

From Foster Child to A-List Advocate

[f](#) [t](#) [in](#) [✉](#)

MILES COOLEY '99

While millions pay to hear megastars Jay-Z, Rihanna, and 50 Cent on their iPhones, Miles Cooley receives a handsome hourly rate to hear them in person. Representing A-list celebrities across music and sports—litigating their cases and negotiating their deals—Cooley's star status in the entertainment law galaxy is light years removed from a harrowing childhood.

"I didn't get a good shake as a kid," he says. "Being a lawyer flows from my constant pursuit of justice back then."

Born to teenage parents, Cooley lived in several unhealthy settings as a child. His mother left for a year when he was 1, and Cooley was just 5 when he found her dead from a drug overdose. Put up for adoption, he spent seven rocky years with a Davis family who eventually put him in foster care.

Life turned at 16 when he moved in with Leslie Cooley, a school psychologist with whom he had bonded over the years. He excelled at Sacramento City College, then transferred to UC Berkeley.

A Peace Corps assignment followed in Ecuador, where Cooley became fluent in Spanish—and frustration. "I went in with enormous drive but had a miserable first year," he says. "We couldn't get anything done, and it was very difficult. It was a blessing, though. I had to dig deep in many ways, and we ended up doing some amazing projects for women and children."

Cooley flourished immediately at Berkeley Law, winning the best oral argument award in first-year moot court and the McBaine Honors Moot Court Competition's best brief award the following year. He went on to practice corporate law in Los Angeles, where one day a partner sought help with a new client. "Next thing I know," Cooley recalls, "I'm a third-year associate handling litigation for 50 Cent."

Word of Cooley's acumen spread quickly, leading to a four-year stint as general counsel for Rihanna and coveted legal work for Jay-Z and other celebrities. Now a partner at Kelley Drye & Warren, Cooley stays nimble in a fast-moving field.

The biggest misconception about representing celebrities? "That it's more glamorous than other work," he says. "It really isn't. While the profile might be a bit higher, you're still dealing with the same legal principles. Celebrities expect quality work and excellent results just like any other client."

A regular at Berkeley Law's annual sports law conference, Cooley is developing an educational boot camp program to prepare Cal student-athletes for life after sports. His extensive pro bono work also includes helping nonprofits that advocate for foster children.

"I know what that life can be," says Cooley, 47, who became a father in 2015. "I want to make sure other kids don't have it like I did."

—Andrew Cohen

06/02/2017



Miles Cooley '99

TRANSCRIPT
MAGAZINE 2017