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## Norman Redlich, Ex-Dean of N.Y.U. Law School, Dies at 85

By PAUL VITELLO  
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Norman Redlich, a quiet luminary of the New York legal community who pioneered the pro bono defense of indigent death row inmates and who, as a staff member of the Warren Commission, helped develop the so-called single-bullet theory to explain how President John F. Kennedy was killed by a lone gunman, died Friday at his home in Manhattan. He was 85.

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Baron Silverman/The New York Times  
Norman Redlich at City Hall in Manhattan in 1972

The cause was complications of Parkinson's disease, his family said.

Throughout his career, Mr. Redlich exerted an important but inconspicuous influence in many areas of public life, frequently serving as playmaker to other people's star.



He helped Jane Jacobs defeat Robert Moses' plan to build a four-lane highway through Washington Square Park in the late 1950s — brokering an unlikely alliance between Ms. Jacobs, the urban theorist, and Carmine De Sapio, the

Tammany boss, that eventually saw not only Moses' plan killed, but all vehicular traffic banished from the park.

He negotiated the deal in which the City of New York bought and renovated Yankee Stadium in 1971, when the team's owners had threatened to leave and Mayor John V. Lindsay resolved to make them stay.

As dean of the New York University School of Law, when Mr. Redlich sought to deepen the school's commitment to the training of public interest lawyers, he recruited the most renowned capital defense lawyer in the country at the time, Anthony G. Amsterdam, whose appointment as head of the school's advocacy program in 1981 received more press than Mr. Redlich ever did as dean.

The low-profile work that would come to give Mr. Redlich his highest profile, however, was his appointment in 1963 as executive assistant to the Warren Commission's chief counsel, J. Lee Rankin. In that job, he and several other staff lawyers, including Arlen Specter, the future Pennsylvania senator, devised the single-bullet theory — which explained how Gov. John B. Connally of Texas and President Kennedy could have been struck almost instantaneously at one point, without there having been a second gunman.

The widespread doubt cast on the theory in later years caused Mr. Redlich to tell a Congressional subcommittee reviewing the commission's findings in 1977, "I think there are simply a great many people who cannot accept what I believe to be the simple truth, that one rather insignificant person was able to assassinate the president of the United States."

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Norman Redlich was born Nov. 12, 1925, in the Bronx, the second of two children of Pauline and Milton Redlich, who owned a small company manufacturing plumbing supplies and gardening equipment. After service in World War II, he graduated from Williams College and Yale Law School, and worked in his family's business throughout most of the 1950s while taking master's-level law courses at [N.Y.U.](#)

While still working for his family, Mr. Redlich also began defending people blacklisted because of their refusal to answer questions before the House Un-American Activities Committee. His work for the National Emergency Civil Liberties Committee, which the F.B.I. considered subversive, later led to efforts to remove him from the Warren Commission; Chief Justice Earl Warren, the chairman, refused.

By 1960, when Mr. Redlich began teaching constitutional and tax law at N.Y.U., he had started to work without compensation on a series of appeals for death row inmates at Sing Sing. He would eventually enlist the help of a dozen fellow law professors and students in saving five men from the electric chair between 1960 and 1963.

He told Life magazine in a 1963 interview, a decade before various court decisions halted most executions, that his ultimate goal was to end capital punishment. But he added: "I can't wait for New York to abolish capital punishment. When I've saved a man from the chair, at least I've abolished capital punishment for him."

Mr. Redlich took a leave of absence in 1966 to join the Lindsay administration as executive assistant to Mr. Rankin, who was named corporation counsel. In 1972, when Mr. Rankin retired, Mr. Redlich was appointed his successor.

During his tenure as dean of the N.Y.U. law school, from 1974 to 1988, Mr. Redlich significantly upgraded the school's standing, said the current dean, Richard L. Revesz. He vastly expanded the library, introduced new programs, built dormitories and "brought extraordinary faculty to this law school," Mr. Revesz said. One of those faculty members, Professor Amsterdam, referring to Mr. Redlich's lifelong, outspoken opposition to the death penalty, said, "His style in this and in every one of the important fights he fought was selfless, steadfast, unsensational."

Mr. Redlich is survived by his wife of 61 years, Dr. Evelyn Grobow Redlich, a pediatrician; three children, Carrie Redlich of New Haven, Bonny Redlich of University Place, Wash., and Edward, of Los Angeles; and five grandchildren.

Edward Redlich said his father's self-effacing style was often tinged with a sense of humor. People would sometimes tell him how brave he was to defend people's civil liberties in the 1950s, during the time of the blacklist, when a mere hint of Communist sympathy could cost people their jobs.

"Brave?" he would reply. "I was working in the family business."

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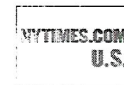
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