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Women, Black/African-American Associates Lose Ground at Major U.S. Law Firms

Women and Black/African-Americans show declines in representation at major U.S. law firms, according to the latest law firm demographic findings from the National Association for Law Placement (NALP). NALP's recent analyses of the 2015-2016 NALP Directory of Legal Employers (NDLE) — the annual compendium of legal employer data published by NALP — shows that although women and minorities continue to make small gains in their representation among law firm *partners* in 2015, the overall percentage of women *associates* has decreased over the majority of the last five years, and the percentage of African-American associates has declined each year since 2009.

Significant Findings

Associates:

NALP's analysis found that although representation of minority associates has increased since 2010 (from 19.53% to 22%) following widespread layoffs in 2009, after the small uptick in 2014 representation of women edged down again resulting in **representation of women among associates essentially remaining flat since 2013**. The representation of women increased steadily from 38.99% in 1993 to its peak of 45.66% in 2009. In 2015, the percentage of representation sits at 44.68% — the lowest point since 2006, before the recession.

In contrast to the pattern for women as a whole, representation of minority women among associates has increased from about 11% (2009-2012) to 11.78% in 2015. (See Table 1.)

Much of the increase in minority representation since 2011 can be attributed to increased representation of Asians among associates. While overall minority representation fell in 2010, this was not the case for Asian associates in particular. Asian associates now make up nearly 11% of all associates, with representation having risen 1.6 percentage points from 9.28% in 2009 to 10.93% in 2015. Hispanic associate representation has also risen. After fluctuating between 3.81% and 3.90% of associates between 2009 and 2013, Hispanics now slightly outnumber Black/African-Americans among associates at 4.28%. In contrast to trends among Asian associates and even Hispanic associates, **representation of Black/African-Americans among associates has fallen every year since 2009** from 4.66% to 3.95%. (See Table 2.)

Partners:

In 2015, representation of both women and minority partners in law firms across the nation increased a small amount over 2014, with representation of minority women, specifically, up by a small amount, as was representation of minorities as a whole. During most of the 23 years that NALP has been compiling this information, law firms had made steady, though very slow, incremental progress in increasing the presence of women and minorities in both the partner and associate ranks. In 2015, that slow upward trend continued for partners, with minorities accounting for 7.52% of partners in the nation's major firms, and women accounting for 21.46% of the partners in these firms, up from 7.33% and 21.05%, respectively in 2014.

Nonetheless, over a period of over twenty years — NALP first compiled this information in 1993 — the total change has been marginal at best. In 1993 minorities accounted for 2.55% of partners and women accounted for 12.27% of partners. At just 2.55% of partners in 2015, **minority women continue to be the most dramatically underrepresented group at the partnership level**, a pattern that holds across all firm sizes and most jurisdictions. The representation of minority women partners is somewhat higher (3.12%), at the largest firms with more than 700 lawyers. Minority men, meanwhile, account for just 4.97% of partners this year, compared with 4.88% in 2014. This means that the increase in minorities among partners was about one-tenth of one percent for both men and women. (See Table 1.)

But, as is the case with associates as well, most of the increase in minority representation among partners since 2009 can be attributed to an increase of Asian and Hispanic partners. **Representation of Black/African-Americans among partners has barely budged over the period** and was 1.77% in 2015. (See Table 2.)

Lawyers Overall:

Overall, representation of women lawyers (both minority and non-minority) was down slightly, but remains higher than in 2009, after being below that level from 2010-2013. This decrease reflects both the decline among associates noted above and also among lawyers other than partners and associates such as “of counsel” and staff attorneys who, in 2015, accounted for 13% of attorneys at these firms. For example, women accounted for 39.5 % of these other attorneys in 2015, compared with 40% in 2014. Since the overall figure for women fell in both 2010 and 2011, changes in the four most recent years mean that the overall percentage for women (33.38%) remains just four-tenths of one percentage point higher than in 2009, when the figure was 32.97%.

The representation of minorities among lawyers as a whole rose a bit in 2015, to 13.97%. Consistent with findings for minority women among partners and associates, representation of minority women as a whole also increased slightly from 6.74% in 2014 and minority women now make up 6.81% of lawyers at these law firms. (See Table 1.)

Summer Associates:

The representation of women and minorities in the summer associate ranks compares much more favorably to the population of recent law school graduates. According to the American Bar Association (ABA), since 2000, the percentage of minority law school graduates has ranged from 20% to over 26%, while women have accounted for 46% to 49% of graduates with the high point coming in the mid-2000s. In 2015, women comprised 47.78% of summer associates, minorities accounted for 31.16%, and 16.99% of summer associates were minority women. All of these measures have improved in the two years since 2013, when representation of women edged down and

minority presence was virtually flat. In addition, the overall number of summer associates remains off by about 30% compared with 2009, despite increases in the numbers after they bottomed out in 2010 and 2011.

