

# TEN LEADERS

IN NORTHERN NEW JERSEY

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## CRIMINAL DEFENSE LAW

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#### EDUCATION

Rutgers University, B.S., 1964  
Rutgers Law School, J.D. 1967

#### AFFILIATIONS

Thomas Ashley is a member of the New Jersey State Bar Association and the Essex County Bar Association. He is a member of the prestigious American College of Trial Lawyers. He is a former member of the board of trustees of the Association of Criminal Defense Attorneys of New Jersey. He has served on the Ethics Committee of the Essex County Bar, and as a member of the federal selection committee for the federal public defender and the federal judicial selection committee. Ashley has been recognized widely for his work in and contributions to criminal-defense law in New Jersey, including the Criminal Trial Attorney's Achievement Award from the Essex County Bar Association and the Lawrence Whipple Award for Excellence and Devotion to the Law from the Association of Criminal Defense Lawyers. Finally, Ashley is listed in The National Directory of Criminal Trial Lawyers as one of the top 500 Criminal Defense Attorneys in the United States. He has twice been selected by the New Jersey Monthly Magazine as one of the top lawyers.

#### BIOGRAPHY

Generous of his time, wise and with a career's worth of accomplishments, Thomas Ashley has been one of the leading criminal defense attorneys in New Jersey for three decades. Indeed, Ashley, long associated with the best of America's civil rights movement, is admired by virtually all of his lawyer-peers in the state - as well as nationally. Ashley recalls vividly the experiences in his native Camden, N.J., that shaped his sense of justice and spurred him to become a lawyer: "I was in a pool hall one night, and the police stormed in and lined us all up against the wall, looking for a suspect. And I wondered, 'Can this be legal?' Growing up where I did, I got a sense of the problems and issues that people face, particularly African-Americans and fellow minorities in our country." A star basketball player at Camden High School, Ashley received a scholarship to attend Rutgers, where he excelled. He went on to receive an academic scholarship to law school. Ashley, the recipient of Rutgers Law School's Civil Rights award, was getting all kinds of big-money offers to major mainstream law firms. But it was a sensitive and gifted law school professor - Arthur Kinoy, who'd represented Adam Clayton Powell - who in 1964 urged Ashley to join the national legal staff of The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. So Ashley found himself trying civil rights cases for the NAACP, (including a 1968 case in which a young black man was charged with the arson fire of an Enid, Oklahoma, building; a judge dismissed the charges.) Within four years he'd teamed up with the legendary criminal and civil rights attorney Raymond A. Brown, and started building a Newark-based practice and reputation that continues to this day. Ashley practices out of offices overlooking the New Jersey Performing Arts Center in downtown Newark. His caseload in the last two decades has been remarkably varied - he's represented alleged mobsters, as well as municipal leaders charged with white-collar crimes, and everyday people charged with crimes. (His current clients include an alleged Bloods gang leader accused of gun-running, and a former Deputy Director of the Jersey City Police Department facing federal bribery charges.) He's also successfully managed his practice - outsourcing to young attorneys such paper-heavy activities as discovery and motion-filing, while leading his team into the battle of a trial. Still an enthusiastic sports fan (although he's retired from basketball - "My knees gave out on me."), Ashley regularly attends sporting events and enjoys reading. The father of two children, ages 17 and 32, he lives in Orange, N.J.

#### Tom Ashley: Observations & Perspectives

With every case I take on, I tell the client that I'm going to work as hard, and as effectively and as sincerely as I can. Early on I'll size up the case for its potential for success. And I'll give my client an honest assessment. Some attorneys view a success as a reduced sentence - but rarely does the client see any amount of incarceration as a "success". It doesn't always happen, but a victory is when you win an acquittal or dismissal - and your client can walk out of the courtroom on his own.

My background gave me a certain perspective, and my good fortune as a trial attorney has put me in a position to help the underprivileged. Thirty years later I'm still doing that - I know, I've been associated with a lot of high-profile cases over the years, but I still like to think of myself as a "neighborhood attorney." There's still some of the neighborhood in me. People still say,

you understand us - and that's important to me.

Things have changed, though. Before, when no one knew who you were, you'd take a case and the spotlight would not be on you. Today when a client comes to you, there are greater expectations.

But my experience gives my clients special advantages today - I've had many clients see charges reduced or dismissed because I recognized an instance of illegal search and seizure. Knowing the rules of evidence is important. And I'm in court every week - handling

big high-profile cases, small cases, and all number in between. I'm there every day for my clients.

I've been fortunate - many people know me today and my reputation as a successful and experienced trial attorney. So many people seek me out. And you know what? After more than 30 years, it still feels really good to be able to help others. That's very satisfying.

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