

Richard Parker's long game

11 min read | 02 October 2026

 Mark Taylor



Credit: Milbank

As a coalition of states prepared its challenge to the proposed \$110 billion Paramount/Warner Bros merger, the antitrust bar rumour mill went into overdrive speculating which heavy-hitter would take up the plaintiff's fight.

When the filing [hit the docket](#) in July, it revealed the California-led party of 12 attorneys general had selected Milbank for the most Hollywood of legal battles, proving the chatter around Richard Parker right.

In a career spanning six decades, Parker has repeatedly found himself at the centre of ambitious practice-building projects, in litigating major antitrust battles and moulding the teams capable of handling them.

The Paramount mandate showed that a project he [joined](#) several years earlier was bearing fruit, propelling Milbank into conversations around the market's very biggest antitrust cases and duking it out to win the work.

Past and present colleagues describe a deceptively smart, elite lawyer whose impeccable credentials are matched by an unusual ability to attract talent, earn trust and inspire loyalty.

When [Adam Di Vincenzo](#) left Gibson Dunn for Milbank in 2022 to build out the firm's Washington antitrust presence alongside [Fiona Schaeffer](#) in New York, he quickly realised something was missing.

"Everything about the firm was great except one thing, and that was that Rich wasn't here," Di Vincenzo said.

The former colleagues caught up over lunch and, for Di Vincenzo, the penny dropped.

"Sometimes the most obvious things escape you for a while," he said. "You're thinking about all the creative solutions, but the solution is right in front of you, and it was Rich."

Di Vincenzo's assessment goes further.

"Rich is a legend in antitrust," he said. "He is just the most extraordinary human being I've ever met in the antitrust bar, bar none."

[James Weingarten](#), the former FTC chief trial counsel whom Parker later recruited to Milbank, said the firm has its own description for him.

"Internally at Milbank we call him the dean of the antitrust bar, and I don't think that's an exaggeration," Weingarten said. "He's accomplished enough to have a huge ego if he wanted one. Instead, he's a total gentleman."

Steve Weissman, global co-chair of Gibson Dunn's antitrust practice, first encountered Parker during an FTC merger case in 1998 before the pair later worked together as partners at the firm, cementing a bond of mutual admiration and respect.

"Rich has a combination of true authenticity, integrity, and charisma that is unique, especially in Washington, DC," Weissman said. "He is one of the rare lawyers, or even people, who is impossible to dislike."

Eliminate your inner big firm

In an interview with GCR, Parker traced a career that began far from Washington's antitrust bar, and by his own account, with little intention of becoming one of its defining figures.

As a child, law was already in his blood. His father was an insurance defence lawyer before moving in-house at State Farm, after serving in the Second World War and attending law school on the GI Bill.

Parker recalls being in seventh grade when he tried to talk his way out of cleaning his room to go play ball with friends, much to his father's incredulity.

"And then he says, 'Richard, anybody who can run their mouth like you probably ought to be a lawyer. But in the meantime, clean your room'. I said, 'Yes, sir,' even though I still think I had a good argument."

Parker eventually followed into the profession. After UC Davis, he served in the Army at Fort Lewis, Washington, then spent seven years in the reserves before attending UCLA Law School and clerking for federal judge William Matthew Byrne Jr, graduating in 1974.

At O'Melveny & Myers, by sheer chance, his first case involved antitrust litigation for IBM.

"If my first case had been securities, I may never have been in antitrust," Parker said. "I didn't have any great interest in antitrust. But I just got assigned to it. I kind of liked it."

A two-year project involving the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission later brought him from Los Angeles to Washington, DC.

"I liked living in LA, but I thought my skill set was pretty good for Washington, so I never went back. I got Potomac fever."

What Parker wanted most was to try cases. Rather than leave for a US Attorney's Office, he spent four years in O'Melveny's bankruptcy practice, where the quick-fire pace of litigation proved the perfect sandbox for trying merger cases.

"A case would be filed in April, we'd be in trial in June, and we'd be in the court of appeals in September," he said.

The experience produced a rule Parker still applies.

"I tell people, 'eliminate your inner big firm'. No messing around on discovery. We are going to trial. Period."

Parker's three golden rules

In 1998, Parker moved into government, prompted by a note handed over during a deposition saying then-FTC chairman Robert Pitofsky wanted to talk.

"I said, 'I'd probably better take this call'."

He joined the FTC that year before becoming director of the Bureau of Competition in 1999.

