

John P. Ward



John Ward graduated from Boston University School of Law in 1976. According to a profile of John in the December 2019 issue of *Bostonia*, Boston University's Alumni Magazine, "Ward became Boston's first openly gay male attorney in 1977." Some 18 years later, John was the first openly gay lawyer to argue a case before the United States Supreme Court.

For more than 40 years, John has been a crusader for LGBT rights, often taking the fight to the courts to end discrimination based on sexual orientation, HIV status, and gender identity. In 1978, he was a founder of GLAD (Gay and Lesbian Advocates and Defenders, now known as LGBTQ Advocates and Defenders).

John spoke to *Bostonia* about his days in law school. "I dipped my toe in the water there at first. At one point I put a note on the blackboard: 'Anybody interested in starting a gay caucus?' But nobody showed up." John's interview with *Bostonia* reveals more about his life as a gay lawyer.

"I came out as a gay lawyer by putting an ad in Gay Community News saying, 'John Ward, Attorney, Serving the Community.' That's all it took. Most, but not all, of my clients were gay.

"I have something in my gut that identifies with the underdog and is offended by unfairness and injustice. I didn't know that I really wanted to be a lawyer until maybe October of my first year at BU, when it quietly dawned on me that I was in the right place. I did not think it was possible for me to be an openly gay lawyer until I met one, Tom Coleman, in Los Angeles, and he gave me the courage to give it a shot. Once I started representing LGBTQ+ folk, I knew I was in the right place."

In addition to handling a wide range of cases involving LGBT rights, for many years John practiced criminal appellate law, representing defendants on appeal in major felony cases. His practice included death penalty appeals.

The History Project, Boston's LGBTQ archives, gave its *History Maker Award* to John in 2021. GLAD gave him its *Spirit of Justice Award* in 2008.

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