

NOTABLE BLACK LEADERS

As one enters the Big Apple through the Midtown Tunnel, the words “E Pluribus Unum” — “Out of many, one” — greet every visitor. This storied phrase well encapsulates the spirit of a city where diversity and unity increasingly coexist.

But challenges persist, especially in business. A 2023 Pew Research Center study found that nearly 3 in 10 Black workers believe their employers pay too little attention to diversity, equity and inclusion. And roughly half of Black workers feel that their race makes it harder for them to succeed professionally.

The 100 honorees on our list of 2024 Notable Black Leaders undoubtedly know both sides of this coin. In honoring them, Crain's celebrates Black New Yorkers' success and advancement, spanning industries from law and finance to nonprofits and the arts. Read on to learn more about these pacesetters and their remarkable achievements.



Maria Cruz Melendez

Partner, Skadden, Arps, Slate, Meagher & Flom LLP

Scope of work: Maria Cruz Melendez is a partner in white collar defense and investigations at the law firm Skadden, Arps, Slate, Meagher & Flom. She represents individuals and corporations in domestic and cross-border investigations and civil and administrative proceedings conducted by government and regulatory entities in connection with the Foreign Corrupt Practices Act, U.S. securities laws and other domestic and international enforcement matters.

Biggest career win: Cruz Melendez has worked on a pro bono Section 1983 civil rights litigation on behalf of a death-row inmate, who has consistently maintained his innocence.

Other contributions: She has devoted time to diversity, equity and inclusion and the mentorship of lawyers and students from diverse backgrounds.

Skadden