



**Name in English:** Bill Lann Lee  
**Name in Chinese:** 李亮畴 [李亮畴]  
**Name in Pinyin:** Lǐ Liàngchóu  
**Gender:** Male  
**Birth Year:** 1949  
**Birth Place:** New York City, New York  
**Current location:** Oakland, California

## Civil Rights Leader

**Profession(s):** Civil Rights Activist & Leader, Attorney

**Education:** B.A., History *magna cum laude*, 1971, Yale University; J.D., 1974, Columbia Law School

**Awards:** 1998, Thurgood Marshall Medal of Justice; 1999, Trailblazer Award; National Asian Pacific American Bar Association; 1999, Honorary Doctorate, Wesleyan University; 2000, Honorary Doctorate, North Carolina Central University; 2001, John Randolph Distinguished Service Award, U. S. Department of Justice; 2001, Honorary Doctorate, City University of New York Law School; 2007, Outstanding Citizen Achievement Award, Organization of Chinese Americans

**Contribution (s):** In 1997, Bill Lann Lee was appointed by President Clinton to serve as Assistant Attorney General for Civil Rights, becoming the first Chinese and Asian American to hold such a high ranking position in the US Department of Justice. During his term, he strengthened hate crime laws and laws against police brutality, improved access and opportunities for Americans with disabilities, fought against housing discrimination, and toughened laws against human trafficking and involuntary servitude.

Lee had worked as a civil rights attorney for 17 years at the Legal Defense and Education Fund at the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), where he was the first Asian American attorney. He also worked in other civil rights and public interest organizations, such as the Asian American Legal Defense and Education Fund, and the Center for Law in the Public Interest. As a civil rights attorney, Lee took on cases that helped desegregate public schools in the South. In total, Lee spent over 20 years fighting against discrimination, seeking equal opportunities for all people, advocating for affirmative action, and defending the rights of the disadvantaged. Over those two decades, he was involved in approximately 200 cases in which he settled all but six of them, a testament to Lee's superior negotiation skills. He was very well qualified to defend the civil rights of Americans before he was appointed Assistant Attorney General.

Lee's father had emigrated from China and served in WWII, but was denied housing and employment because he was Chinese. Nevertheless, both of Bill Lann Lee's immigrant parents instilled in their son the importance of patriotism, family, hard work, and determination – values that propelled Lee to the highest law enforcement post of the

Clinton administration. Lee's father in particular had a vision of America which he conveyed to his son – a land of equal opportunity for all – so compelling that he could set aside the fleeting ugliness of racism and bigotry. Although Lee has achieved much throughout his career, Lee considers his biggest achievement as having kept faith with his father's vision of the promise of America.

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