

# [***Meet America s Top 200 Lawyers 2024***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:6BN5-KC11-JBCM-F01J-00000-00&context=1516831)

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**Byline:** Liane Jackson, Forbes Staff

**Highlight:** The attorneys on Forbes inaugural list of America's Top 200 Lawyers are change agents whose expertise, passion and purpose set them apart.

**Body**

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The statue of justice Themis or Justitia, the blindfolded goddess of justice against a flag of the United States of America, as a legal concept

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The late Abigail Van Buren, known to the world as advice columnist Dear Abby, once remarked that she couldn t think of a more potent combination than God and a good lawyer. Indeed, few aspects of life and death go untouched by a lawyer s hands. And if you re looking for a good one, we ve got recommendations in spades.

The attorneys on**Forbes** inaugural list ofare not just the finest in the field. They are, in many cases, change agents in every corner of the profession whether through breakthrough deals, blockbuster cases, societal reform, creating precedent or changing lives through public interest work. All are lawyers whose expertise, passion and purpose set them apart. Some work for emerging businesses and small entrepreneurs; others are counsel to the biggest global brands on the planet, guiding and litigating in the tech space, intellectual property, crypto, employment or the impact of AI. And at a time when ***politics*** and the law have become inextricably linked, with landmark criminal and civil cases dominating the national discourse, many of our top attorneys have been pivotal, representing elected officials, governments, defendants, voters on all sides of the spectrum.

Nuclear verdicts have become commonplace, but**Davida Brook**, a partner at the Susman Godfrey law firm in Los Angeles, made headlines when her firm secured a $787.5 million settlement in Dominion Voting Systems defamation lawsuit against Fox News Network. Then, working pro bono, Brook successfully defended Arizona Secretary of State Katie Hobbs and Wisconsin Governor Tony Evers in lawsuits brought by former federal prosecutor Sidney Powell alleging fraud in the 2020 presidential election.

I was attracted to the law because in representing just one person and hopefully changing their life for the better you can simultaneously establish a precedent that helps countless others, Brook says of her multifaceted practice, which includes intellectual property and complex litigation. Serving as co-lead counsel to the**New York Times**NYT NYT, Brook has filed a groundbreaking copyright infringement action against MicrosoftMSFT MSFTand OpenAI alleging that the companies illegally used millions of the newspaper s articles to train ChatGPT. That ability to work on behalf of just one person or company, but in so doing have a broader impact on a group of people or even an entire industry that s what I love about it.

The attorneys on**Forbes** list ofwere selected through a review of thousands of names from outside nominations, independent research and direct outreach. Our independent judging process leverages our editorial team s decades of experience in law practice, coverage of legal news, knowledge of the legal marketplace and information analysis. With the assistance of our advisory board, we curated a diverse and superlative group of attorneys who have demonstrated outsize influence and have achieved an elite level of excellence in private practice, civil rights and organizational work. These are lawyers from a variety of backgrounds, specializations and jurisdictions. Some have been part of the most consequential and seminal cases or legal trends in recent years; others are making their mark less publicly. But they all share reputations for integrity and records of excellence.

And the impact of their work is omnipresent. Landmark litigation can benefit consumers and businesses, put a lawyer on the map, and boost firm profits. And financially speaking, a good law practice means good business. But at its most aspirational, the legal profession is about more than just the bottom line. Lawyers work to scaffold rights, hold power to account and level the business playing field. They can help protect the marginalized, fight discrimination and increase transparency. Attorneys like**Bryan Stevenson**in Birmingham, Ala.,**Lee Merritt**in Houston, and**Ben Crump**in Tallahassee, Fla., are on the frontlines of civil rights law, working to end mass incarceration, excessive punishment and police misconduct.

When I think about the progress we re making, it is always going to be incremental. It s a long game, Crump says of his efforts, through wrongful death suits and civil litigation, to stop what he sees as an epidemic of police brutality. When institutions of oppression have been in existence for centuries, this is a journey to justice it s not going to happen overnight.

