

Focus on Diversity

For more information on items in this special section, contact Louisiana State Bar Association Director of Member Outreach and Diversity Kelly McNeil Legier, (504)619-0129, (800)421-5722, ext. 129, or email kelly.legier@lsba.org.

Updates

Minority Legal Internship Fair converted to “virtual only” event

The Louisiana State Bar Association’s (LSBA) Minority Involvement Section has converted its fourth annual Minority Legal Internship Fair to a “virtual” event. Employers who register by March 28 (at no charge) will receive a link to the books containing the students’ résumés by March 31. The talented students with diverse backgrounds are seeking free or modestly-paid internships during all or part of the summer. As a virtual event, there will be no “in person” activities, interviews, information tables or networking lunch.

Employers seeking to register should contact Sonjanita Jordan at (504)619-0115. Additional accommodations can be made for employers wanting an interview list or assistance connecting with students who live in particular areas or who have particular experiences. For more information or a customized approach to connecting with the students, contact LSBA Member Outreach and Diversity Director Kelly McNeil Legier at (504)619-0129 or email kelly.legier@lsba.org.

SAVE THE DATES!

- ▶ **May 8**
Train the LSBA Diversity Facilitator Workshop
Louisiana Bar Center
New Orleans
- ▶ **Oct. 11**
Disabilities Summit
Baton Rouge
- ▶ **Nov. 16**
Superwomen CLE
Baton Rouge



The 2012 Diversity Conclave was well attended. For more information, visit www.lsba.org/diversity or make sure to read the upcoming *Louisiana Bar Journal* for a wrap-up on the event. Photo by Danielle Boveland.

Midyear Meeting networking reception sponsored by LSBA Diversity Committee

The Louisiana State Bar Association’s Diversity Committee co-hosted, in partnership with specialty bars, a Jan. 19 networking reception in conjunction with the LSBA’s Midyear Meeting in New Orleans.

The specialty bar associations co-hosting the reception included the Association for Women Attorneys, New Orleans Chapter; the Greater Baton Rouge Louis A. Martinet Legal Society, Inc.; the Greater New Orleans Louis A. Martinet Legal Society, Inc.; the Hispanic Lawyers Association of Louisiana; the Louis A. Martinet Legal Society, Inc. Alexandria Chapter; the Louisiana Asian Pacific American Bar Association; the Louisiana Association of Black Women Attorneys; and the Vietnamese American Bar Association of Louisiana.

Reception sponsors included: Champion Sponsor, Hammerman & Gainer, Inc.; Partner Sponsors, ADR inc. and LSBA Civil Law and Litigation Section; and Friend, Alliance Overnight Document Service, L.L.C.

Application deadline is April 13 for “Suit Up for the Future”

The Louisiana State Bar Association (LSBA) and the Just the Beginning Foundation will present its second “Suit Up for the Future” High School Summer Legal Institute and Internship Program. This program is open to incoming high school juniors and seniors interested in the legal profession. Students will participate in the three-week program (June 11-29) at the Louisiana Bar Center and at participating New Orleans area law firms and courts.

The application and all supporting documents must be postmarked by April 13 and mailed to: Louisiana State Bar Association, Attn: Diversity Committee, 601 St. Charles Ave., New Orleans, LA 70130. The application is available online at: www.lsba.org/lsbadocuments/538.pdf.

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ASK & TELL

Why do we need diversity efforts now that we have had an African-American LSBA President, Supreme Court Justice and United States President?

On Jan. 20, 2009, Barack Obama became the first African-American to serve as President of the United States. No one can dispute the significance of his election as a benchmark for racial progress in America.

However, the fact remains that, of 44 presidents in our country's history, one has been African-American. Of 112 Supreme Court Justices, two have been African-American and one Hispanic. The numbers speak for themselves to demonstrate that we are just beginning to correct the historic and pervasive disparity of opportunity for minorities in the United States.

The majority of African-Americans and Hispanics continue to experience significant economic disadvantage compared to whites. According to a 2009 U.S. Census Bureau report, the median household income for white families in the United States is \$51,861; for African-Americans, \$32,584; and for Hispanics, \$38,039.¹ While 21.4 percent of white households are making \$100,000 or more, only 9.3 percent of African-American and 11.7 percent of Hispanic households are earning the same.² These numbers illustrate the ongoing disparity in opportunity and treatment for minorities in our country.

This disparity is also reflected in law school admissions numbers. According to the 2010 U.S. Census Report, 12.6 percent of the United States population is African-American.³ Yet, a study conducted by Columbia Law School Professor Conrad Johnson found that of students starting at an American law school in the fall of 2008,

only 7.3 percent were African-American and 1.4 percent were Mexican American.⁴ Even more disturbing, these numbers have decreased from 1993, when 7.9 percent of first-year law students were African-American and 1.6 percent were Mexican-American. Though the study found grades and LSAT scores improved for both groups, acceptance rates decreased.⁵

According to the latest edition of the National Association of Law Placement's Directory of Legal Employers, the percentage of minority lawyers at major U.S. law firms rose slightly, from 12.4 percent to 12.7 percent in 2011. The percentage of minority partners also rose slightly, from 6.2 percent to 6.7 percent. Minority men comprised 4.5 percent of law firm partners and nearly 20 percent of associates in 2011, and minority women could only be found as 2 percent of partners and just under 11 percent of associates.⁶

The answer to this question is simple: Minorities are still significantly under-represented in American law schools and the legal profession — despite recent historical events indicating positive growth towards racial unity and a diversity-oriented society. Therefore, one might rightfully assert that more progress and effort is needed before the totality of the masses is realistically represented throughout every level of our society. As the 2010 U.S. Census Report shows, minorities in our country will become the majority very soon. The national level findings reported that more than 9 million Americans checked two race categories on their 2010 census, up from 32 percent in 2000.⁷ Over the next decade, these numbers are expected to substantially increase and diversity efforts must be fostered so that our society can maximize its potential in every aspect — economically, politically and socially.

