

## 9 Famous Figures Whom You Might Not Have Known Were Attorneys

It may come as a surprise to learn that each of the following well-known individuals also practiced law

by Patrick Soon and Rebecca Bellow

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Many famous politicians got their start in the legal profession prior to being elected to office: Thomas Jefferson, Abraham Lincoln, Bill Clinton and President Barack Obama. And while it is hardly shocking to learn that someone in government was formerly an attorney, it may come as a surprise to learn that each of the following well-known individuals also practiced law.

### **Gerard Butler (1969 - )**

Long before taking on iconic roles at King Leonidas of Sparta in 300 and the Phantom in *The Phantom of the Opera*, Gerard Butler was a law student at the [University of Glasgow](#) and a two-year trainee lawyer at an Edinburgh, Scotland law firm. However, he had a difficult time deciding about becoming a lawyer. Even during training to be a solicitor, he decided to take a year off to visit Venice Beach, California. When he returned to finish his last year of law school, he graduated with high honors and as the President of the Law Society. He then entered a prestigious Edinburgh firm as a trainee lawyer. However, his interest in law continued to wane until the last week before his lawyer qualification, when he attended a film festival in London. It was there that he recognized he wanted to become an actor. Not long after, Butler was fired from his position at the firm. He took it as a sign to change his career and moved to London to begin his acting career.

### **Andrea Boccelli (1958 - )**

Andrea Boccelli is celebrated as one of the greatest operatic singers of our time, but before Andrea Boccelli became famous for his angelic voice, he was a lawyer. Boccelli earned his law degree from the [University of Pisa](#) despite being blind since the age of 12, and then served as a court-appointed attorney for one year. However, it soon became clear that music, not litigation, was Boccelli's true love. He first began making money by singing in piano bars, but by the mid-1990s he was widely recognized as one of the best tenors in the world.

### **Jerry Springer (1944 - )**

Perhaps this famous former lawyer should have conducted more mediations to help him prepare for the lively "disputes" he would encounter as host of *The Jerry Springer Show*. Jerry Springer earned his J.D. from [Northwestern University](#) in 1968. Rather than diving straight into legal practice post-law school, Springer entered the world of politics as a campaign adviser to Robert F. Kennedy. Springer's time with Kennedy was brief; as Kennedy was tragically assassinated just months after Springer joined the campaign. Springer joined the Cincinnati law firm of Frost & Jacobs (now Frost Brown Todd) where he practiced for a few years before embarking on his political career and running for Congress in Ohio in 1970.

### **Gandhi (1869 - 1948)**

Prior to donning his traditional Indian dhoti and shawl and engaging in non-violent demonstrations that eventually led to Indian independence, [Mohandas Gandhi](#) donned a tie and worked as an attorney. Gandhi completed his study of law in London in 1891, and then practiced briefly in Bombay, and also in South Africa. However, after his one-year contract as a legal representative for Indian Traders in South Africa expired, Gandhi turned his full attention to the peaceful struggle for Indian civil rights, first in South Africa and then in his native India.

### **Nelson Mandela (1918 - 2013)**

Though Nelson Mandela is best known as an anti-apartheid revolutionary who served as President of South Africa from 1994 to 1999, he was also a licensed attorney. Mandela worked for two different law firms as a lawyer before opening his own practice with fellow African National Congress leader Oliver Tambo in 1953, [Mandela and Tambo](#). This was South Africa's first all-black law firm. It was also during this time that Mandela spent a great deal of time traveling around the country, building support for protests against discriminatory laws. These activities led to several arrests and long-term incarcerations for Mandela.

### **John Grisham (1955 - )**

It is little wonder that his name has become synonymous with the modern legal thriller, as John Grisham himself spent 60-70 hours per week working in a small Mississippi law practice. After graduating from [Ole Miss](#) (the University of Mississippi) in 1981, Grisham spent a decade as a criminal defense and personal injury attorney in Southaven. Grisham would get up at 5:00 a.m. each morning to work on his first novel, "A Time to Kill," before heading to the office. This work was initially rejected by many publishers, but eventually became a bestseller. He has since written over 20 more titles and sold over 275 million copies of his books, nine of which have been made into movies.

### **Fidel Castro (1926 - )**

Fidel Castro attended law school at the [University of Havana](#) where he became immersed in the culture of student activism there surrounding issues of Cuban nationalism, anti-imperialism, and socialism. For a time, Castro co-founded a law firm partnership with two law school colleagues, Jorge Azpiazu and Rafael Resende, called "Azpiazu, Castro, & Resende". It catered primarily to poor Cubans but proved to be a financial failure, earning a grand total of forty eight hundred pesos in its three years of operation. At the time, Castro was forced to cut-off the electricity and even sell-off furniture, much to the distress of his wife. Castro's decision to aid the poorest in Havana assisted him with his political aspirations, however, when he began an armed struggle against then Cuban President Fulgencio Batista in 1952. Though it failed and he was nearly killed, imprisoned Castro lived to lead a second, successful rebellion.

### **Howard Cosell (1918 - 1995)**

While younger readers may not be familiar with the name, many of our more seasoned colleagues remember Howard Cosell as the voice and personality of ABC sports. His friendly verbal sparring with [Muhammad Ali](#) is almost as famous as some of the matches that Ali fought in the ring. However, before he brought his brash "pull-no-punches" personality to the television and radio airwaves, Cosell worked as a lawyer in New York. Cosell was admitted to the state bar in 1941 and then began practicing in lower Manhattan after the end of World War II, primarily in union law.

## **Geraldo Rivera (1943 - )**

Before his career in journalism began, Geraldo Rivera was one of the top five students in his [Brooklyn Law School](#) class in 1969. While working as a lawyer for the Puerto Rican activist group known as the “Young Lords,” *Eyewitness News* executive Al Primo noticed Rivera and offered him a job as a reporter. Primo who convinced Rivera to stop using “Gerald” and instead use “Geraldo,” a more identifiably Latino pronunciation of his name, to reflect his Puerto Rican heritage on his father’s side of the family.

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