

THE NATIONAL LAW JOURNAL



PROFILES IN POWER

The 50 most influential minority lawyers in America

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FIRST, A REALITY CHECK: At last count, a mere 5.4% of partners at U.S. law firms were members of minority groups. For women of color, the figure was fewer than 1.7%, according to the legal placement organization NALP.

But what an amazing group of people those numbers represent, and what a payoff for the firms, law schools and corporations that invested in diversity.

We wanted to get a feeling for how well the legal profession was integrating attorneys who not that long ago were rarely considered the right sort to practice at the elite level. We asked our readers to nominate candidates who have had a national impact in their legal fields and beyond during the past five years. Merely holding a high office or position of authority was not enough; we wanted to identify attorneys who have demonstrated the power to change the law, shape public affairs, launch industries and get big things done. Law professors and in-house counsel were eligible; judges and nonpracticing lawyers were not.

We were met with an avalanche of nomina-

tions, which we supplemented with our own research. Editors in our newsroom evaluated great drifts of paperwork to arrive at the list of 50 attorneys that you'll find here. The thumbnail biographies were written by staff reporters Leigh Jones, Vesna Jaksic and Peter Page, and by contributing writers June Bell and Emily Heller.

We freely concede that the results are subjective. Frankly, we could publish a list twice as long and only begin to recognize all of the attorneys making important contributions to the law.

That said, there's no question that the attorneys listed here truly represent important movers and shakers. They direct the legal affairs of mighty corporations; they invent new practice areas; they move the gears of the nation's political machinery. And some will be in a position to become even more influential, depending on how the presidential campaign ends—they also happen to be advisers to Senator Barack Obama.

—MICHAEL MOLINE

PROFILES IN POWER

THE 50 MOST INFLUENTIAL MINORITY LAWYERS IN AMERICA



Vernon E. Jordan Jr.
72, Akin Gump Strauss
Hauer & Feld, Washington

A WELL-KNOWN troubleshooter during the Clinton administration, Jordan was chairman of the Clinton presidential campaign in 1992 and subsequently a member of the Council on Foreign Relations and the Iraq Study Group. His corporate posts include senior managing director with Lazard Freres & Co. and directorships with American Express Co., Asbury Automotive Group, Howard University, J.C. Penney Co. Inc., the Lyndon Baines Johnson Foundation and Xerox Corp. He has served on the international advisory boards of DaimlerChrysler A.G. and Barrick Gold Corp. His past civic titles include president and chief executive officer of the National Urban League Inc. and executive director of the United Negro College Fund Inc.



Prakash H. Mehta
39, Akin Gump Strauss
Hauer & Feld, Washington

MEHTA IS head of Akin Gump's private equity and investment funds practice, representing some of the largest and most prominent hedge and private equity funds in the world. He evaluates, structures and negotiates mergers, acquisitions and investments, and is expert in legal and regulatory matters in diverse markets including India, China, Russia, the Middle East and Latin America. He is the rare practitioner who can take a fund from its inception through its various stages of growth, and is well placed to spot complex investment trends as they emerge. His clients have included The Carlyle Group, Warburg Pincus LLC and Soros Fund Management LLC. Mehta left Clifford Chance in 2002 to join Akin Gump's Washington corporate practice.

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