. George -- First of a Series](#)

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On January 3, 2011, the twenty-seventh Chief Justice of California, Ronald M. George, will conclude over thirty-eight years of service on the California bench. To mark the retirement of this great California jurist, we begin a four part profile on state's third longest-serving Chief Justice.

Born in March 1940, Chief Justice George graduated from Beverly Hills High School in 1957. Following high school, the Chief attended the Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International Affairs. At the time, he planned to make his career in the Foreign Service.

All that changed at age nineteen, when he spent the summer between his sophomore and junior years in college hiking around West Africa and meeting American diplomats. "Most of them seemed to just be congregating amongst themselves and having very little contact with the local populace and not having much, if any, of an impact on the problems of the area," the Chief Justice recalled in a 1996 newspaper profile.

So he decided to attend law school. "I decided . . . that a law degree would offer the most options for whatever form of public service I might choose to pursue." The Chief Justice graduated from Stanford Law School in 1964.

Following law school, the Chief Justice joined the Attorney General's office as one of then-Attorney General Stanley Mosk's deputies. During seven years in the Attorney General's office, the Chief Justice handled a number of high-profile cases. The Chief was unsuccessful in one of his highest profile cases, *People v. Anderson*, where the Supreme Court struck down California's death penalty, but he prevailed not long after that in *People v. Sirhan*, where the Court affirmed the conviction of Sirhan Sirhan for assassinating Senator Robert F. Kennedy.

Chief Justice George served as counsel and argued six cases before the United States Supreme Court, including several which are still familiar to criminal law practitioners: *Chimel v. California* (invalidating warrantless search of entire house in connection with arrest of burglary suspect); *Hill v. California* (approving search incident to arrest, although police arrested the wrong person) and *McGautha v. California* (allowing jury to choose between life or death without governing standards not unconstitutional in capital cases) All together, the Chief Justice handled over one hundred appeals and writs, ending his career in the AG's office with a year as Administrative Assistant in charge of the Los Angeles office.

Join us tomorrow as we turn to the early years of the Chief Justice's judicial career