

PHINEAS INDRITZ DIES AT 81

By [Bart Barnes](#)

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Phineas Indritz, 81, retired legal counsel to several congressional committees and a civil rights lawyer and activist who participated in dozens of cases aimed at ending discrimination based on race or gender, died of cancer Oct. 15 at Holy Cross Hospital.

Mr. Indritz was a founding member and executive vice chairman of the American Veterans Committee, a multiracial equal rights organization of U.S. servicemen and women formed during World War II. As national counsel to this committee, he supported civil rights legal actions on various fronts. These included lawsuits aimed at ending racial segregation on interstate railroad trains, racial discrimination in D.C. restaurants and racial discrimination in Washington bowling alleys and other places of public entertainment.

In 1948, he made the Supreme Court argument in the D.C. companion case to *Shelley v. Kramer*, which outlawed judicial enforcement of racially restrictive covenants in real estate deeds, and he also participated in the lawsuits leading to the Supreme Court's outlawing of public school segregation in the 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* case. He also took part in legal cases that made it easier for private citizens to file lawsuits seeking the enforcement of environmental regulations and anti-pollution laws.

Officially, he retired from the staff of the House of Representatives during the 1970s. But as a practical matter, not until 1994 did he leave Capitol Hill, where there remained a special desk and telephone reserved for him in House office buildings.

There, Mr. Indritz was known as one of the last of the New Deal liberals, an energetic man with a scholarly mind, an encyclopedic memory for obscure facts and details of constitutional law, and a lifelong obsession for fighting discrimination and injustice. He helped write legislation aimed at ending gender discrimination in the setting of insurance rates, employment discrimination against pregnant women and racial segregation in colleges receiving federal aid.

Mr. Indritz began his career on Capitol Hill in 1957, and he was on the legal staffs of the House committees on Government Operations, Energy and Commerce, and Conservation and Natural Resources, from which he retired.

Mr. Indritz, a resident of Silver Spring, was born in Moline, Ill. He graduated from the University of Chicago and its law school.

In college, he was a competitive gymnast, and he qualified for the 1936 U.S. Olympic gymnastics team but did not go to the Olympics. He later replaced gymnastics with juggling, which became a lifelong avocation. He was a member of several juggling clubs, including an organization called the Department of Juggling, a Washington-based group whose members meet weekly for communal juggling. At his death, Mr. Indritz was one of the oldest members of the Department of Juggling.

From his desks in various House office buildings, Mr. Indritz took periodic breaks on the Capitol lawns, where his juggling feats with bowling pin-shaped clubs delighted friends and tourists. He was a member of the International Jugglers Association.

He came to Washington in 1938 and joined the legal staff of the Interior Department as an assistant solicitor. During World War II, he served in the Army Air Forces, then returned to the Interior Department, where he remained until 1957.

Locally, Mr. Indritz participated during the 1950s in efforts to end prohibitions against black members of the District Bar Association and for fair housing measures in Montgomery County. In 1950, he received an award from the D.C. chapter of the NAACP for his legal efforts "involving basic civil rights of minorities."

His wife of 34 years, Ruth Gould Indritz, died in 1974. Survivors include three children, Tahma Metz of Bethesda, Tova Indritz of Albuquerque and Dr. Doren Indritz of Phoenix; a sister; and two grandsons.