



NEW YORK CITY LAW DEPARTMENT
OFFICE OF THE CORPORATION COUNSEL

Speeches

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For Immediate Release

HONORING EDITH I. SPIVACK AND 60 YEARS OF LAW DEPARTMENT SERVICE

***SPEECH GIVEN BY MICHAEL A. CARDOZO AT LAWRENCE A. WEIN MEMORIAL LUNCHEON ON
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In 1932, when Executive Assistant Emerita Edith Spivack graduated from this Law School, jobs were scarce for all law graduates, let alone women. After an exhaustive search, a rare alumnus stepped forward who was willing to hire her at his firm.

While her employer had agreed to hire a woman, his "broad-minded thinking" did not extend to married women whose place, he believed, was in the home. So Edith's private practice career ended shortly after it began, when she married.

Nevertheless as many in this room know, Edith Spivack is a determined woman. She volunteered in what was then known as the Workmen's Compensation Division in the New York City Corporation Counsel's office, now the Workers' Compensation Division. Three months later, she was offered a paying job as an assistant in the Corporation Counsel's office of the LaGuardia administration.

Today, ten mayors and 24 corporation counsels later, she's still there. I know, because I'm her boss. The office of the Corporation Counsel has been in existence since the late 17th century; Edith has served under more than 25% of all Corporation Counsels. In a career that has spanned seven decades, Edith has worked in the Real Estate Tax Division, the Condemnation and Commercial Tax Divisions, and later as Executive Assistant Corporation Counsel. Her negotiated tax settlements with such companies as Penn Central Railroad and Consolidated Edison brought billions of dollars into the coffers of the city. Edith has been a shining example to the generations of women who have followed her, of what a determined person can accomplish. Today, thanks to her leadership, more than 50% of the people employed in the New York City Law Department are women. Edith's leadership and counsel continue to this day.

In addition to serving the City of New York, she has been a member of many public service organizations, from the Association of the Bar of the City of New York to the World Peace through Law Center, to the New York County Lawyers' Association Women's Rights Committee. The latter group has established an annual award in her name to honor her efforts on behalf of women in law.

Today, she is receiving the Lawrence A. Wein Prize in Social Responsibility. It will be another award to add to the many she has received, though it is clear her motivation, skill, and integrity is not fueled by the receipt of awards and lofty citations. As she told a reporter several years ago, "I don't feel like a pioneer. I just knew that I wanted to be a lawyer. I understood it would be difficult, but I just wanted to use the law to do some good."

To recognize the "good" to which you put your legal training it is my honor to present you with the Lawrence A. Wein prize in social responsibility.

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