THE 50 MOST INFLUENTIAL WOMEN LAWYERS IN AMERICA

PREPARING THIS, our first tribute since 1998 to the most influential women in the law, served to remind us of just how much has changed in a relatively few years.

Many of the women on this year's list entered law school at a time when to be a "lady lawyer" was unusual, even a little weird. It is extraordinary to recall that as recently as the 1970s, women were discouraged from entering law school on the ground that they would take a "man's place." Now it's the prejudice against women that seems unfathomable.

We asked our readers to nominate female attorneys who have had a national impact in their fields and beyond during the last five years. Merely holding high office was not enough; we looked for women with the demonstrated power to change the legal landscape, shape public affairs, launch industries and do big things. Law professors and in-house counsel were eligible; judges and nonpracticing lawyers were not.

We received nominations for nearly 200 attorneys, and tossed other names into the pool on the basis of our own research. A team of editors in New York scrutinized the candidates and decided upon the list you'll find here. The profiles were written by staff reporters Sandhya Bathija, Peter Geier, Vesna Jaksic, Leigh Jones, Lynne Marek and Pamela A. MacLean, and by contributors June Bell, Emily Heller and Peter Page.

There were a lot of close calls in the course of our highly subjective review. In the end, the list reflects not just some of the most influential women lawyers, but some of the most influential lawyers, period. Some of these careers showed remarkable staying power: Ten of the women we highlight here made our first list of the most influential women attorneys nine years ago. Eight reprise their appearance on the list of top women litigators that we published in 2001.

It goes without saying that there's still room for improvement; one of the themes emerging from the nominations is the challenge that women, more so than men, face in balancing the conflicting demands of a legal career and family. That pressure helps explain why, according to the law placement organization NALP, women make up about half of all law students, but only about 17% of the partners at major U.S. law firms.

Even so, our survey attests to the high caliber of women in the law. We're well beyond the stage when women had to apologize for pursuing a legal career; these attorneys prove why.

—MICHAEL MOLINE

PROFILES IN POWER

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PROFILES IN POWER

Terri L. Mascherin

47, Jenner & Block, Chicago



BY DAY A contract and corporate transactions litigator and partner on her firm's management committee, Mascherin has dedicated much of her career to pro bono cases, particularly representing indigent clients on death row. To cite one example, she successfully defended former Illinois Governor George Ryan's commutations of death sentences in Illinois. No slouch with paying clients, she has first-chaired jury and bench trials, argued appeals in state and federal court and arbitrated both domestic and international disputes. Last year, for example, she won $100 million in arbitration and declaratory relief for Honeywell International Inc. over the breach of a petrochemical supply agreement. She was lead counsel for WorldCom Inc. in several actions under the Telecommunications Act of 1996. NLJ

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