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Top WOMEN LAWYERS 2020

Laura R. Washington

Washington represents clients in the media and entertainment sectors. She has extensive litigation and intellectual property experience that includes both trial and appellate work. She is active in cases connected to the #MeToo movement, representing media clients in litigation and to conduct internal investigations, assist with government inquiries and manage crisis responses

She represents Miramax LLC and a former board member of The Weinstein Co., Tim Sarnoff, the current deputy CEO of Technicolor SA., in the U.S.-based Harvey Weinstein-related litigations. Although Harvey Weinstein was a co-founder of Miramax in the 1970s, he left the company in 2005. Earlier this year he was found guilty of rape and a criminal sexual act after a career as a film producer in which he exploited his influential position to pressure women for sex.

Over the last 18 months Washington has defeated every Weinstein-related case filed against her clients, cutting through the media frenzy around the cases and focusing on issues such as the ongoing viability of non-disclosure agreements and the creation of new exceptions to statutes of limitations.

“Miramax had nothing to do with Harvey Weinstein for 15 years, and I make sure that people not involved with Harvey don’t get dragged into the mess he made,”

Washington said.

Despite the explosive revelations of sexual misconduct in the entertainment industry, Washington said the #MeToo episode has had a positive side. “The long-term beneficial effect has been that these allegations have at last been addressed and dealt with. Things that were long pushed aside have now been taken seriously.”

Other litigation has been disrupted or otherwise influenced by the coronavirus pandemic court closures, Washington said. She represents SteelHouse Inc., an internet advertising technology company specializing in re-targeting, in litigation with a shoemaker over contract claims after Deckers hired SteelHouse to modernize its online presence. *Deckers Outdoor Corp. v. SteelHouse Inc.*, 17CV05684 (S. Barbara Co. Super. Ct., filed Dec. 18, 2017).

Washington and her Latham team filed cross-complaints and succeeded in transferring the case to Los Angeles County Superior Court, where a trial set for early May 2020 was postponed, leading the parties to resolve the matter out of court.

That was symptomatic of the way the court closures have affected some cases, Washington said. “The depositions we took prior to March—the other side didn’t get the information they thought they’d use to score points with. That and the lack of a trial date helped drive a settlement.”

“A trend I’m seeing is that while some litigants are digging in and making a trial



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Trials, litigation

a priority, more cases are settling as people evaluate the lack of available court dates and the growing backlog of cases. They ask, ‘Is this worth the time and money?’ Mediation and settlement begins to look like the better option.”

— John Roemer