



A Note from the Office of Dean Leonard M. Baynes

Women's History Month invites us to reflect on a profession reshaped by social change and legal advocacy. The legal field was not built with women in mind, yet women have redefined it through persistence, brilliance, courage, and leadership. Today, women serve as judges and justices, lead law schools and legal departments, shape legislation and precedent, and strengthen the rule of law in all corners of our society. This month, we honor the trailblazers who opened doors and the women who continue to expand what's possible.

The story of women in the law is one of resilience and redefining what leadership looks like. We see that legacy in pioneers like Myra Bradwell, whose pursuit of legal licensure despite being denied by the U.S. Supreme Court in 1873 set the stage for generations who followed. Her spirit was carried forward by Belva Lockwood, who became the first woman admitted to practice before the U.S. Supreme Court.

This journey of "firsts" continued with Constance Baker Motley, the first African American woman to argue before the Court and later the first to serve as a federal judge. Decades later, Sandra Day O'Connor's appointment as the first woman on the U.S. Supreme Court signaled a new chapter for the entire profession.

Today, that trajectory of leadership continues through the impactful service of Justice Sonia Sotomayor, who made history as the first Hispanic and Latina Justice to serve on the nation's highest court, and Justice Ketanji Brown Jackson, the first African American woman to serve on the Court. These milestones remind us that progress is fueled by the intellectual rigor and dedication of those who push forward despite the obstacles.

At the University of Houston Law Center, we see this legacy in action every day through our students, faculty, staff, and our incredible alumni network. In that spirit, I am delighted to highlight one of our distinguished graduates, Alison Chen (J.D. '03), whose career powerfully illustrates the impact of blending legal acumen with a commitment to service.



Alison L. Chen (J.D. '03)

Chen's journey is one of self-discovery and bold progression. Born in Taiwan and raised in Houston, she entered the Law Center as a first-generation law student. Like many, she initially envisioned a traditional path in litigation. However, through the thoughtful reflection that law school often inspires, she realized her strengths were elsewhere. She pivoted to tax law and honed an expertise that would take her from the classrooms of Houston to an LL.M. at NYU, and eventually to the highest levels of private practice.

Currently, Chen is the managing partner of the Houston office of Akin Gump Strauss Hauer & Feld LLP. In a profession where leadership at top-tier firms remains a significant achievement for women, Chen's role is a testament to her skill and strategic vision.

Chen is also an active leader in the Houston community, beyond her law practice. She previously served on the board of the Asian American Bar Association of Houston and currently serves on the board of the Houston Area Women's Center (HAWC) and the Houston Bar Foundation, where she helps guide strategy, support community initiatives, and strengthen the institutions that serve Houston's legal profession and broader community. Her career reminds us that true leadership is not just about personal accomplishments, but about giving back, mentoring the next generation, and keeping the doors of opportunity open for all who follow.

As we celebrate Women's History Month, I hope Chen's story serves as a reminder that there is no single "correct" path to success in the legal profession. Whether you are a student discovering your niche or a graduate navigating a new chapter, your unique background and perspective are your greatest assets.

I invite you to view the accompanying [slideshow](#), which recognizes many more of our outstanding Law Center women graduates. Their achievements illuminate the multi-faceted contributions women make to our profession, our society, and the legacy of the University of Houston Law Center.

Sincerely,

Leonard M. Baynes
Dean, Hugh Roy and Lillie Cranz Cullen Distinguished Chair, and Professor of Law
University of Houston Law Center

[Share Your Thoughts](#) with the Dean
Learn more about [Dean Baynes](#)
Follow on Twitter at [@UHLawDean](#)
[Register for Upcoming Events](#)

The University of Houston Law Center is part of a Carnegie-designated Tier One public research university and an EO institution.

