

Topic Page: [Dershowitz, Alan \(1938 - \)](#)

Summary Article: **Dershowitz, Alan Morton**

From *The Hutchinson Unabridged Encyclopedia with Atlas and Weather Guide*

US lawyer, professor, and author. A Harvard law professor, he was the defence and appeal lawyer in some very high profile cases. An outspoken critic of flaws in the legal system, he championed every imaginable form of free speech.

Born in New York City, he was admitted to the bar in 1963 after a brilliant career at Yale Law School and became Harvard Law School's youngest ever tenured law professor. He served as a clerk to US Supreme Court justice Arthur Goldberg and is credited with composing the legal memo that underlay the court's opinion that the death penalty, as then applied, constituted 'cruel and unusual punishment'. At Harvard, he often spiced up his standard curriculum with courses on legal issues of the Vietnam War or psychiatry and the law. Meanwhile, he soon began to take on cases having to do primarily with First Amendment, or free speech issues, defending those such as Dr Benjamin Spock in his antiwar actions, the radical lawyer William Kunstler, the star of the pornographic film, *Deep Throat*, Harry Reems, and the racist genetic theorist William Schockley. These cases inevitably brought considerable publicity, but he always insisted that he accepted cases above all because they involved issues of civil liberties or constitutional rights. He also replied to charges that he sought out high profile cases by pointing out his donation of time and talents to many unreported cases, including those involving prisoners on death row. His most celebrated case was the successful appeal and subsequent acquittal of Claus von Bülow, who was accused of murdering his wife. Dershowitz told the story of this case in his *Reversal of Fortune* (1986), which was subsequently made into a movie of the same name (1990), in which he played a bit part. He wrote in defence of his aggressive tactics in *The Best Defense* (1982). In addition to various professional texts and other books, he wrote a widely syndicated newspaper column on the law and he has been a frequent guest on television programs involving legal matters.

quotations

Dershowitz, Alan Morton

APA

Chicago

Harvard

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Chicago

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