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## Miami Criminal Defense Titan Roy Black Dies At 80

By **Carolina Bolado**

Law360 (July 22, 2025, 2:22 PM EDT) -- Roy Black, a Miami criminal defense legend who became a national name defending William Kennedy Smith against rape charges in a highly publicized and televised trial, died Monday night in Coral Gables, Florida.

Black, 80, was still working at the firm he'd founded, Black Srebnick, when he died at his home after battling an illness, according to the firm.

"Roy Black was the greatest criminal lawyer of our generation, perhaps in American history, achieving acquittals over a span of 50 years in some of the most challenging and notorious cases of all time," Howard Srebnick, Black's longtime partner, said.

Throughout his long career, Black defended individuals and companies facing an array of criminal charges, ranging from murder to healthcare fraud and tax evasion. He successfully defended Smith, who was acquitted of rape charges in 1991 in Palm Beach, Florida.

He also counted actor Kelsey Grammer and conservative commentator Rush Limbaugh as clients and successfully defended Indy 500 winner and Dancing with the Stars Champion Helio Castroneves against charges of income tax evasion. In addition, Black represented police officer William Lozano, whose killing of a Black motorcyclist sparked riots in Miami in 1989.

David Oscar Markus of Markus/Moss PLLC, called Black the "Michael Jordan of criminal defense lawyers" who inspired an entire generation of attorneys.

"Like all of the players who got to suit up with Michael, I'm so glad I got to try a case with Roy," Markus said. "He worked harder than any lawyer I know. And he outlawyered every prosecutor who he ever went up against. I will miss him. His impact on criminal defense is beyond measure."

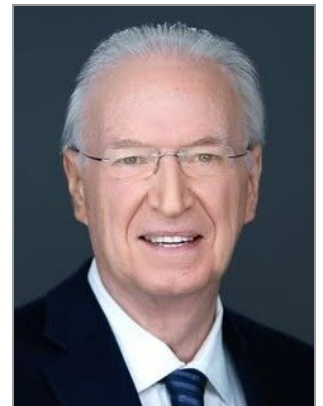
Josh Dubin, executive director of the Perlmutter Center for Justice at Yeshiva University's Benjamin N. Cardozo School of Law in New York City, said Black connected with juries simply by being himself.

"He had this sort of human curiosity and authenticity about what he was saying that drew people in because he was not an act," Dubin said. "It was just who he was. I think the reason why juries were always enamored with him is because he was an enamoring human being. He was kind, he was gentle, and when he saw government overreach, he called it out."

Dubin, who also works as a jury consultant, became close friends with Black as they worked together on cases over the past 22 years and referred to him as a "surrogate uncle." When Dubin began trying cases, he said, there was "not a case or examination" he did without taking it over with Black.

Dubin recalled one time in particular when he was defending Clemente Aguirre-Jarquín, who was on death row for murder, in his retrial. Dubin was going to cross-examine the woman the defense team thought was the real perpetrator, but he was stuck as to how to approach it.

"I didn't know whether to come out of the gate swinging, whether to be aggressive or ease back," Dubin said. "I was stuck, so I talked to Roy about it."



Roy Black

He said Black called him at 11 p.m. the night before the examination and told him to ask her why she threatened to murder people.

"I said I thought you told me never to ask an open-ended question on cross," Dubin recalled. "But he said, 'You have her on tape threatening to murder people. It's going to throw her off.' And he was right. It threw her off so bad."

Black was born in New York in 1945 but spent his high school years in Jamaica and then landed at the University of Miami, where he completed both his undergraduate and law degrees.

Phil Hubbard, a former judge for Florida's Third District Court of Appeal, said Black was one of his top students at the University of Miami School of Law, where Hubbard taught workshops in criminal evidence and trials. Black made such an impression on Hubbard that when Hubbard was elected the public defender in 1970 for the Eleventh Judicial Circuit in Miami, he hired Black for his office right out of law school.

"He didn't know what he was going to do with his career, and I was running at that time for public defender, and I said, look, if I win the election, you've got a job, and he said great," Hubbard recalled. "I think he tried a murder case the second day. He didn't really know what to do, and I said, well, first thing you should do is go to the jail and talk to the defendant. They won the case."

Hubbard said he transformed the office from one that was wary of taking cases to trial to one in which defendants got robust defenses before juries.

"It made a big difference," he said. "We provided some real defense for defendants who up until that point weren't getting much of a defense at all. Roy was an important part of that."

After a few years as a public defender, Black set up his own firm, the one that took on its current name, Black Srebnick, in 1996 after Srebnick joined the firm.

Srebnick said he first came across Black in 1991 on the black-and-white television in the chambers of the late U.S. Circuit Judge Irving Goldberg in Dallas, where Srebnick was then working as a clerk. Black was on the television cross-examining the woman who accused Smith of rape.

"Judge Goldberg knew I was leaning hard in favor of a career in criminal defense, and after watching Roy in action, Judge Goldberg said that Roy's were the footsteps I should follow," Srebnick said.

Srebnick said Black was "always the most prepared lawyer in the courtroom" and was a student of the law.

"His hobby was studying the law," Srebnick said. "And he was a great storyteller, and he was personable, and he was humble. So he could connect with people, both jurors and judges. He really was a scholar who had magnificent trial skills. It was a formidable combination."

Srebnick said that in his final year, Black was still doing the training of the young lawyers at their firm.

Another partner at the firm, Jackie Perczek, said she was "just a kid out of law school" when Black asked her to join him at his firm — which she called "the opportunity of a lifetime."

"And for the last 30 years, it has been magical," she said. "Roy was not only my law partner, he was also my teacher and my friend. I loved him dearly. He once said that every time we see injustice in the legal system, that is a lesson for us to love and fight for justice even more."

Black had also taught criminal evidence every fall semester at the University of Miami School of Law since 1973, never missing a semester, according to interim Dean Patricia Sanchez Abril, who said he was even on the schedule for the coming fall semester. The void he leaves is "unfillable," she said.

"He did it very quietly," she said. "He did it for the love of the students and the love of the law. He never failed us, and he never failed our students. He once said it was his favorite way of giving back to the school that launched his career."

The final trial of Black's career was the acquittal of Amin Khoury, a Massachusetts businessman accused of paying Georgetown University's tennis coach to get his daughter into the school. It was the lone loss for the government in its sprawling "Operation Varsity Blues" that resulted in charges against dozens of wealthy individuals accusing them of bribing their kids' ways into top colleges.

Black is survived by his wife, Lea Black, a television personality who was on *Real Housewives of Miami*. He is also survived by their son, R.J., and his daughter, Nora.

--Editing by Amy French.

*Update: This story has been updated to add additional commentary from Black's colleagues.*

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