

# Making a Difference Through Generations

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**I**n legal practice, as in life in general, progress is often made possible because we are able to build on the legacy of the generations who have come before us.

This issue of *The Philadelphia Lawyer* focuses on several such legacies. One of our cover stories looks at how some of those within our community have made the law a “family business,” and the lessons and insights that flow when the Thanksgiving dinner table is surrounded by lawyers.

We also wanted to recognize that for many people of color within our community, a career in law was historically not an option due to systemic racism. Al Dandridge writes about how institutions including the Barristers’ Association, the law firm of Norris Schmidt Green Harris Higginbotham & Brown and our Association’s own Liacouras Committee acted as “nurturing relatives” helping to guide aspiring attorneys of color and open doors for them to enter the profession.

January 2021 marked the 50th anniversary of the publication of the Liacouras Committee’s report, formally titled “The Report of the Philadelphia Bar Association Special Committee on Pennsylvania Bar Admission Procedures — Racial Discrimination in Administration of the Pennsylvania Bar Examination.” It found, among other revelations, that while 98% of white applicants passed the Pennsylvania bar exam, only 70% of Black applicants passed. Out of 7,430 attorneys in Pennsylvania at the time, only 130 were Black. Only one large firm at the time had a Black partner and no large law firm had more than three Black associates.

The Committee’s findings gained



national attention and led not only negotiations that succeeded in changing how the bar exam was administered in Pennsylvania, but also to other states using the report as the impetus to make similar changes. Within two years, 82 Black attorneys were admitted to the Pennsylvania bar — nearly equaling the number who had been admitted between 1955 and 1970.

I am proud of all that the Association has done since then to continue the Liacouras Committee’s legacy. Among our efforts, we have developed a Diversity and Inclusion Action Plan for our leaders, setting forth annual goals including mentoring attorneys or law students from diverse backgrounds; identifying attorneys from diverse backgrounds to speak at CLE programs or events; volunteering for nonprofit organizations that serve underrepresented communities, and encouraging attorneys from diverse backgrounds to join the Association or run for leadership positions.

We have also implemented diversity and inclusion training for our Board of Governors, which includes the officers of

our organization and our Judicial Commission, which evaluates and issues recommendations on the qualifications of Philadelphia judicial candidates.

Our Diversity in the Profession Committee, which is comprised of member representatives from local affinity bar organizations, advocates for equal rights and increased representation of attorneys in the Philadelphia area who are members of minority groups. The Committee also organizes programming on diversity, equity and inclusion, and makes recommendations for action to the Association’s Board of Governors.

We are deeply committed to speaking up when we feel equal justice for all is under attack, amplifying the voices of those in our community who are in the minority, and providing opportunities for the legal profession to have critical conversations about diversity, equity and inclusion.

One such conversation will take place at the end of this month at our Summer Quarterly. The speaker portion of the event is traditionally dedicated to the memory of Judge A. Leon Higginbotham, the first Black U.S. District Judge for the Eastern District of Pennsylvania and a lifelong champion of individual rights. This year, we decided to feature a panel discussing Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) from the view of the general counsel’s office at Fortune 500 companies Exelon, Fidelity National Financial and IKEA. We will also honor the 2021 recipient of the Justice Sonia Sotomayor Award, Brenda Marrero of The Public Interest Law Center, for her commitment to promoting full and equal participation and inclusion in the legal

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