Without diversity efforts and proportionate representation, some perspectives and needs of individuals in our society will never be heard and/or addressed. Not to mention, no one wants to feel excluded. So, instead of asking the question "why?," perhaps the question is "why not?" If the goal of diversity objectives is to make everyone feel included and represented, then "why not" continue the movement until everyone is most adequately represented by our leadership?

While this question triggered a response

regarding racial diversity, needs regarding diversity and inclusion remain concerning the other dimensions of diversity, such as generational gaps, gender, culture, physical and mental disabilities, to name a few.

Tabatha L. George, an associate in the New Orleans office of Fisher & Phillips, L.L.P., provided the response to this question.

FOOTNOTES

1. "Money Income of Households – Percentage Distribution by Income Level, Race, and Hispanic Origin, in Constant (2009) Dollars: 2000-2009;" www.census.gov/prod/cen2010/briefs/c2010br-02.pdf.
2. "Money Income of Households – Percentage Distribution by Income Level, Race, and Hispanic Origin, in Constant (2009) Dollars: 2000-2009;" www.census.gov/prod/cen2010/briefs/c2010br-02.pdf.
3. The 2010 Census Brief: Overview of Race and Hispanic Origin; www.census.gov/prod/cen2010/briefs/c2010br-02.pdf.
4. Conrad Johnson, "A Disturbing Trend in Law School Diversity," <http://blogs.law.columbia.edu/salt/>.
5. Conrad Johnson, "A Disturbing Trend in Law School Diversity," <http://blogs.law.columbia.edu/salt/>.
6. Dorothy Hae Eun Min, "In the Minority," <http://thedailyrecord.com/generationjd/2011/11/17/in-the-minority/>.
7. CBS News. "Minorities make up the majority of U.S. Babies," aired on 6-23-11, www.cbsnews.com/stories/2011/06/23/national/main20073650.shtml.

The Ask & Tell column is designed as a discussion-starting vehicle. Bar members are encouraged to pose for discussion tough, even politically incorrect, issues about race/culture, religion, gender, sexual orientation, disability and age. In turn, members can expect smart, direct and disarmingly frank answers. Submit questions or scenarios to Kelly McNeil Legier, (504)619-0129, e-mail kelly.legier@lsba.org. If selected for publication, topics or scenarios will be presented without names or identifying information.

in the SPOTLIGHT

Taylor, Porter, Brooks & Phillips, L.L.P.

It is often said that, within any organization, leadership starts at the very top. In essence, before there can be buy-in throughout the organization, there must be buy-in at the highest level. This sentiment has proven to be particularly true in the context of law firm diversity. Although firms generally recognize the importance of diversity, efforts to make law firms more inclusive and reflective of society in general have slowly evolved. While many firms have tried to weave their diversity and inclusion efforts throughout the fabric of their organizations, rarely have such efforts resulted in diverse attorneys ascending to positions of leadership within firm management.

One firm that has managed to buck the trend of majority-only leadership is Taylor, Porter, Brooks & Phillips, L.L.P. Taylor Porter's commitment to diversity begins at the top. Celebrating its 100th year of professional client service in 2012, Taylor Porter has assembled what is arguably one of the most diverse management teams of any law firm operating in Louisiana. Charged with the responsibility of developing and implementing firm policy, Taylor Porter's nine-member Executive Committee includes among its ranks five white males, two African-Americans, one Asian-American and one female. The members of Taylor Porter's Executive Committee range in age from 40 to 64 years old and are elected from all levels of the partnership.

Over its 100-year history, Taylor Porter has been privileged to witness the growth of many of its clients firsthand. At times, client growth has included expansion outside of Louisiana and into other parts of the country. Taylor Porter believes that its commitment to diversity



Members of the Executive Committee of Taylor, Porter, Brooks & Phillips, L.L.P., from left, Todd S. Manuel, Erick Y. Miyagi, Robert W. Barton, Harry J. Philips, Jr., Vicki M. Crochet, Preston J. Castille, Jr., Paul O. Dicharry, J. Michael Parker and A. Michael Dufilho.

at the management level has equipped it with the tools necessary to respond to the growing needs of not only its national clients but also those who are local and find themselves increasingly operating in a global economy. Managing partner Skip Philips said, "The members of our Executive Committee are actively engaged in the community. They hold positions of significant responsibility in various professional organizations on both the local and national levels. Our ability to provide exceptional client service and creative professional solutions is strengthened by the backgrounds and experiences of our management team, which sets the example for the entire firm."

Through the composition of its Executive Committee, Taylor Porter is creating an environment where diversity

and inclusiveness are not only viewed as goals that the firm should aspire to achieve, but where they are valued as a core value of the firm and an integral part of client service and the everyday practice of law. Taylor Porter: 100 years strong, 100 percent committed to diversity!

The "In the Spotlight" section highlights diversity achievements and groundbreaking diversity accomplishments, primarily of signatories of the LSBA's Statement of Diversity Principles. If you have recommendations for attorneys, judges or legal organizations that should be considered for future articles, call or email Kelly McNeil Legier, (504)619-0129, kelly.legier@lsba.org.