



## Legal Diversity on the March

The legal profession seems to be making progress in its crawl toward ethnic diversity. Survey results from 198 firms published in *The National Law Journal* in December 1998 indicates that 5,532 lawyers at the top firms count themselves as members of minority groups, up from 3,745 in 1996. The 48 percent increase in raw numbers means that minority group member attorneys have increased their share of the big-firm pie from 6.8 percent to 8.5 percent. "It's not surprising the raw numbers are up because the law firms have been hiring," Reginald Jackson, chair of the American Bar Association Conference of Minority Partners in Majority Law Firms, told the NLJ, adding: "but there continues to be a problem with minorities advancing to partnership -- particularly equity partnership. When you look at minorities as a group, we are far from critical mass."

Of all the minority groups represented, Asian-Americans have made the most rapid advances. 2000 Asian-American attorneys now work at the nation's largest firms, a 72 percent increase from 1996. In particular, the number of Asian-American associates has grown. The NLJ reports that several of its respondents have hired "dozens" of Asian-American associates. Since 1996, Simpson, Thacher has hired 32, O'Melveny & Myers 37, Brown & Wood 29, and Morrison & Foerster 45. Wilson Chu, an attorney at Dallas' Haynes & Boone, noted to the NLJ: "We have 10 percent of the class in major Ivy League law schools. Sooner or later you're going to see that trickle up."

For their part, African-Americans have made significant advances. African-American associates outpaced the general associate market, their overall numbers increasing by 27.5 percent from 1996. However, the number of African-Americans making partner stayed almost flat, and the NLJ reports that most African-Americans making partner became non-equity partners. Peter Harvey, a partner at Riker, Danzig, Scherer, Hyland & Perretti highlighted the inequity of non-equity. "It's appearances," he notes, "They say, 'listen, we won't give you a cut of profits. We'll give you a high salary and let you call yourself partner.' But really all it is, is you're a contract employee for the owners. You don't make decisions."

Several observers also noted to the NLJ that the any gains in the number of attorneys that are members of minority groups may be threatened by legal and political attacks on affirmative action. Dan Perez, Director of the Hispanic National Bar Association and partner at Dallas' Gardere & Wynne, observed that "what you have in Texas is an exponential growth in Hispanics coupled with a decline in law school admissions."

###

This article was written by Vault.com HR and recruiting editors. To sign up for Vault's FREE recruiting newsletter, or to post unlimited jobs on Vault, go to [www.vault.com](http://www.vault.com).