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Bob Egelko
San Francisco Chronicle

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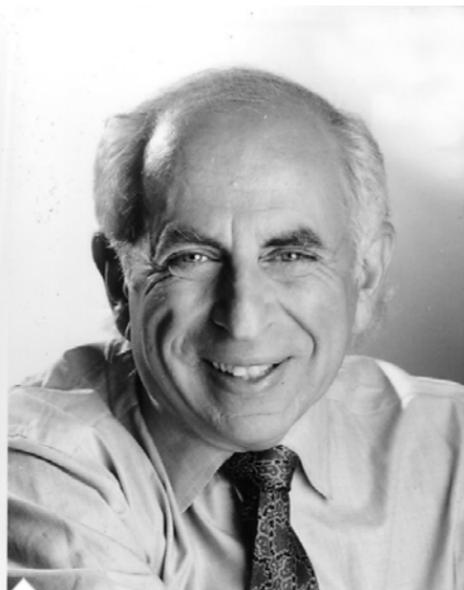
Bernard Segal, longtime law school professor, dies

Bob Egelko, Chronicle Staff Writer

Thursday, August 18, 2011

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Golden Gate University ... / ... School of Law

Bernard Segal taught law at Golden Gate University for 39 years.

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Bernard Segal, who spent 39 years at Golden Gate University teaching future lawyers the litigation skills he learned defending civil rights and antiwar protesters and an Army officer in a sensational murder case, died Friday at his home in Tiburon. He was 81.

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Mr. Segal came to the San Francisco law school in 1972 and founded and directed its litigation program, which the school plans to rename in his honor. Students described him as dedicated and creative.

"He was always available, incredibly kind and generous with his time. There was so much more to learn from him than you could learn in a classroom," said Wendy Bemis-Albertson, a former student of Mr.

Segal's who became his teaching assistant and continued to consult with him on cases after starting a civil law practice in San Francisco.

Among his lessons, she said, were that "there are no little people," and that "the person who can tell the

best and clearest story is most likely to impress the jury. If you can't win, at least you get a good story from it."

Amy Segal said her father's students told her "he taught them to believe in the system and to use that system for justice."

Mr. Segal was born in Philadelphia, the son of poor Polish immigrants. He attended Temple University, where he was student body president and editor of the school newspaper, was an Army officer in the Korean War and graduated from the University of Pennsylvania Law School in 1959.

He worked as a public defender and private criminal defense lawyer in Philadelphia for the next 12 years and also served as a volunteer attorney for the American Civil Liberties Union in Mississippi. His clients there included some of the Freedom Riders who rode

buses into the South to challenge segregation.

Mr. Segal also represented opponents of the Vietnam War. A former law partner, Louis Natali, recalled how Mr. Segal defended antiwar advocates who were charged with desecrating the American flag because they wore a flag on their shirt, pants or bandanna.

"He would always be looking in stores that were selling stuff," like dishware with flag images, "so he could buy it and bring it to court" to show jurors how common and innocuous the displays were, Natali said. "He usually won on grounds of freedom of expression."

Natali said Mr. Segal used courtroom theatrics to win some tough cases. In one robbery case, Natali recalled, the defendant claimed the alleged victim had lost money to him in three-card monte and refused to pay. Mr. Segal handed a deck of cards to his client, who put on a dazzling display for the judge and won an acquittal.

His most prominent client was Jeffrey MacDonald, an Army doctor and former Green Beret charged with murdering his pregnant wife and their two young daughters on a North Carolina military base in 1970.

MacDonald, who suffered bruises and a stab wound, claimed four intruders had attacked his family. Mr. Segal represented him in the military investigation, which ended without charges, and represented him again in a federal prosecution, which ended in MacDonald's conviction and life sentence in 1979.

The case reached the Supreme Court and became the subject of the book and movie "Fatal Vision." MacDonald is still trying to win his freedom and recently was granted a new hearing in federal court. Mr. Segal kept in touch with him and "to the end of his life believed that Jeff was innocent," Amy Segal said.

She said her father continued practicing law until about 10 years ago and was teaching classes until his health declined in April.

Mr. Segal is survived by his children, Amy Segal of Richmond, Beth Segal of New York City and Eric Segal of Gainesville, Fla.; and two grandchildren. Memorial plans are pending.

E-mail Bob Egelko at begelko@sfnchronicle.com.

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