

Mary Jo White

Mary Jo White did not always aspire to be a lawyer. Defying family tradition, she yearned to become a doctor and studied clinical psychology, earning both a bachelor's and a master's degree in that field. But after attending a year at Columbia University Law School, she never looked back, graduating at the top of her class in 1974.

After serving as a law clerk to a federal district judge and working as a litigation associate at Debevoise & Plimpton LLP, Ms. White was hired in 1978 by U.S. Attorney Robert Fiske as a line assistant in the Southern District of New York. She handled her first terrorism case at that time, prosecuting a group of violent anti-Castro radicals, Omega 7. She also served as the chief of appeals. As a young prosecutor, Ms. White developed her reputation for being fiercely competitive and, despite her diminutive height, played point guard on the United States Attorney's Office women's basketball team.

In 1981, Debevoise lured Ms. White back from the prosecutor's office. There she represented clients like the *New York Times* and became one of the first women to make partner at Debevoise. She was the first woman partner in the litigation department and represented some of the firm's most significant clients in litigation and regulatory investigations. But one of the matters she is most proud to have undertaken during this period was a landmark pro bono lawsuit to open the ranks of the New York City Fire Department to women firefighters. Ms. White also found time to help design the firm's part-time program and ensure that an attorney's election of part-time options would not impair opportunities for career advancement.

In 1990, Ms. White was named the Chief Assistant United States Attorney for the Eastern District of New York and then its Interim United States Attorney. Three years later, President Clinton appointed her as the United States Attorney for the Southern District of New York. She was the first woman and is the only person to have held the top law enforcement position in both districts, which together encompass New York City and its suburbs.

Under her leadership, the offices brought major prosecutions involving complex white-collar economic crimes, international terrorism, money laundering, official corruption, organized crime,

civil rights and environmental law violations, and racketeering. Her tenure in the Southern District of New York began soon after the first bombing of the World Trade Center in 1993. Ms. White and her staff worked relentlessly to bring to trial those responsible for the 1993 bombing, the 1998 bombing of United States embassies in Kenya and Tanzania, and the terrorist plots to attack New York City landmarks and blow up American airplanes over the Pacific Ocean. The results were more than 30 criminal convictions and not a single acquittal. In 1998, Osama bin Laden was also indicted for his role in the embassy bombings; he remains a fugitive.

During her time at the United States Attorney's Office, Ms. White appointed the first-ever woman Deputy United States Attorney and promoted women to head the Civil Division, Violent Gangs and Public Corruption Units and to fill many other supervisory positions. She encouraged supervisors to allow flexible work arrangements without sacrificing the quality of service to the public.

Since returning to private practice in 2002, Ms. White has taken on a role in New York's legal community never before shouldered by a woman. Her day-to-day work involves the representation of clients in "bet-the-company" criminal and regulatory investigations and litigation involving major business, finance, healthcare, and civic institutions. She has contributed significantly to the firm's consistently being ranked as one of the top law firms for women, which was most recently honored by *Working Mother* magazine as a "2007 Working Mother & Flex-Time Lawyers Best Law Firm for Women."

Ms. White has been named one of the *National Law Journal's* "50 Most Influential Women Lawyers in America" on multiple occasions and received the Sandra Day O'Connor Award for Distinction in Public Service, the Magnificent 7 Award of the Business and Professional Women/USA, the Women of Power and Influence Award from the National Organization of Women, and the Most Influential Women in the Law Award from Benjamin N. Cardozo School of Law.



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