

EQUAL JUSTICE SOCIETY

EVA JEFFERSON PATERSON

President Equal Justice Society

Eva Jefferson Paterson has campaigned for civil rights with passion, courage, and tenacity for more than three decades.

Paterson is the President and a founder of the Equal Justice Society, a national organization dedicated to changing the law through progressive legal theory, public policy and practice.

Prior to taking the helm of the Equal Justice Society in 2003, Paterson worked at the Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights for twenty-six years—thirteen of them as Executive Director. Paterson led the organization's work providing free legal services to low-income individuals, litigating class action civil rights cases, and advocating for social justice. At the Lawyers' Committee, she was part of a broad coalition that filed the groundbreaking anti-discrimination suit against race and gender discrimination by the San Francisco Fire Department. That lawsuit successfully desegregated the department, winning new opportunities for women and minority firefighters.

Paterson co-founded and chaired the California Coalition for Civil Rights for 18 years, and was a leading spokesperson in the campaigns against Proposition 187 (anti-immigrant) and Proposition 209 (anti-affirmative action) and numerous other statewide campaigns against the death penalty, juvenile incarceration, and discrimination against lesbians and gay men. Following her graduation from U.C. Berkeley's Boalt Hall School of Law, she worked for the Legal Aid Society of Alameda County and co-founded A Safe Place, a shelter for battered women in Oakland, California.

She served as Vice President of the ACLU National Board for eight years, and chaired the boards of Equal Rights Advocates and the San Francisco Bar Association. Paterson has received more than 50 awards, including the Fay Stender Award from the California Women Lawyers, Woman of the Year from the Black Leadership Forum, the Earl Warren Civil Liberties Award from the ACLU of Northern California, and the Alumni Award of Merit from Northwestern University where she received her B.A. in political science.

A self-described beneficiary of affirmative action, Paterson is passionate in support of equal educational opportunities. She co-authored several landmark lawsuits in support of affirmative action: the federal lawsuit challenging California's Proposition 209, the successful litigation against U.C. Berkeley's admissions policy limiting access to students of color and an amicus brief in *Grutter v. Bollinger*, in which the U.S. Supreme Court upheld the race-conscious admissions policy at the University of Michigan Law School.

"Affirmative action gave me an opportunity, but I cracked the books, did the work, and passed the tests," Paterson says and she did her affirmative action program justice: she has been described by writer Paul Rockwell as "one of California's most brilliant lawyers," and was named as one of the top 25 lawyers of 2002 by the San Francisco Chronicle. "By all accounts, Paterson is the civil-rights leader of the Bay Area," wrote the Chronicle.

Paterson and the Equal Justice Society played a pivotal role in the broad coalition that decisively defeated Ward Connerly's Proposition 54—the dangerous, divisive measure would have banned the collection of racial and ethnic data by any state agency, thus making it virtually impossible to track and document race discrimination or to bring civil rights suits to court. She was a leading spokesperson for the "No on 54" Campaign.

Paterson has delivered commencement addresses on college campuses across the nation, and she has served as an adjunct professor at the University of San Francisco School of Law and at Hastings School of Law.

The author of numerous articles, including "Can't We Get Along?" and "The Future of Affirmative Action" (*California Lawyer*), "Pro Bono Help for Legal Services Programs" (*Clearinghouse Review*), and "How the Legal System Responds to Battered Women" (*Battered Women*), Paterson is often sought out by the media for commentary on racial justice issues.

As a 20-year-old student leader at a time of turmoil, Eva Jefferson Paterson was catapulted into the national spotlight when she debated then Vice President Spiro Agnew on live television. Dubbed the “peaceful warrior” for fostering non-violent protest in the aftermath of the 1970 shooting of student demonstrators at Kent State University, she was named one of Mademoiselle’s “Ten Young Women of the Year,” featured on the covers of Ebony and Jet, and called to testify before Congress.

Paterson grew up in a military family in France, England, and southern Illinois. In high school, she traveled the state giving Martin Luther King’s “I Have a Dream” speech.” As a junior at Northwestern University, she became the first African American president of student government.