

FEBRUARY 28, 2022 | FIRM NEWS

Celebrating Black History Month

Black History Month is a time to recognize the contributions of Black Americans throughout U.S. history. As the month comes to a close, Conn Maciel Carey Partner, [Aaron Gelb](#), reflects on African American mentors and peers who have impacted his life both personally and professionally.



I've been fortunate during my life and career to have been influenced and shaped by several African American mentors, friends, and colleagues. Starting at the beginning, my godfather, Sidney Bertrand, had a big influence on me as I remember spending time with him and his wife, Zelda, at their apartment on 125th Street in Harlem as a young kid, having sleepovers, etc. Although Sidney succumbed to cancer at a relatively young age, his efforts in the face of adversity taught me a lot.

When I was in college at the University of Chicago, I worked as a teaching assistant to Professor Donna Franklin, a professor in the School of Social Service Administration—I learned quite a bit from her as she shared her perspectives on education, advocacy, and social changes through conversations we had about the course materials as well as what she had seen in her own life.

✘ Later, not long after I moved to Chicago in 1999 as a 4th year associate at a large law firm, I met Revie Sorie, a former All-Pro offensive lineman with the Chicago Bears who was working with Special Olympics Chicago

("SOC") at the time. Revie asked me to serve on a board that planned and organized a fundraising event for SOC, which I did for several years; I then followed him when he left SOC to join Ada S. McKinley ("ASM"), an incredible organization in Chicago where he was leading the Educational Services Division; once at ASM, Revie continued and expanded the organization's longstanding efforts to help make college a reality for students on the West and South Sides of Chicago. I learned so much from Revie about leadership and connecting with people on a genuine level than if I had taken a leadership development course. More importantly, I saw how everybody can make a difference no matter your background or your station in life.

Most recently, I have been fortunate to connect on a personal level with one of our clients—Travonte Warren—with whom I have had thought provoking and far-ranging conversations on a regular basis throughout the pandemic that helped keep me sane during some of the most challenging periods of the pandemic. Although Travonte is a good bit younger than me and is a relatively recent law school grad (compared to me, at least), he is without question one of the brightest, most thoughtful and witty people I have ever met—indeed, while some might think I would be in a position to mentor him, his perspectives and insights have helped me become a better lawyer to my clients and a better manager to our associates.



[Aaron R. Gelb](#) is a partner and head of Conn Maciel Carey LLP's Chicago office where he specializes in [OSHA workplace safety](#) and [labor & employment](#) litigation. Passionate about ensuring equal access to justice for all, Aaron is an active member of the Chicago Lawyers Committee for Civil Rights Under Law and is a frequent participant in the Northern District of Illinois' Settlement Assistance Program.