“I will flat-out tell you, that was the best job I ever had,” he said. “It was a match made in heaven. Bob Pitofsky did not need Rich Parker to tell him what the antitrust policy of the US ought to be, but I could help tell him whether we could win the case,” he said.

The experience shaped the three rules he has for younger or aspiring lawyers.

The first is becoming as good as possible at something sophisticated; the second is pro bono work; and the third is public service.

“I am a death-penalty abolitionist, and I got two guys off death row. And those are the most important cases I ever did. Period,” he said.

One of the men whose death sentence Parker helped overturn later earned a GED and began teaching younger inmates. The two have exchanged letters twice a month for 25 years and remain close friends.

Win it on common sense

Weissman said he has long heeded Parker’s advice and in 2013 became deputy director of the FTC’s competition bureau, 15 years after the two first encountered each other on opposite sides of the FTC’s challenge to the Cardinal Health and McKesson mergers.

Even then, Weissman said, Parker’s trial style stood out.

“Rich led the FTC to a victory in that case and, just by observing him in front of witnesses and the judge, I learned so much about effective advocacy, especially to a generalist audience not steeped in antitrust,” he said.

They later worked together on the FTC’s challenge involving Arch Coal and Vulcan, prevailing before Judge John Bates in 2004.

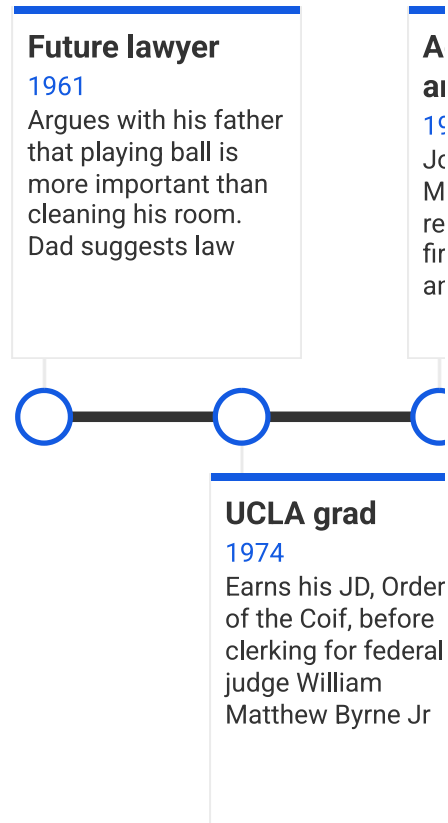
“Rich has many talents, but one of his special ones is taking complex, geeky antitrust principles and analyses and translating them into simple narratives and points that everyone, especially clients and generalist audiences like judges, can understand and not get lost in the weeds and ‘mumbo jumbo’ of antitrust language,” Weissman said.

Parker is more direct.

“Look, you win antitrust cases not on the basis of fancy economics,” he said. “You win it on the basis of common sense. You have to have the fancy economics because the judges need it for the court of appeals. But you win the case like any other case. You win it on the basis of common sense.”

Richard Parker, a life in law

Click the circles to learn more about Milbank's "dean of antitrust"



Source: GCR interviews, public records



Find the human touch

Di Vincenzo notes Roche's 2019 acquisition of Spark Therapeutics as one of the clearest examples of the magic Parker can bring.

Spark, based in Philadelphia and working out of Children's Hospital of Philadelphia, was developing a gene therapy for haemophilia. Roche already had the standard of care for haemophilia A.

According to Di Vincenzo, Spark was out of financial runway, while the FTC investigation became mired in questions spanning antitrust, medicine and clinical science.

As the debate went around and around, becoming ever more technical and complex, Parker stepped back.

"We need to find a witness who is easy to talk to, who is credible, and who can tell the story in a very human way," Di Vincenzo recalled him saying.

The team turned to a doctor on Spark's board who had spent her career treating haemophilia A patients.

Her experience reached back to Philadelphia during the AIDS epidemic of the 1980s, when contaminated blood products exposed haemophilia patients to HIV, in one of the most infamous public health crises in American history.

"She talked about treating AIDS patients around Philadelphia in the 1980s who had inherited hemophilia A and needed blood transfusions, and that's how they got the disease. If they didn't die of AIDS, they were dying of hemophilia," Di Vincenzo said.

"It was incredibly human and incredibly touching," he said. "But it was the real story behind the deal and why the deal needed to happen."

The testimony did not replace the antitrust analysis.

"It wasn't that we didn't need a huge, complicated economic analysis, which is what we used to do and were trained to do," Di Vincenzo said. "He just understood what was needed for that situation."

