



U.S. Supreme Court Justice Samuel Alito

# THE ODYSSEY

*How the State Bar of Texas Annual Meeting has evolved to become one of the nation's top legal conventions.*

BY TALMAGE BOSTON

**WHEN I JOINED THE STATE BAR OF TEXAS LITIGATION COUNCIL IN THE FALL OF 1997**, the Litigation Section focused on putting out robust quarterly issues of *The Advocate*, with then editor-in-chief Joseph Patrick “Pat” Hazel doing most of the heavy lifting; assembling a strong group of speakers for the annual “Litigation Update” seminar; and attempting to create a website for the section. At that time, there was zero interest in making a programming contribution to the State Bar Annual Meeting.



Author John Grisham

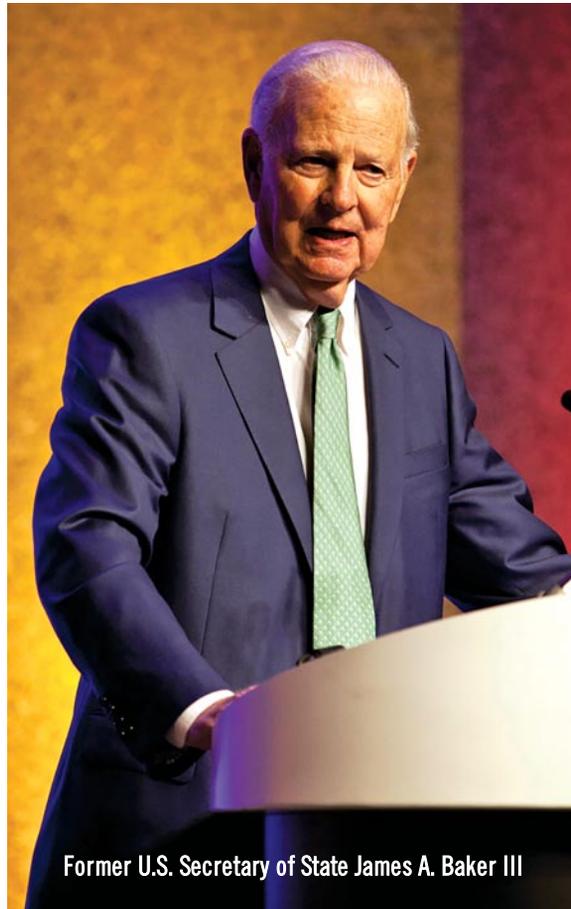
In the fall of 1998, upon becoming Litigation Section chair, Doak Bishop took me to lunch and planted a seed that with time grew into an orchard. Bishop said, “The Annual Meeting is a huge opportunity for us, and we’ve been ignoring it.” He explained that we had money in our budget to make a splash at the meeting and suggested I line up some top-notch speakers under the theme “Art of Advocacy.” “Let’s make this part of what our section does,” he told me. And so we did, scheduling consecutive presentations by litigation stalwarts Michael Tigar, Jim McElhaney, Stephen Susman, and Joe Jamail at the 2000 Annual Meeting. All these speakers drew huge crowds, hour after hour, and energized us to the point that our council committed itself to make the meeting an important vehicle for bringing value to the Litigation Section’s members in the years ahead.

Thanks to fellow council member Alistair Dawson, in 2001 and 2002, the Litigation Section brought high-profile lawyer David Boies to the Annual Meeting. The first year, he wove stories around how he, on behalf of the U.S. Justice Department, successfully extinguished Bill Gates and Microsoft’s monopoly power; the following year, Boies joined Irv Terrell in a discussion on how they represented their respective presidential candidate clients in the case of *Bush v. Gore*. Both Boies programs packed the convention center ballroom during the Friday lunch hours and made State Bar leadership realize it was imprudent to have a Friday lunch program that competed for attendees against the Litigation Section.

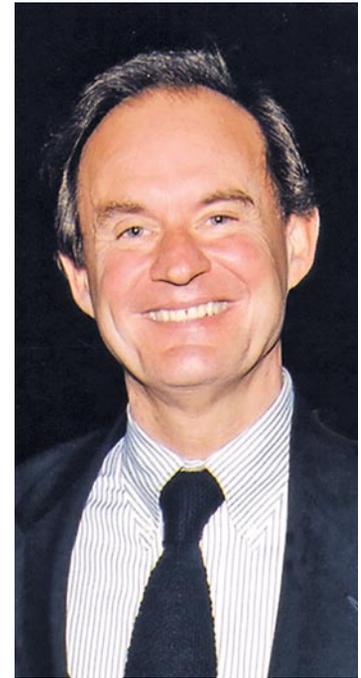
For the next several years, with State Bar leadership’s blessing, the section assembled at the Annual Meeting’s Friday luncheons a series of panel discussions devoted to



**Historian  
Doris Kearns Goodwin**



**Former U.S. Secretary of State James A. Baker III**



**Attorney David Boies**

“this year’s hottest topic in the law,” moderated by TV legal analyst Roger Cossack. Participants included nationally renowned figures on the order of former U.S. Sen. Alan Simpson, CNN’s Paul Begala, and former Watergate prosecutor Richard Ben-Veniste. The topics ranged from the confirmation process of federal judges, to the pros and cons of tort reform, to how judicial activism comports with the separation of powers doctrine.

