

# Rethinking the Modern Law Firm

An Interview with Faith Gay, Founding Partner, and Jennifer Selendy, Managing Partner, Selendy & Gay

**EDITORS' NOTE** Faith Gay is a founding partner of Selendy & Gay. Previously, she was the Co-Chair of the National Trial Practice at Quinn Emanuel Urquhart & Sullivan and a highly-respected federal prosecutor. Named a "Top 250 Female Litigator" by Benchmark Litigation, a "Leading Lawyer in America" by Lawdragon 500, a New York Metro "Super Lawyer," and a "Top Female Trial Lawyer" by Law360, Gay has repeatedly been recognized as one of the leading trial, appellate, and white-collar lawyers in the U.S. She is a former Deputy Chief of the Special Prosecutions Unit and the Civil Rights Division in the United States Attorney's Office for the Eastern District of New York and an Assistant U.S. Attorney in the Criminal Division. Gay received a B.A. in public policy studies with Honors from Duke University, a J.D. from Northwestern University School of Law, and an M.Div. from Yale Divinity School.

Prior to co-founding Selendy & Gay, Jennifer Selendy was a partner at Quinn Emanuel Urquhart & Sullivan and Kirkland & Ellis where she honed her skills as a trial lawyer on bet-the-company litigation for both plaintiffs and defendants. She was recognized as a New York Metro "Super Lawyer" in 2019 and she is the principle architect of several "next generation" innovations central to the founding of Selendy & Gay. She has an active public interest practice focusing on poverty and women's rights, climate change, and education, for which she has received a number of awards, including the Pro Bono Service Award from the Homeless Persons Representation Project of Baltimore. Since 2012, Selendy has served as the Board Chairman for the National Center for Law & Economic Justice. She is also the co-founder and founding Board Chairman of the award-winning Speyer Legacy School, an independent school for gifted children that focuses on identifying and educating low-income, high-achieving children in New York City. Selendy received her B.A., magna cum laude, in international relations from Tufts University and a law degree, cum laude, from Harvard Law School after completing an MPhil in International Relations at Oxford University as a Marshall Scholar.

**FIRM BRIEF** Selendy & Gay's ([selendygay.com](http://selendygay.com)) practice is dedicated to excellence in litigation and investigations. It has gathered legal talent of the highest caliber and, by re-thinking the law firm structure, management, operations, and culture, has crafted an environment for its lawyers to serve their clients' needs with an unwavering focus on quality and efficiency. This allows the firm to bring a strongly-led, tightly-coordinated combination of talent and resources to each of its client's priorities.



Faith Gay



Jennifer Selendy

## What was the vision for creating Selendy & Gay and how do you define the Selendy & Gay difference?

*Selendy:* There comes a point in your career when you feel like there's really no reason to do this if you're not going to do it right, and do it the way you want, and in a way that reflects your values. We all believe strongly that if we're going to practice we're going to do it at the highest degree of excellence, with the best people we can, and work on the most interesting cases. We came to feel that law firms were compromising in a number of ways around the idea of quality and excellence because they were trying to be global, and they were choosing scale over quality to be all things to all people. This was particularly impacting litigation where we really wanted to handle the best cases and the most interesting cases.

*Gay:* I would say that something was going on in the world in terms of litigation and in terms of the role of litigation in society. They're two different ideas. In litigation, big firms had made litigators their service appendages, and so people who were getting into these careers were doing a lot of processing of paper, were in far-flung locations and weren't getting together and creatively resolving the very biggest issues for their clients. That's a huge part of what litigators do, and the ability and skill and craft and genius of doing that has been largely lost in big firms.

On the other hand, lawyers who are up on their feet arguing big cutting-edge cases and taking risks tended to be in very small firms that didn't have the capital and the resources to actually be able to go as deep as they would like to go. So there was a big hole in the market for experienced litigators with the depth and quality, top to bottom, to be able to take on

serious disputes and pay real attention to them, without being just seen as second rate profit centers in big firms. We saw that need, and we think we're filling that very well.

## How broad is Selendy & Gay's focus?

*Gay:* Our practice is very broad in one respect. While we only do litigation, trial and appellate work, and investigations, within that we have a very broad, sweeping practice. We do a lot of financial litigation, a fair amount of white-collar litigation, and a fair amount of bankruptcy litigation. We also do intellectual property, antitrust and energy litigation, and are increasingly involved in consumer advocacy litigation and civil rights litigation. We don't handle run-of-the-mill disputes. We handle bet-the-company disputes and cutting-edge constitutional questions.

## You mentioned the firm's commitment to diversity and inclusion. How critical is building a diverse workforce to the success of the firm?

*Selendy:* Faith and I have been doing law school recruiting for decades and have been attracting diverse lawyers at the recruiting stage which is one thing that I think people would say law firms are able to do well. However, where law firms have failed pretty profoundly is being able to retain and promote diverse talent. The majority of our firm's equity is held by women. We also have about 23 percent of our lawyers that identify as lawyers of color, and over 20 percent as LGBTQ, and the firm is only 18 months old, so the proof will be in the pudding. We believe that the investment we make in individual lawyers is going to help us retain the lawyers that we want.

## Will you discuss Selendy & Gay's commitment to pro bono work?

*Gay:* It's central to the firm, and we believe that you can do good and do well at the same time. We are a serious commercial firm on both the plaintiff and defense side and that increases our ability to do public interest work, not only because we have the resources to do it, but because we're taken seriously as litigators who are deeply commercial. The judges know us, our adversaries know us, all of us together have been in the business for hundreds of years, and I think that helps us to be taken more seriously when we go into court in either a pure pro bono case or a public interest case. ●