

AN ADVOCATE FOR DEMOCRACY

LAUREN RIKLEEN

Executive Director, Lawyers
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LAUREN RIKLEEN IS THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

of Lawyers Defending American Democracy, whose mission is to galvanize the legal profession to protect democracy and the rule of law. She recently published *Her Honor: Stories of Challenges and Triumph from Women Judges*.

➔ **What do you enjoy most about your career?**

What I have enjoyed most about my career path is the continued opportunity to work in areas that align with my core values and interests. Throughout my life, I have been driven by the responsibility we all share to respond to injustice in our schools, communities, workplaces, and government. I have tried to find opportunities in my work and in my professional and community volunteer roles where I can focus on a variety of societal challenges in the hope that, in some small way, I can help make a difference.

➔ **Tell us about your current role.**

My current roles reflect a drive to work with (or help create) mission-driven organizations. At the height of the pandemic, I was asked to become involved in Lawyers Defending American Democracy, an organization created to galvanize the legal profession to do more to protect democracy and the rule of law. I have since agreed to assume the role of executive director to help broaden the organization's reach and develop projects that can move lawyers to act in response to the grave dangers confronting our democratic institutions.

I also continue, on a more limited basis, to speak and train on issues relating to workplace culture and the importance of creating work environments that are respectful, diverse, equitable, and inclusive. I see both roles as interconnected, as workplace culture is critically important to one's quality of life on a day-to-day basis. When people experience such negative behaviors as harassment, bullying, pay inequity, and bias in the workplace, it affects their health and well-being, negatively impacting their careers. Similarly, when our government fails to function fairly or denies or rescinds rights and liberties that took decades, if not centuries, to achieve, we are weakened as a society.

Our lives cannot be segmented.

➔ **What does a day at work look like for you?**

When I am not traveling (which I do less frequently in the post-pandemic world), I work out of my home office and have my dogs hanging out with me while I am on the phone, on Zoom, or writing.

➔ **What are some of the challenges you face in your current role?**

One of the biggest challenges is to help people understand that responding to attacks on democracy is not political or partisan work.

The founders of Lawyers Defending American Democracy originally saw themselves filling a temporary need to respond to documented abuses of the rule of law in the last administration. Yet, after the 2020 election, we have seen a full-throated effort to undermine America's electoral systems by fueling distrust and passing laws that have the effect of denying ballot access to targeted populations. We are also seeing a steep decline in trust in the nation's courts, fueled, in part, by decisions that appear political and failures to adhere to basic ethical norms and expectations. We are seeing continued attacks on the media and dangerous efforts to undermine the reporting of facts. And we are now seeing a rise in laws that politicize our nation's schools by banning books and by cruelly exploiting vulnerable children, directly impacting what they can

learn about American history and how kids can talk about their values and family structures.

These threats to democracy are ongoing. Our challenge is to respond as best we can, which means increasing our resources to effectively do this work, both through volunteer and financial support.

Protecting the rule of law is apolitical work.

➔ **What causes are you passionate about?**

It would be easier to ask what causes I am not passionate about! As I indicated in other responses, there are so many connections between the wrongs we see in society and the wrongs we experience in our own workplaces, schools, and communities. The best answer I can offer is that I am most passionate about engaging others during this difficult time in our nation's history to ensure that decency, civility, and compassion prevail and that we never allow hate to win. It is incumbent on all of us to act.

➔ **How do you serve your community?**

Over the years, I have been fortunate to serve in many leadership roles in my community, including helping to create two charitable organizations, serving on numerous nonprofit boards, and engaging in bar association activities. Two of my most meaningful bar roles have been my service as president of the Boston Bar Association and as chair of the American Bar Association's Section of Civil Rights & Social Justice.

Is there any question you wish I asked, so I can share something with the readers about your professional or personal life that you would like to share?

➔ **How can interested persons get involved?**

Local bar associations and other non-profits (like Lawyers Defending American Democracy) are always looking for committed volunteers and offer unparalleled opportunities for lawyers to do meaningful work. Pick something you are passionate about and volunteer. You will be making an important contribution and will be glad you did.



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WHAT ARE YOU READING?

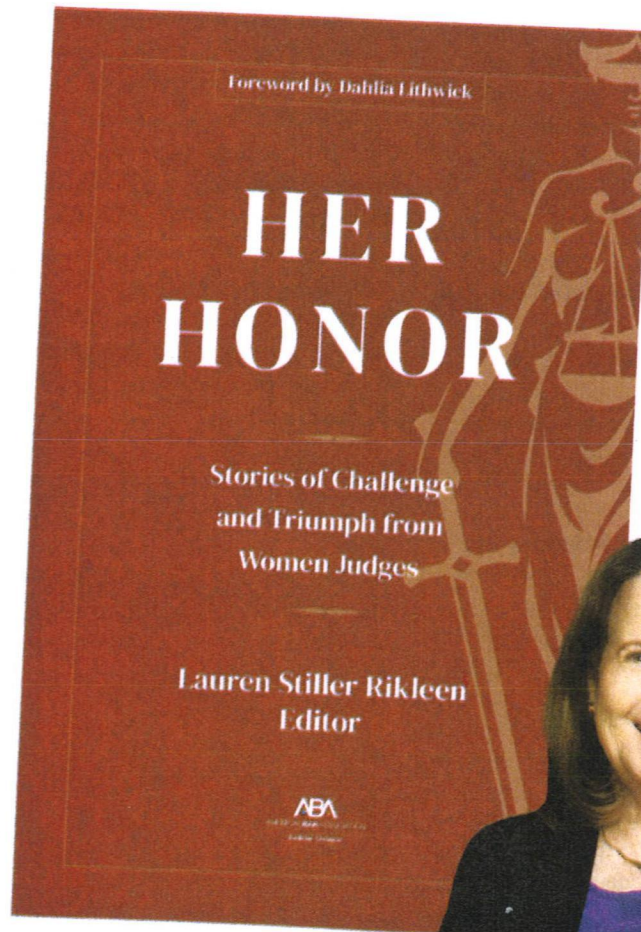
Her Honor

by Lauren Stiller Rikleen

The book promises to provide inspiration to the next generation of female lawyers and jurists.

IN HER HONOR, LAUREN STILLER RIKLEEN has selected 25 unique women judges from our state and federal courts and shared their stories. *Her Honor* is a collection of their challenges and triumphs while sitting on the bench. Ruth Marcus of the *Washington Post* said the stories in the book “are unique but also universal—tales of women who endured slights, barriers and outright humiliation unimaginable to later generations of female attorneys, but who persevered with grit, humor, and intelligence.”

The book promises to provide inspiration to the next generation of female lawyers and jurists. Their stories demonstrate their devotion to the rule of law and the correction of all injustices. The essays recount how each of these remarkable women judges “overcame great obstacles—sexism and racism and antisemitism and homophobia and poverty and so much else to rise to the top of the legal profession and make a huge difference,” said Erwin Chemerinsky, Dean and Distinguished Professor of Law, University of California, Berkeley School of Law.



Purchase your copy of *Her Honor* here:

[HTTPS://WWW.AMAZON.COM/HER-HONOR-STORIES-CHALLENGE-TRIUMPH/DP/1639052402](https://www.amazon.com/her-honor-stories-challenge-triumph/dp/1639052402)

WEB EXTRA



MSBA was honored to have Lauren Stiller Rikleen participate as panelist at our Spark Series Capstone Program in January. Watch the event at [HTTPS://WWW.YOUTUBE.COM/WATCH?V=JLKHPR9PHU](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JLKHPR9PHU).

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