For the 2008 Annual Meeting, State Bar staff leaders Kelley Jones King and Holly Wilkerson decided to take the convention up a notch by bringing in a megawatt speaker for Thursday to balance the escalating attraction of the Friday luncheon. Kicking off that new programming direction involved a mini-miracle when author John Grisham (who gives precious few speeches each year) agreed to speak and proceeded to electrify the crowd with his impassioned plea for the Innocence Project.



**Historian Douglas Brinkley**

The 2009 convention included a celebration of the Lincoln Bicentennial, with historian Doris Kearns Goodwin receiving a standing ovation for her *Team of Rivals*-inspired Friday luncheon message on the historical staying power of our 16th president into the 21st century. It complemented the convention’s recognition of our first African-American president’s impact, per the non-partisan analysis by *New York Times* columnist David Brooks in his Thursday luncheon speech entitled “America in the Age of Obama.”

In connection with the 50th anniversary of Harper Lee’s *To Kill a Mockingbird*, the 2010 Annual Meeting provided a series of programs on Atticus Finch serving as our profession’s ultimate role model. Perspectives on Finch came from former U.S. Attorney General Dick Thornburgh, former Pepperdine University School of Law Dean Ken Starr, Judge Royal Furgeson, State Bar of Texas and American Bar Association leader Kim Askew, Houston trial lawyer

Jim Perdue, and *Mockingbird* aficionado Bill Parrish.

Recognizing the lawyer as society's ultimate "Person in the Arena," 2011 prompted an Annual Meeting examination of what attorneys can learn about law and life from the study of Theodore Roosevelt, led by Pulitzer Prize-winning biographer Edmund Morris and historian Douglas Brinkley.

The last two years have brought two figures of the profession's highest order: former U.S. Secretary of State James A. Baker III in 2012 and U.S. Supreme Court Justice Samuel Alito in 2013—who weighed in respectively on America's place in the world and the most important unknown aspects concerning practice before our U.S. Supreme Court.

This type of programming has lifted the State Bar of Texas Annual Meeting and solidified its place on the short list of preeminent bar conventions in the country. Over the past decade, Texas lawyers have learned that they can fulfill all of their annual CLE requirement in the convention's two days while engaging with a steady stream of esteemed speakers and experts on virtually all aspects of professional life.

In 2014, the pizzazz continues. This year, the Annual Meeting will celebrate the 50th anniversary of an American legal history milestone—the Civil Rights Act of 1964. Appropriately, this year's convention will be in Austin, home of the LBJ Presidential Library, and speakers addressing the Act will include civil rights litigators Bill Baxley and Doug Jones; National Constitution Center CEO Jeffrey Rosen, addressing the "Meaning and Legacy of *Brown v. Board of Education*"; international historian Jeremi Suri explaining "How the Civil Rights Act Changed the World"; and remembrances of Lyndon Johnson by his daughter Lynda Bird Johnson Robb and the director of the LBJ Presidential Library, Mark Updegrave. Following on the heels of the 2013 Annual Meeting's popular courtroom program, "The Trial of Lee Harvey Oswald," this year's convention will have a reenactment of the U.S. Supreme Court oral argument in *Sweatt v. Painter*, the landmark case involving the ultimately successful effort to integrate the University of Texas School of Law in 1950.

The State Bar's Annual Meeting train has steadily picked up steam and should continue to accelerate on June 26-27, 2014—a ride lawyers should not think about missing. **TBJ**



**TALMAGE BOSTON**

is a shareholder at Winstead PC and is the past chair of the State Bar of Texas Litigation Section (2003-2004) and the Annual Meeting Committee (2009).



**LGBT LAW SECTION**  
State Bar of Texas

**at the 2014 Annual Meeting**

**June 26-27 in Austin**

**Fair and Impartial Courts –  
A Judicial Discussion**

FEATURING

**Mark Cady**

*Chief Justice of the Iowa Supreme Court*

**Woodie Jones**

*Chief Justice of the Third Court of Appeals*

**Tonya Parker**

*Judge of the 116th District Court, Dallas County*

**Fast and Furious:  
The LGBT State of the Nation**

FEATURING

**Shannon Minter**

*National Center for Lesbian Rights*

**D'Arcy Kemnitz**

*Executive Director of The LGBT Bar*

**Taxation and Federal Benefits  
for Unmarried and  
Same-Sex Couples**

FEATURING

**Professor Patricia Cain**

*Santa Clara University*

[CO-SPONSORED BY THE TAX SECTION]

**True Equality:  
Immigration Issues Post-*Windsor***

**JOIN US EACH NIGHT FOR A RECEPTION!**

See the events page for a detailed schedule at  
**facebook.com/LGBTLawTX**