

## In Defense of Superhotties

BY A3G

**F**ederal judges. You read their opinions in the *Federal Reporter*; your clients comply with their orders. But how well do you *really* know our nation's federal judges—not just as jurists, but as people? ¶ In an attempt to answer this question, as well as to alleviate the boredom of life as a law-firm document drone,

Article III Groupie, a.k.a. A3G (yours truly), recently started Underneath Their Robes (<http://underneaththeirrobes.blogs.com>). UTR's premise is that federal judges are celebrities, the rock stars of the legal profession. A version of *People* or *Us Weekly* for federal judges, UTR offers "news, gossip, and colorful commentary about the federal judiciary." Recent features include "Superhotties of the Federal Judiciary," a contest to select the fairest (that is, the most physically attractive) federal judges, and "Justice Is Blind," a collection of scrumptious blind items of judicial gossip.

Since its debut in June, UTR has received almost 150,000 hits, as well as coverage in publications such as *Newsweek*, the *ABA Journal*, and the *San Francisco Daily Journal*. Clearly the public has a voracious appetite for federal judicial gossip! But UTR is not without its critics, who condemn its cheeky approach to discussing federal judges. Indeed, UTR's controversial, quasi-sensational nature explains why A3G has chosen to remain anonymous.

To those who would argue that UTR is disrespectful of federal judges, I'd argue that UTR's irreverent treatment is actually salutary. By underscoring that judges are

fallible human beings, not faceless judicial machines, UTR is performing a valuable public service. A healthy skepticism of authority, including judicial authority, is important for a robust democracy. UTR encourages such skepticism by reminding the public that federal judges are flawed human beings who sometimes make mistakes or do embarrassing things.

A second criticism of UTR is that its focus on certain private, nonjudicial aspects of federal judges is an unseemly violation of their privacy. As stated by U.S. District Judge Nora Manella (C.D. Cal.), who earned an honorable mention in our Superhotties contest,

UTR "makes me reconsider my support of the First Amendment." She suggested that people who want their name in boldface type should go into politics. In a similar vein, a reader took A3G to task for "Judicial Sight-ations," UTR's celebrity sightings column for federal judges: "Celebrities are fair game ... because their careers are based on public attention. But judges didn't sign up for this."

A3G respectfully disagrees. Although they may be less-public figures than movie stars or members of Congress, federal judges are prominent and influential

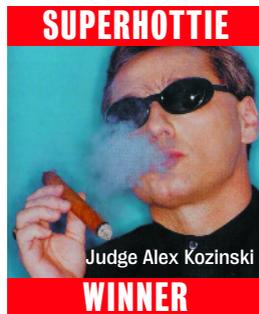
members of government. As the increasingly heated judicial confirmation battles demonstrate, the personal conduct of judges may be quite relevant to their official responsibilities. For example, if a judge uses a racial slur after having his parking spot stolen at the mall—the type of encounter reported in "Judicial Sight-ations"—that would be something litigants appearing before him would want to know. When federal judges accept lifetime appointments to exercise the judicial power of the United States, they should realize that a reduction in privacy comes with the territory.

A third, quite different, critique of UTR is that federal judges do not merit celebrity treatment. With salaries lower than those of many law firm associates, most federal judges are not rich. Nor are they famous, like movie stars—or even the lawyers to the stars, now celebrities in their own right.

Federal judges may not be traditional celebrities. But just as pastels are the new black, prestige is the new fame. Within the credential-obsessed upper echelons of the legal profession, *prestige*—here defined as limited fame or renown, for the "right" reasons, such as intelligence and good judgment—is the highest good. And federal judges enjoy oodles of prestige.

Investment bankers are rich; movie stars are famous. Lawyers pride themselves on belonging to a learned profession. And in this learned profession, who is more deserving of attention and adulation than the elite corps of federal judges, handpicked for their posts based on learning and professional achievement?

Move over, J. Lo. Federal judges are in the house! **CL**



Article III Groupie works for a large law firm in a major city, where she toils in obscurity. During her free time, she consoles herself through the overconsumption of luxury goods. Her goal in life is to become a federal judicial diva.