



JANE M. BOLIN

Although she never cared to think in these terms, Jane Bolin would often have her name followed with the descriptive, “first black woman to.” In her mind, she was simply following her life’s path, pursuing goals in a profession she cared for deeply, not unlike any other man or woman, black or white. Still, the facts are undeniable that part of Bolin’s life path involved opening doors that had been, until her arrival, closed to African-American women and so the description, while not necessarily welcome, is accurate. Jane Bolin was the first black woman to graduate from Yale

Jane M. Bolin (1908-2007) was the first black woman to serve as a judge in the United States when she was sworn into the bench of the New York Domestic Relations Court in 1939. She was also the first black woman to graduate from Yale Law School, the first to join the New York City Bar Association and the first to join the New York City Law Department.

Law School, the first black woman to work as Assistant Corporation Counsel for the City of New York, the first black woman to join the Bar Association of the City of New York and most significantly, the first black woman judge in the United States. “Everyone else makes a fuss about it, but I didn’t think about it, and I still don’t,” she told David Margolick of the New York Times in 1993. “I wasn’t concerned about first, second or last. My work was my primary concern.”