

RECOGNIZING AFRICAN AMERICAN LEGAL TRAILBLAZERS

Janielle Walker

To this day, the legal career remains predominantly white, contributing to over 80% of the demographic. The remaining demographic is made up of Hispanics and Latinos—around 6.9%, Asian—5.8% and lastly African American—5.4%. There was a point in time where being an African American in the legal field was unconventional. Many decades ago, numerous African American trailblazers paved the way for other African Americans to pursue law.

In 1844, Macon Bolling Allen became the first African American lawyer. As one can imagine, he faced many obstacles. During the 1840's, slavery was still prominent in certain states, making it hard for Allen to obtain citizenship. Allen was encouraged to be admitted to the Maine bar but was rejected because of his residency. Allen then worked hard to pass the examination for nonresidents, later making him the first licensed African- American lawyer in the United States and a historical pioneer for our community. Allen continued to make history after becoming the first African American judge and a contributing founder of the first African American law firm in the United States.



Macon Bolling Allen

Lutie Lytle was another pioneer African American that helped positively impact the legal profession. When Lutie Lytle was 21 years old, she worked as a schoolteacher in Chattanooga, Tennessee while saving funds to go to law school at Central Tennessee College. After graduating as valedictorian of the 1897 class, she began to practice law and became the first African American woman to obtain a law license in Tennessee. Later Lytle was the first African American woman admitted to the Kansas State bar after moving back to her hometown, Topeka, Kansas.



Lutie Lytle

Thurgood Marshall became the first African American justice to serve on the Supreme Court of the United States in 1967. Although becoming the first colored justice was a huge historical accomplishment, Marshall made astonishing triumphs earlier on. Marshall attended Howard University School of Law, graduating as valedictorian in 1933. Marshall continued to make monumental achievements in the legal field as an African American lawyer working to dismantle segregation in the United States. Marshall led the NAACP's efforts to undermine segregation and finally integrate schools around the country (*Brown v. Board of Education*).



Thurgood Marshall

Many African Americans have helped transform the legal system by ending discrimination and breaking barriers. Nevertheless, as future African American lawyers, it is still our job to continue to improve the legal system by overcoming racial injustice. Thurgood Marshall once said, "The legal system can force open doors and sometimes even knock down walls, but it cannot build bridges. That job belongs to you and me."