

MINORITY LAWYERS

Background/Issues

Despite improvement during the 1990s in the number of people of color entering the legal profession, the disparity between the legal profession and the general population is increasing. At the current time, the legal profession is more than 90% white, while the general population is about 70% white. In the next 50 years, the general population is projected to be about 50% people of color, while current American law school enrollment is less than 20% people of color. In addition, there have historically been a low number of minority attorneys in leadership roles in state bar organizations.

While Wayne Budd became the first African-American to serve as president of a state bar (Massachusetts) in 1979, election of minority attorneys to such bar leadership positions has not historically been widespread. But in the last few years at least 10 state bars have elected their first man or woman of color as president or president-elect. At the same time, the ABA in 2003 welcomed Dennis Archer as its first African-American president. He was succeeded in 2004 by Robert Grey, Jr., also an African-American.

Many state, local, and specialty bars have instituted diversity initiatives to encourage minorities to enter the legal profession and to become active in bar leadership. On a national level, in 1984 the American Bar Association established a task force to examine issues of diversity in the legal profession; these initial efforts have grown so that currently there are three ABA entities specifically devoted to racial and ethnic diversity. The ABA has also, among other initiatives, established a Legal Opportunity Scholarship Fund to encourage racial and ethnic minority students to apply to law schools and provide financial assistance, produced a multimedia package to educate law firms and corporate law departments about retention of minority lawyers, and sponsored a Diversity Summit to develop an ABA-wide strategy for increased ethnic diversity among ABA leadership.

Missouri Bar Activities

The Missouri Bar has been actively involved for several years in seeking ways to increase diversity in the legal profession and to encourage active bar participation among minority attorneys. In 2000, the Special Committee on Women & Minorities was made a standing committee and redesignated the Committee on Minority Issues to further define its mission and distinguish its purpose from that of the Committee on Gender & Justice. The committee was charged with considering issues affecting and involving minority members of the bar, developing Missouri Bar programs to address issues affecting and involving its minority membership, and serving as a liaison between The Missouri Bar and the various minority bar organizations throughout the state.

Among the committee's major initiatives have been: development of Annual Meeting programming focusing on diversity; a Leadership Conference, which provides a forum for leaders of the state bar to brainstorm and plan with leaders of various minority bars on issues of diversity and leadership; and the Leadership Academy, which emphasizes diversity in recruiting attorneys who have shown leadership skills in their local communities for leadership positions in The Missouri Bar.

The Leadership Academy, inspired by a similar program of the Maryland State Bar Association, was brought to Missouri in 2000. Each summer eight to 10 attorneys are selected to participate in a year-long program focusing on leadership, bar service, and public service. At the end of that year, each graduate of the program commits to two years of active service with The Missouri Bar in some capacity. Alumni of the program are currently bringing diversity to bar leadership by serving as volunteers in many different roles. Most are active members of substantive law committees. Several are members of the YLS Council or the Legal Education Committee. Many have written or reviewed for CLE publications or served as speakers or moderators for CLE programs. The continued, active involvement of Leadership Academy graduates remains an important focus of The Missouri Bar.



The 2004-2005 Missouri Bar Leadership Academy Class poses for a group photo with former Missouri Bar President Michael Gunn (far right).