



THE NATIONAL
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PROFILES IN POWER



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The 50 most influential minority lawyers in America



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.

We were met with an avalanche of nominations, 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 Jakšić and Peter Page, and by contributing writers June Bell and Emily Heller.



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 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.



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.

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



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**Eric H.
Holder Jr.**

**57, Covington & Burling,
Washington**

HOLDER'S day job is engaging in high-stakes litigation and white-collar criminal defense. On the side, he serves as national co-chair of

the Barack Obama presidential campaign, offering policy advice and serving as a surrogate on the campaign trail. In a recent case, Holder brought to a close a criminal investigation into payments made by Chiquita Brand International's former Colombian subsidiary to a paramilitary group that had been designated a terrorist entity by the U.S. government. Earlier, Holder served as U.S. attorney for the District of Columbia and later as deputy U.S. attorney general. He has represented the National Football League in the "Spygate" affair, in which a former employee of the New England Patriots alleged that the team videotaped its opponents' pregame warm-ups.



**Thomas S.
Williamson Jr.**

**61, Covington & Burling,
Washington**

WILLIAMSON chairs Covington & Burling's employment practice. He is the first black member of the firm's management committee. Major corporations rely

on him for advice about employment law and to litigate complex discrimination cases. In 2002, the National Football League asked him to help design and implement a plan to increase racial diversity among head coaches and front office executives. Williamson started his career at the firm in 1974 and became the firm's second black partner in 1982. President Bill Clinton appointed him U.S. solicitor of labor in 1993.

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