AFFINITY

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ATTORNEYS AT LAW, NEW ORLEANS

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PERSPECTIVE: Highlighting the Achievements and Advancements of Women in the Legal Field

Surely, but slowly, women are making progress in representation at law firms. According to the National Association for Law Placement, Inc.'s (NALP) 2020 Report on Diversity in U.S. Law Firms, the representation of female lawyers increased from 36.33% in 2019 to 37.14% in 2020. Within law firm settings, women's representation weakens the higher you go in the hierarchy, as women make up just 19% of equity partners and 25% of executive-leadership positions, according to ABA research.

> "When I'm sometimes asked 'When will there be enough (women on the Supreme Court)?' and my answer is: 'When there are nine.' People are shocked. But there'd been nine men, and nobody's ever raised a question about that."
>
> *--Ruth Bader Ginsburg*

While women may still be noticeably underrepresented in the legal field, we have come a long way from where we started. In celebrating the achievements and advancements of women, we take this opportunity to recognize some of the female pioneers in the legal community, aside from Ruth Bader Ginsburg, Erin Brockovich, and Elle Woods.

DO YOU KNOW?

- ***Margaret Brent*** was the first woman recorded to practice law in America. Margaret arrived in the colonies in 1638.
- ***Lucy Terry Prince*** was the first Black woman to argue a case in front of a U.S. Supreme Court justice. Lucy was kidnapped from Africa as a baby, and sold into slavery in the 1720s. After being freed, Lucy and her husband worked their own land in Vermont. However, when a colonel laid claim to their land through various lawsuits, successfully taking half of their property, Lucy and her husband took their case to the U.S. Circuit Court in Bennington, VT, where Lucy argued their case against two respected lawyers.
- ***Ada Kepley*** was the first American woman to graduate from law school in 1870.
- ***Charlotte Ray*** was the first Black American female lawyer in the U.S. Charlotte graduated from Howard University School of Law in 1872.
- ***Belva Lockwood*** was the first woman member of the U.S. Supreme Court Bar, admitted in 1879. In addition to being a practicing attorney, Belva was a passionate advocate for many causes, including women's suffrage, equal pay for women, the rights of Mormon women, nonviolence and world peace.
- ***Lutie Lytle*** – was the first American woman to teach law in a chartered law school. Lutie joined the faculty of Central Tennessee Law School in 1897. She also worked as a practicing lawyer and gave lectures at public events to advance the cause of civil rights and integration.

Sandra Day O'Connor was the first female United States Supreme Court Justice

- ***Marian Mayer Berkett*** was the first female attorney hired by a Louisiana law firm. In 1937, Marian graduated first in her class from Tulane Law School and joined the law firm Deutsch Kerrigan. For more than 70 years, Marian practiced almost every kind of law in New Orleans. During her career, she wrote a comprehensive history of workers' compensation in Louisiana, rallied against Huey Long, and created a charter for Jefferson Parish.
- ***Claire d'Hemecourt Glas*** was the first female attorney hired by MBLB after the firm was started in 1997. In 1999, Claire was hired as Alan Brackett's associate. Claire left MBLB to work as a representative of Westlaw, where she continues to work today.

These women certainly paved the way for the current representation of female lawyers. While celebrating their achievements, they also remind us of the call for continued action to improve gender diversity in the profession. At MBLB, we recognize the importance of gender diversity in the legal profession and how essential it is in meeting the needs of our clients, as well within our own community. Diversity in gender brings a unique set of ideas and mindsets, and we strive to make conscious efforts to create an environment that promotes and encourages the success of women in the legal profession and within our firm.