NALP Executive Director on Declines

NALP Executive Director James Leipold commented on the declines noting, "It is troubling to see the numbers for women and African-American associates seemingly reversing course. **2015 marks the sixth year of decline in the representation of Black associates, and while the percentage decrease is small, the overall number itself was small to begin with, so any decline is significant, and the trend is distressing.** For women, too, after years of small gains, the pattern of flat to declining representation among associates in law firms is disturbing."

Leipold continued, "Representation for women and minorities at the partnership level remains small, but at least the trends remain positive, with firms continuing to make small annual incremental gains. Nonetheless, **future gains are jeopardized by the shrinking pool at the associate level, and it is clear that measuring overall levels of diversity within law firms is inadequate without also looking at representation by specific race and ethnicity.** It is also important to remember that the story varies tremendously firm by firm and city by city, and while there are a small number of jurisdictions where overall levels of law firm lawyer diversity exceed the national figures, there are far more where diversity continues to lag considerably, and where little progress has been seen year to year," Leipold concluded.

Breadth of Lawyer Representation in the NALP Directory

The 2015-2016 NALP Directory of Legal Employers (NDLE), which provides the individual firm listings on which these aggregate analyses are based, includes attorney race/ethnicity and gender information for over 113,000 partners, associates, and other lawyers in 1,081 offices, and for over 6,500 summer associates in 775 offices nationwide. The NDLE is available online at www.nalpdirectory.com.

Table 1. Women and Minorities at Law Firms — 2009-2015

	Partners			Associates			Total Lawyers			Summer Associates		
	% Women	% Minority	% Minority Women	% Women	% Minority	% Minority Women	% Women	% Minority	% Minority Women	% Women	% Minority	% Minority Women
2009	19.21%	6.05%	1.88%	45.66%	19.67%	11.02%	32.97%	12.59%	6.33%	46.62%	24.04%	12.90%
2010	19.43	6.16	1.95	45.41	19.53	10.90	32.69	12.40	6.20	47.35	26.99	14.92
2011	19.54	6.56	2.04	45.35	19.90	10.96	32.61	12.70	6.23	47.71	27.11	15.19
2012	19.91	6.71	2.16	45.05	20.32	11.08	32.67	12.91	6.32	46.26	29.55	16.26
2013	20.22	7.10	2.26	44.79	20.93	11.29	32.78	13.36	6.49	45.32	29.51	15.78
2014	21.05	7.33	2.45	44.94	21.63	11.51	33.48	13.83	6.74	46.33	30.27	16.63
2015	21.46	7.52	2.55	44.68	22.00	11.78	33.38	13.97	6.81	47.78	31.16	16.99

Table 2. Partner and Associate Demographics at Law Firms — 2009-2015

	Partners						Associates					
	Asian		Black/African-American		Hispanic		Asian		Black/African-American		Hispanic	
	Total %	% Women	Total %	% Women	Total %	% Women	Total %	% Women	Total %	% Women	Total %	% Women
2009	2.20%	0.76%	1.71%	0.57%	1.65%	0.41%	9.28%	5.12%	4.66%	2.93%	3.89%	2.00%
2010	2.30	0.81	1.70	0.56	1.70	0.44	9.39	5.15	4.36	2.75	3.81	1.94
2011	2.36	0.82	1.71	0.58	1.92	0.48	9.65	5.31	4.29	2.61	3.83	1.92
2012	2.48	0.89	1.73	0.60	1.91	0.48	10.01	5.40	4.19	2.55	3.90	1.95
2013	2.67	0.91	1.78	0.60	1.99	0.54	10.48	5.64	4.10	2.43	3.82	1.89
2014	2.74	0.99	1.72	0.63	2.16	0.60	10.80	5.81	4.01	2.31	3.95	1.89
2015	2.89	1.07	1.77	0.64	2.19	0.63	10.93	6.00	3.95	2.25	4.28	2.03

Tables 3-6 provide additional figures by firm size for women and minorities at law firms in 2015. Patterns of representation vary considerably with geography and extended versions of Tables 3-6, providing information for 40 cities and 7 states can be [found here](#).

For purposes of the figures in these three tables, minority attorneys include those whose race or ethnicity is Black, Hispanic, American Indian/Alaskan Native, Asian, Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander, and those of multi-racial heritage, as reported by the law firms in the NDLE. The partner numbers include both equity and non-equity partners.

