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## In Memoriam: Aaron Joshua Thomas, Jr.

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## In Memoriam: Aaron Joshua Thomas, Jr.

JESWALD W. SALACUSE\*

**S**TRONG PERSONS make strong institutions, and Arron Joshua Thomas, Jr. was such a person. During his thirty-five years as teacher and scholar at Southern Methodist University, the School of Law grew dramatically in quality and stature, and that growth was due in no small part to his efforts. Although one may measure A. J.'s service in decades, rather than years, it was not its length that mattered, but rather its quality in the numerous roles he played: teacher, scholar, colleague, and friend. To many of us, he was also the dean for on two occasions he served as the School's Dean *ad interim*, — the last time for two years when he guided us surely and skillfully through some difficult waters.

Although I knew A. J. for only five of those thirty-five years, that was time enough for me to learn how much he meant to the School, to the University, to our students and to our alumni. He was a beloved teacher, whose magic in the classroom left its mark indelibly on the minds and spirits of his students year after year. A strong teacher, he maintained high academic standards and demanded much of his students, while gaining their affection and their respect. Like his colleagues on the faculty, his students sensed his concern for them as people. Having taught over one-half of the living graduates of SMU Law School, A. J. came to hold a very spe-

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cial place in the hearts of the alumni of the School.

Throughout his career, A. J. Thomas was not only a superb teacher but also an active and productive scholar who wrote a dozen books and numerous articles. At the time of his death, one more book—*The War-Making Powers of the President* co-authored with his wife Ann—was at the press. While he was most definitely a scholar, he was not a “scholar-recluse,” but rather a “scholar-*bon vivant*,” for he truly had a love of people and a love of life. He expressed that love through his generosity and hospitality, and almost everyone who came in contact with him felt its warmth.

Despite the tragedy of his passing, when I think of A. J. Thomas, I have to smile inside because A. J., if he was nothing else, was fun. Whenever I saw him, he invariably offered a joke or a quip. But his humor was not bland, for it very often had a point. Pomposity and arrogance were ready targets for the wit of A. J. Thomas, and he exercised it with good will. Yet despite his sense of humor, A. J. took important things seriously. He took teaching, scholarship, the Law School and the University very seriously indeed. He was a University man—indeed, a University *statesman*—who always viewed academic issues beyond the parochial confines of the Law Quadrangle. From one end of the campus to the other, he was first and foremost concerned about Southern Methodist University as an institution.

Among the numerous attributes which he brought us, one of the most important—for me, at least—was his internationalism. Having come to SMU after three years in the United States foreign service, with postings in Costa Rica, the Azores, and the Netherlands, A. J. Thomas was to make significant contribution to the growth of international studies at SMU Law School. With the encouragement of the late Dean Robert Storey, A. J. worked to transform SMU Law School from a rather parochial local law school into one with a broad international perspective, a rich curriculum in international law, and a thriving foreign student program whose several hundred graduates now practice in over sixty different countries throughout the world. His love of people made him open to

persons and cultures from all corners of the world. That quality and his dedication to international understanding have placed an indelible mark on all our programs.

All of us at the School feel the void left by his passing. And yet when we look at what he has left behind—his students, his scholarship, the very Law School to which he contributed so much—we must be very glad that he came our way. The School of Law is a continuing legacy from those who have gone before to those who come after, and that portion of the legacy left to us by A. J. Thomas is very rich indeed.

