



Rebels at the Bar: The Fascinating, Forgotten Stories of America's First Women Lawyers

Jill Norgren

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Long before Sandra Day O'Connor and Ruth Bader Ginsberg earned their positions on the Supreme Court, they were preceded in their goal of legal excellence by several intrepid trailblazers. In *Rebels at the Bar*, prize-winning legal historian Jill Norgren recounts the life stories of a small group of nineteenth century women who were among the first female attorneys in the United States. Beginning in the late 1860s, these determined rebels pursued the radical ambition of entering the then all-male profession of law. They were motivated by a love of learning. They believed in fair play and equal opportunity. They desired recognition as professionals and the ability to earn a good living.

Through a biographical approach, Norgren presents the common struggles of eight women first to train and to qualify as attorneys, then to practice their hard-won professional privilege. Their story is one of nerve, frustration, and courage. This first generation practiced civil and criminal law, solo and in partnership. The women wrote extensively and lobbied on the major issues of the day, but the professional opportunities open to them had limits. They never had the opportunity to wear the black robes of a judge. They were refused entry into the lucrative practices of corporate and railroad law. Although male lawyers filled legislatures and the Foreign Service, presidents refused to appoint these early women lawyers to diplomatic offices and the public refused to elect them to legislatures.

Rebels at the Bar expands our understanding of both women's rights and the history of the legal profession in the nineteenth century. It focuses on the female renegades who trained in law and then, like men, fought considerable odds to create successful professional lives. In this engaging and beautifully written book, Norgren shares her subjects' faith in the art of the possible. In so doing, she ensures their place in history.

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