Table 3. Women and Minorities at Law Firms — Partners and Associates — 2015

	Partners				Associates				# of Offices
	Total #	% Women	% Minority	% Minority Women	Total #	% Women	% Minority	% Minority Women	
Total	51,419	21.46%	7.52%	2.55%	45,619	44.68%	22.00%	11.78%	1,081
By # of Lawyers Firm-wide:									
100 or fewer	3,884	20.67%	5.87%	2.03%	2,054	43.14%	16.11%	8.37%	129
101-250	10,467	21.15	5.61	1.82	6,029	44.24	15.81	8.53	151
251-500	11,027	22.14	6.92	2.38	7,526	44.46	21.21	11.12	219
501-700	6,637	20.51	7.71	2.62	6,140	44.07	21.74	11.30	146
701+	19,404	21.71	9.16	3.12	23,870	45.15	24.39	13.22	436

Source: The 2015-2016 NALP Directory of Legal Employers.

Table 4. Women and Minorities at Law Firms — Total Lawyers and Summer Associates — 2015

	Total Lawyers					Summer Associates				
	Total #	% Women	% Minority	% Minority Women	# of Offices	Total #	% Women	% Minority	% Minority Women	
Total	113,031	33.38%	13.97%	6.81%	1,081	6,509	47.78%	31.16%	16.99%	
By # of Lawyers Firm-wide:										
100 or fewer	6,783	28.93%	9.01%	4.10%	129	277	43.32%	27.80%	10.83%	
101-250	18,872	30.02	9.11	4.20	151	704	50.57	27.98	16.19	
251-500	21,822	32.44	12.39	5.84	219	1,035	48.89	28.02	14.98	
501-700	15,021	33.14	13.89	6.67	146	827	49.33	32.53	18.26	
701+	50,533	35.72	17.15	8.60	436	3,666	46.92	32.60	17.89	

Source: The 2015-2016 NALP Directory of Legal Employers.

Table 5. Partner Demographics at Law Firms — 2015

	Partners by Race or Ethnicity									# of Offices
	All Partners			Asian		Black/African American		Hispanic		
	Total #	% Minority	% Minority Women	Total %	% Women	Total %	% Women	Total %	% Women	
Total	51,419	7.52%	2.55%	2.89%	1.07%	1.77%	0.64%	2.19%	0.63%	1,081
By Size of Firm:										
100 or fewer	3,884	5.87%	2.03%	2.75%	1.08%	0.82%	0.18%	1.03%	0.36%	129
101-250	10,467	5.61	1.82	1.97	0.72	1.38	0.49	1.71	0.46	151
251-500	11,027	6.92	2.38	2.32	0.92	1.86	0.71	2.09	0.58	219
501-700	6,637	7.71	2.62	2.65	0.95	2.06	0.74	2.38	0.69	146
701+ lawyers	19,404	9.16	3.12	3.83	1.38	2.03	0.74	2.66	0.78	436

Source: The 2015-2016 NALP Directory of Legal Employers. The few Native American, Native Hawaiian and multi-racial lawyers reported are included in the overall minority percentages but are not reported separately.

Table 6. Associate Demographics at Law Firms — 2015

	Associates by Race or Ethnicity									# of Offices
	All Associates			Asian		Black/African American		Hispanic		
	Total #	% Minority	% Minority Women	Total %	% Women	Total %	% Women	Total %	% Women	
Total	45,619	22.00%	11.78%	10.93%	6.00%	3.95%	2.25%	4.28%	2.03%	1,081
By Size of Firm:										
100 or fewer	2,054	16.11%	8.37%	9.25%	4.72%	2.63%	1.07%	2.39%	1.56%	129
101-250	6,029	15.81	8.53	7.38	4.10	3.23	1.84	3.38	1.59	151
251-500	7,526	21.21	11.12	9.33	5.22	4.24	2.47	4.68	2.06	219
501-700	6,140	21.74	11.30	9.74	5.07	4.35	2.44	4.07	1.92	146
701+ lawyers	23,870	24.39	13.22	12.79	7.07	4.05	2.33	4.60	2.20	436

Source: The 2015-2016 NALP Directory of Legal Employers. The few Native American, Native Hawaiian and multi-racial lawyers reported are included in the overall minority percentages but are not reported separately.

About NALP: NALP is an association of over 2,500 legal career professionals who advise law students, lawyers, law offices, and law schools in North America and beyond. What brings NALP members together is a common belief in three fundamental things. First, all law students and lawyers should benefit from a fair and ethical hiring process. Second, law students and lawyers are more successful when supported by professional development and legal career professionals. Third, a diverse and inclusive legal profession best serves clients and our communities. That's why NALP members work together every day to collect and publish accurate legal employment data and information, and champion education and standards for recruiting, professional and career development, and diversity and inclusion. For more than 40 years, NALP has played an essential role in the success of our members and the lawyers and law students they serve.

NALP maintains an online archive of press releases at www.nalp.org/pressreleases. For additional information about NALP research, contact Judith Collins (jcollins@nalp.org), Director of Research, or James G. Leipold (jleipold@nalp.org), Executive Director, at 202-835-1001. **Mailing address:** National Association for Law Placement, 1220 19th Street NW, Suite 401, Washington, DC 20036-2405.
