



Meet Our Founder, Edgar Cahn

Dr. Edgar S. Cahn is the creator of Time Dollars and the founder of TimeBanks USA, as well as the co-founder of the National Legal Services Program and the Antioch School of Law (now the David A. Clarke School of Law). He is the author of "No More Throw Away People: The Co-Production Imperative," "Time Dollars" (co-author Jonathan Rowe, Rodale Press, 1992), "Our Brother's Keeper: The Indian in White America," (1972) and "Hunger USA." The development of Time Dollars is just one achievement in a career that, since the early 1960's, has been dedicated to achieving social justice for the disenfranchised. His own life is an example of dedication to strongly held principles and ideals, and he brings to audiences a powerful vision, sincere compassion, spontaneous humor, and the ability to inspire others. Edgar Cahn is the originator of Time Dollars, the creator of the Co-Production principle, and the President and Founder of the Time Dollar USA. A compelling speaker, Edgar possesses the eloquence, passion, and sense of humor to inspire in his audiences a sense not only that social justice matters, but that it calls for immediate action. For over four decades, his own life has stood as a model for action and as a testament to his abiding concern for the rights, welfare, and dignity of the disenfranchised.

A graduate of the Yale law school, Edgar entered the legal profession determined to use the law to achieve social justice. He started his career in government as special counsel and speechwriter for Attorney General Robert Kennedy under President John Kennedy. As part of that role, he was assigned by Kennedy to the Solicitor General's office for the government's amicus brief in civil rights sit-in cases. Edgar also worked to spearhead the first national campaign against hunger and malnutrition in the US, and in doing so, he authored an influential report entitled Hunger USA, which led to legislation enforcing shipments of food to severely malnourished communities on Indian reservations and in the southern United States. His work to fight hunger also involved initiating the earliest litigation to challenge the administration of the food stamp and commodities program, establishing the standing for potential recipients, and assisting in the preparation and defense of controversial documentary, "Hunger in America."

In 1963, Edgar's life and work seeking social justice first became known at a larger scale when the article he co-authored with his late wife, Jean Camper Cahn, titled "The War on Poverty: A Civilian Perspective" was published in the Yale Law Journal and became the blueprint for the National Legal Services program. Using their model and working closely with Sargent Shriver and the War on Poverty, Edgar and Jean co-created the National Legal Services program under the Office of Economic Opportunity in the Johnson administration. Having left the government for work with the Field Foundation in 1968, Edgar founded the Citizens Advocate Center as watchdog on government whose primary purpose was to challenge the colonialism of the Bureau of Indian Affairs. That same year, he authored "Our Brother's Keeper, the Indian in White America." Leading American Indian activists did the research for the book, which was intended as a catalyst for change in national policy and which helped to spearhead the official adoption of Indian self-determination as national policy.

In 1972, Edgar and his late wife created and founded the Antioch School of Law, which later became the UDC David A. Clarke School of Law and continues the tradition established in the Antioch days to emphasize social justice as a critical role for the law. As law-school deans, Edgar and Jean were the first pioneers of clinical legal education in the US, an approach which is now to be found in law schools throughout the nation.

In 1980 after a massive heart attack that nearly claimed his life, Cahn stepped outside of the law to create yet another social invention, a local, tax-exempt currency called Time Dollars, which are designed to validate and reward the work of the disenfranchised in rebuilding their communities and fighting for social justice. As a distinguished fellow at the London School of Economics, Edgar completed the work on Time Dollars that has led to Time Dollar initiatives being funded by government and major philanthropic foundations in the United States in areas as widespread as juvenile justice, community health, education, public housing, community building, wraparound services for children with emotional disorders, immigrant workers' rights, and elder care.

As the president and founder of the Time Dollar USA, Cahn's experience with Time Dollars led him in 1995 to develop a radical new framework for social welfare and social justice that turns recipients of service into co-producers of change. He called this new approach "Co-Production." An example of Co-Production principles at work can be seen in Washington, DC, his home city, where in 1996 he founded the Time Dollar Youth Court, whose mission is to enlist youth in changing the shape of juvenile justice in DC. Sanctioned by the DC Superior Court, the Time Dollar Youth Court is now among the largest youth courts in the nation. Its innovative design enlists more than 400 youth each year, the majority of them former delinquents, as active shapers of a new form of justice for DC youth.

Besides creating the National Legal Services program, pioneering clinical legal education, and enjoying a long and distinguished career as an advocate for the nation's disenfranchised, Edgar has held positions at the University of Miami School of Law, Florida International University, the London School of Economics, Center for the Study of Human Rights, Columbia University and the UDC David A. Clarke School of Law.

Cahn's educational background includes a B.A. magna cum laude from Swarthmore College, an M.A. and Ph.D. from Yale University, and a J.D. from Yale Law School. Honors include: Phi Beta Kappa, Magna Cum Laude, Fulbright Scholar (Cambridge University), Order of the Coif, Articles & Book Review Editor, Yale Law Journal; Jefferson Award for Outstanding Public Service Benefiting Local Communities; Founder's Award, National Council on Aging; American Association of Law Schools William Pincus Award for Outstanding Contribution to Clinical Legal Education; Point of Light 1997; Co-op Quarterly 1998 Building Economic Alternatives Award for Outstanding Work in Fostering a Sustainable Economy; Medal of Distinction, D.C. Superior Court 2000.