

Lynch, Loretta ^[1]

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21 May 1959 -

By Sarajane Davis, Government & Heritage Library 2020



Portrait of. Loretta Lynch, taken while she was U.S. Attorney for the Eastern District of New York and prospective U.S. Attorney General. Image from the U.S. Department of Justice. ^[2]

On April 27, 2015, Loretta Lynch was sworn in as Attorney General of the United States. President Barack Obama nominated Lynch to succeed Eric Holder. Lynch became the first African American woman to hold the position. She served as Attorney General of the United States from 2015 to January 2017. Lynch's decorated legal career has centered on social justice and public service.

Lynch's parents are Reverend Lorenzo Lynch and Lorine Lynch. Her father was a minister, and her mother was a school librarian. They instilled a commitment to justice and service into their daughter. Loretta Lynch was born in Greensboro, North Carolina. The family relocated to Durham when she was six years old. Her parents experienced the injustices of racial segregation. Surviving the Jim Crow South shaped how they raised their three children. They made sure Loretta and her two brothers had access to more opportunities. They encouraged Loretta to pursue her dreams. Loretta gained her work ethic and learned civic responsibility from her parents.

Lynch dealt with the enduring legacy of racism while growing up in Durham. She scored exceptionally well on a standardized test for elementary students. Her score shocked the teachers and they asked her to retake the exam. Loretta's love for learning and reading continued throughout her early education. She was a member of the literary club and the top student of the graduating class at Durham High School in 1977. Her academic record was exceptional. Yet, administrators asked her to share the valedictorian title with a white peer.

The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill recognized her potential. The school offered a four-year scholarship to attend North Carolina's flagship university. But Lynch turned down the offer. She decided to follow her dream of attending Harvard University instead. As an undergraduate student, she studied English and American Literature. After earning her B.A., graduating once again with honors, Lynch enrolled at Harvard Law School.

Her professional legal career began in New York City. She was a litigation associate at the Cahill Gordon and Reindel law firm. Lynch stayed with the firm for six years. She then joined the U.S. attorney office for the Eastern District of New York. Colleagues recall her diligent work for the Office.

She first gained national attention in 1999. That year she was a part of the successful prosecution of a major police brutality case. The two officers involved plead guilty for brutally assaulting Haitian immigrant Abner Louima. Soon after, President Bill Clinton made Lynch the head of the U.S. Attorney's Office for the Eastern District office of New York. She first served in the position until 2001. In 2008, President Obama asked her to lead the Eastern District again. Her second tenure in this position included more high-profile cases. She earned a reputation for fairness and careful listening. These traits characterized both periods she worked in the U.S. attorney's office.

The same held true once she took the mantle as Attorney General. Under her leadership, the justice department led many

cases that garnered global attention. One case involved corruption in professional sports. Lynch's team also launched investigations on police brutality across the United States. In 2016 the justice department took steps to protect transgender people's civil rights. The department sued the state of North Carolina to invalidate the House Bill 2. Again, fairness and justice functioned as her guideposts.

Two years after leaving the justice department Lynch once again made headline news. In 2019 she became a litigation partner at the Paul Weiss Rifkind Wharton & Garrison law firm in New York.

Lynch married Stephen Hargrove in 2007. Hargrove works in television broadcasting.

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