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# Introduction: The Women at the United States Court

Bryant G. Garth

*UC Irvine School of Law*, bgarth@law.uci.edu

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## INTRODUCTION: THE WOMEN AT THE UNITED STATES SUPREME COURT

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I am Bryant Garth, the Dean of Southwestern Law School during the *Women at the United States Supreme Court* program hosted at the school on February 24, 2012. One of the privileges of being Dean is that I was able to welcome our community to this splendid event, which kicked off a remarkable day at this law school. We were celebrating our centennial, and we have come a very long way from the period when Southwestern was established. But this school has also stayed true to its roots. It is now my privilege to introduce the published version of this event.

The first classes at Southwestern contained disadvantaged minorities, immigrants, and others who would not have had the possibility of getting a legal education if Southwestern had not been established. And in particular, we celebrate the fact that our very first graduate was a woman. And not only was she a woman, but she made waves in the legal profession. Betty Trier Berry, the first graduate in 1915, went on to be the first woman to serve as a public defender in the United States.<sup>1</sup>

This centennial occasion reminded us of our early mission and our continuing commitment to challenge discrimination and unequal access to the legal profession. We began the day with this extraordinary panel moderated by Mary Alice Williams<sup>2</sup> on Women at the United States Supreme Court. The panel, organized by Southwestern's wonderful Professor Judy Sloan, comprised Sandra Day O'Connor, retired Associate Justice of the U.S. Supreme Court; the Honorable Barbara Underwood, the first female acting Solicitor General of the United States; Patricia Ann Millett, who from the time of the panel until the present moved from a tie

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1. *Betty Trier Berry '15, Southwestern's First Graduate*, SOUTHWESTERN LAW SCHOOL, <http://www.swlaw.edu/about/hist/aboutberry>.

2. Professor Mary Alice Williams has been a member of the Journalism faculty at State University of New York, Purchase College since 2009, and she was also one of the founding prime-time anchors at CNN.

into first place as the woman who has argued the most cases before the Supreme Court,<sup>3</sup> and Professor Sloan.<sup>4</sup>

Southwestern was treated to the insights of a unique and pioneering group who managed to excel while encountering and helping to break through what had been pretty secure glass ceilings. Their insights are inspiring and enlightening. Their presence for the occasion of our centennial honors Southwestern and reminds us of the constant need to renew our commitment to equality in the legal profession, which is central to promoting social equality more generally in the United States.

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3. Joe Palazzolo, *Millett Makes History with 31 Cases Argued in Supreme Court*, WALL ST. J.L. BLOG (Apr. 24, 2012, 5:56 PM), <http://blogs.wsj.com/law/2012/04/24/millett-makes-history-with-31-cases-argued-in-supreme-court/>.

4. The Honorable Sandra Day O'Connor made history when she served as the first female Associate Justice of the United States Supreme Court from 1981-2006; the Honorable Barbara Underwood is currently the Solicitor General of New York, and prior to that she served as the Acting Solicitor General and Principal Deputy Solicitor General of the United States from 1998-2001; Patricia Ann Millett is partner at Akin Gump Strauss Hauer & Feld, LLP, where she heads the firm's Supreme Court and national appellate practices; and Professor Judy Sloan was selected as a Supreme Court Judicial Fellow in 1987 and has served as member of the Southwestern faculty since 1991 where she was named the Rosenberg Professor of Law at Southwestern in recognition of her outstanding teaching and public service.