



## ATTORNEY PROFILE

### JOHN HOUSTON SCOTT

John Houston Scott hung his shingle straight out of law school in 1977 in San Francisco. After starting a general practice that included cases focused on personal injury, family law, immigration, criminal law, probate and conservatorships, he quickly realized that his passion was civil-rights work and the courtroom.

By 1980, he partnered with Rufus Cole and worked with Oliver Jones, Regional Counsel for the NAACP. John devoted his practice to police-misconduct litigation and mental-health-patients' cases involving wrongful death, electro-shock, forced drugging and physical restraints. In 1983, John obtained a \$3 million-dollar jury verdict against the Richmond Police Department, believed to be the nation's largest verdict in a police misconduct case at that time.

During the mid-1980s, John expanded his civil-rights practice to include employment discrimination and retaliation. He represented over twenty female police officers from agencies all over the Bay Area with claims of sexual harassment, discrimination and retaliation. He also handled over one dozen wrongful-death cases on behalf of heirs of patients who died in Napa State Hospital and other locked psychiatric facilities.

Beginning in 1989, he teamed up with Leroy Lounibos, Jr. (a scholar, teacher, historian, writer and accomplished trial attorney) to pursue complex civil-rights cases on behalf of mental patients, prisoners, public employees, minors and small businesses. In *Adams v. Gomez*, they represented the heirs of a San Quentin prisoner, Mark Adams, who was shot and killed by guards during a fistfight with another inmate on a small exercise yard. The lawsuit challenged the policy of using deadly force to break up fistfights in the California prison system in violation of the 8th Amendment. At the time, California was the only prison system in the civilized world that allowed the use of deadly force to break up inmate fistfights.

After the jury awarded the plaintiffs a \$2.3 million-dollar verdict, the number of shooting incidents and shooting deaths in the California prison system decreased dramatically. In *Veal Connection*, they represented a successful family-owned specialty meat company in Sonoma County, which was subject to regular inspections by the USDA. Because of discriminatory enforcement of some regulations, the company complained to

various government officials. As a result of these complaints, the USDA literally ran the company out of business through retaliatory “enforcement” actions. A First Amendment retaliation complaint was filed in federal court and tried to a jury. The verdict was for \$1,750,000. This was believed to be the first verdict obtained against the USDA and its employees for retaliation by a regulated business.

From 1995 to 2002, he partnered with John Prentice and focused on representing public employees, wrongful-death cases and litigation aimed at reforming the California Department of Corrections. In 1999, he negotiated a \$1.7 million-dollar settlement on behalf of whistleblower Richard Caruso who exposed inmate abuse at Corcoran State Prison.

Some of John’s more recent accomplishments include teaming with John Burriss and Jim Chanin to secure an \$11.5 million-dollar settlement for over 100 persons falsely arrested, and often beaten, by a group of Oakland police officers known as The Riders. In addition, he obtained a jury verdict against Alex Fagan, Jr. on behalf of Adam Snyder, a victim of the off-duty police beating known in San Francisco as Fajitagate.

John also teamed up with Darren Kessler and Michael Sorgen to represent a class of special-needs foster children in Contra Costa County. The plaintiffs sued for having their adoptions delayed, a lack of a child-specific case plan, and not addressing their special needs in violation of the Americans with Disabilities Act. The plaintiffs had to prevail on several trial and Ninth Circuit motions to ultimately convince the defendant to settle the case with a \$750,000 distribution and agreement to implement policies and training to better serve foster-care children with special needs.

Over the past 30 years, John has devoted himself to helping people who are vulnerable and lack the resources to “take on” public entities and big business. Among his many accomplishments, John has:

- Tried more than 130 cases to verdict;
- Handled over 125 appeals, including over 25 published decisions;
- Participated in at least 125 mediations;
- Lectured, written and consulted about civil-rights litigation.

While he can point to many million-dollar verdicts and settlements, his greatest successes are the cases that have changed public policy or positively impacted peoples’ lives. He now offers his pro bono services to the community by acting as a mediator in civil-rights and elder-abuse matters.