The transaction received a unanimous FTC vote, including from an aggressively enforcement-minded commissioner. Children's Hospital, which held shares in Spark, received almost half a billion dollars from the deal.

For Di Vincenzo, the episode also explains something that Parker's manner can obscure.

"People miss how amazing a technical antitrust lawyer he is because he's so friendly and down to earth," he said. "He takes pains not to come across as arrogant or knowing more than other people. He's always asking good questions. But he's one of the best technical antitrust lawyers you'll ever see."

Leave everything on the field

Parker is candid that his approach has not always worked.

"I have not won all these cases. I've got my ass kicked," he said.

One of those defeats came when he defended Sysco against the FTC's successful challenge to its proposed acquisition of US Foods in 2015.

Parker nevertheless emerged from the case with enormous respect for Judge Amit Mehta, who ruled against his client. Three months later, Parker asked Mehta to lunch.

"He and I are really good friends," Parker said. "My wife and his wife, I mean, we are family friends, wives and kids, and we became really good friends, starting out with him ruling against us."

For Parker, it comes back to another personal rule of how to approach litigation.

“The number one thing is you’ve got to realise the best you can do is leave everything on the field,” he said. “And if you’ve done that, you’re disappointed if you lose, but you can’t be that disappointed. You did everything you could.”

After more than 45 years at O’Melveny, across two stints where he prided himself on being able to offer “any kind of antitrust..mergers, regulatory approval in mergers, criminal, class actions”, it was time to move on.

“The firm gave me a lot. I gave them a lot. Gibson gave me an opportunity to help them develop their antitrust practice. They had an excellent one, but they thought I could help them,” he said.

Parker went on to handle major merger fights including the successful defence of Deutsche Telekom in the [T-Mobile/Sprint litigation](#) and [Tronox’s](#) resolution of the FTC challenge to its Cristal acquisition.

The opportunity at Milbank followed a similar pattern, and when Di Vincenzo later moved, Parker followed.

Milbank already had an established antitrust platform, including Schaeffer in New York. Di Vincenzo said Schaeffer is “a tremendous colleague and an uber-talented antitrust lawyer” who has handled difficult deals including [US Steel/Nippon](#) and laid the foundations alongside the Washington team.

The partners said Grant Bermann, who joined Milbank alongside Parker from the Department of Justice’s Antitrust Division in 2023, was another essential addition to the DC unit.

When approached, Weingarten was sold instantly and started in June 2024.

“He said we weren’t starting from ground zero,” Weingarten said. “We were already on the fifth floor and trying to build a skyscraper. That was enormously appealing.”

Weingarten said the aim was to grow the litigation side of the existing platform, with Parker bringing a plan developed through previous practice-building efforts.

“We were out there pounding the pavement, meeting clients, building relationships and competing for mandates,” he said. “We started landing matters, from class-action defence to other antitrust engagements. Rich is a five-tool player. He can do criminal antitrust, civil litigation, merger work, the whole range.”

Parker has his own description of that side of the profession.

“I like to meet with clients. I like to sell. I like to be out on the open market competing, and that’s what I did. I’m sort of a street fighter in that respect.”

Then came Paramount.

“I think that's going to be a real rocket booster for the practice,” Weingarten said.

California declined to be interviewed on the record. A source familiar with the state's investigation noted they wanted a team that could litigate an extremely complex, multi-jurisdictional transaction in a manner digestible by a court. “Rich has spent decades doing exactly that,” the source said.

From quarterback to Coach Parker

At Milbank, Parker's role is less prominent than earlier in his career, as he has transitioned from star player to the coach who builds teams around one.

The leaders he admires include Dwight Eisenhower, former US Secretary of State George Marshall, former UCLA basketball coach John Wooden and former Alabama football coach Nick Saban.

“I'm a team guy,” he said. “These are guys who really knew how to put teams together and demanded team play.”

Parker's son attended Alabama, and Parker became a big fan of the heavily decorated Saban while watching the school win national championships.

“Right now, I'm aspiring to be Nick Saban, and James is the quarterback,” he said. “I used to be the quarterback. I'm going to participate in the trial and everything else, but he's the quarterback.”

More than 50 years into his career, he still has the same hunger. The final act will have to wait, Parker said; there is no sign of the curtain coming down after Paramount.

“I'm not getting any younger, but I'm also healthy, and I really enjoy doing this,” he said. “So I'm going to keep doing it.”



Mark Taylor

US Editor

Centellic

mark.taylor@centellic.com