Change of a different type has been fostered by corporate and entertainment law attorney**Mathew Rosengart**of Greenberg Traurig, whose work to end Britney Spears father s conservatorship over the superstar singer set in motion deeper policy discussions about the propriety of such arrangements, including guardianships, and the potential for abuse.

One of the lessons learned is that the law can, in fact, be a powerful tool to effectuate change, both in someone s life and potentially systemically as well, Rosengart says. The fact that the case ultimately received the attention of various legislative bodies, including the United States Congress, was not something we expected but it was a byproduct of the case.

But not every case is a headliner. Many of**Forbes** top lawyers are working assiduously in the trenches on behalf of their clients whether individual or institutional briefing, researching, investigating, and just handling business. Among other high-profile cases and appointments,**Diandra Fu Debrosse** of DiCello Levitt is leading multidistrict litigation in massive product liability cases involving the alleged dangerous effects of infant formula and hair relaxers. But Debrosse has an even more ambitious goal: to widen opportunities in her specialty. She s leading a push for more attorneys of color in the billion dollar field of mass torts, and co-founded Shades of Mass, a nonprofit designed to expose law students and young lawyers to the field through education and networking opportunities.

According to the American Bar Association Profile of the Legal Profession, while there are 1.3 million lawyers in the U.S., 27% reside in just two states: New York and California. While many of the attorneys on our list are clustered on the coasts along with other industry hubs like Houston or Chicago top legal talent is dispersed across the country. Based in Sioux Falls, South Dakota,**Brendan Johnson**has had great success handling commercial litigation cases and representation of American Indian Tribes, demonstrating you can run a thriving and expansive practice even in a smaller jurisdiction.

The most rewarding part of my practice is being able to rewrite the odds for clients in high stakes litigation, says Johnson, a partner at Robins Kaplan. Being from a place like South Dakota means that when I am litigating in places like California or New York, my team is often met with a mix of skepticism and curiosity from the big law firms. That is not only a tactical advantage but it places a chip on the shoulder of my team that is helpful at trial.

Still, a dearth of attorneys willing to practice in smaller towns has created legal deserts. And the high cost of legal services and access to justice is a problem across the country. The law profession certainly isn t all wine, roses and six-figure starting salaries. The legal field faces continued diversity issues and equal pay challenges, particularly at the highest echelons of partnership. The best-paid lawyers in America are overwhelmingly male. And overwhelmingly white.

There has to be more intentionality by leadership at law firms and more accountability, says**Roberta Liebenberg**, a partner at Fine, Kaplan and Black in Philadelphia who has extensively researched in this area. If they looked at these issues in the same way they looked at profits per partner, you d see a lot more progress.

A lot can be at stake when lawyers are involved money, reputation, solvency, freedom. And while there are excellent attorneys throughout the U.S., we ve curated the advocates you d call on to represent you in your toughest fight, negotiate the best deal possible or pursue justice on your behalf. These are the lawyers you want on your side, not across the table an extraordinary array of legal practitioners at the pinnacle of the profession.

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**Methodology**

To create our inaugural list of America s Top 200 Lawyers,**Forbes**assembled an editorial team with broad experience in law practice, coverage of legal news, and knowledge of the legal marketplace. The team then identified a wide pool of eligible candidates through hundreds of interviews with industry insiders, outside nominations, editorial research, and an independent, five-person advisory board of experts. To qualify for consideration, lawyers were required to be active and licensed and thousands of attorneys from a variety of backgrounds, specializations and jurisdictions were ultimately considered.

In-depth research into each candidate yielded evaluations on a variety of criteria, including reputation, industry honors, influence on the legal landscape, advocacy performance, commitment to diversity, and pro bono work. Although a lawyer s lifetime achievements were considered, emphasis was placed on their most recent accomplishments. Candidates were then rated in seven weighted categories.

The result is a collection of elite lawyers who have been involved in the most consequential recent cases, deals or legal trends. Others have been deemed, by peers and clients, superlative in their practice area. Some boast immediate name recognition; others are making their mark less publicly. But they all share reputations for integrity, records of excellence and**Forbes** recognition as the best in the business.

As with all**Forbes**lists, candidates do not pay any fee to be considered. For questions about this list, please contact lawyerlist [at] Forbes.com.

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