

Managing Diversity

By Pamela W. Carter

A workforce of people from different horizons is an asset for any ambitious and dynamic business that wants to excel in the global marketplace.

Continuing the Journey to the Perfect Mosaic

The world's increasing globalization requires more interaction among people from diverse cultures, beliefs and backgrounds than ever before. We no longer live and work in an insular marketplace; we are now part of

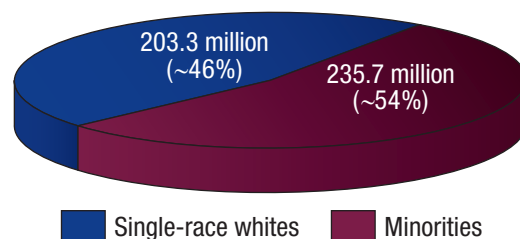
a worldwide economy with competition coming from nearly every continent. For this reason, the legal profession must get beyond the rhetoric and become more creative and open to inclusion and change. Maximizing and capitalizing on diversity has become an important issue for corporations and law firms today. The diversity of our population is an increasingly striking feature of today's United States of America.

Most scholars, writers, politicians and others agree that with the possible exception of the American Indian, to be American is to be, genealogically speaking, from somewhere else in the world. As a result of the mingling of many ethnicities, America may be evolving from a multicultural nation to a nation of multicultural people. According to the United States Census Bureau, by 2050, the total "minority" population, which includes everyone except non-Hispanic, single-race whites, is projected to be 235.7 million out of a total U.S. popu-

lation of 439 million, or nearly 54 percent. The United States has a growing "patchwork heritage," as described by President Barack Obama in his inaugural address.

A number of recent polls and other reports point to trends indicating shifts in American attitudes toward race and ethnicity that may be influencing how Americans think about their identities. In an ABC News poll completed in January 4, 2009, more than half the respondents who were black said they think of themselves first as American. That 51 percent is up from 46 percent in September 2008. Blacks age 50 and older

Projected 2050 Total "Minority" Population.



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call themselves American first by a margin of 2 to 1. In an October 2008 poll by the American Anti-Defamation League, 66 percent of respondents see the growth in “minority” populations in the United States as an advantage in building a strong economy. In 1992, only 39 percent held that view.

The nation is becoming even more diverse: more than one third of its popula-

million. The African-American population rose 1.3 percent to 41.1 million.

We must continue to accept diversity and inclusion (not conformity) as an opportunity to enrich our outlook and widen our horizons—we must learn to manage it well. In the current state of demographic change and economic downturn, our profession cannot afford to waste the potential of older workers, persons with disabilities, people of ethnic minority background or any other disadvantaged group.

Accepting diversity—managing it well—is a necessary precondition of guaranteeing equal opportunities of all people. Diversity is the key to success in the global economy. It requires adaptation such as the development of inter-cultural skills, removal of barriers and increased flexibility on the part of legal departments. A workforce of people from different horizons is an asset to any ambitious and dynamic business that wants to excel in the global marketplace. Diversity generates extra momentum, opens up new market segments and increases innovation and productivity. Many businesses have already taken diversity on board as a social fact and as an asset in terms of their activities and culture. Over the last few years, more and more companies have developed effective, efficient diversity-management strategies and have teamed up with progressive law firms to make diversity management part of their overall business strategy.

However, we must also acknowledge that there is still great reticence to inclusion in the legal profession. It is hoped that the issues addressed in upcoming DRI diversity-related publications will make an important contribution to placing diversity issues, dialogues and solutions even more firmly on the strategic business agenda of firms and companies across the United States.

Diversity can contribute to more effective decision-making and problem-solving capabilities by providing a diverse range of perspectives, a broader spectrum of expertise and more robust critical evaluation. Further, teams characterized by diversity have the capability to access broader networks of relationships, cultural capital and bicultural competence and bring these assets into the innovation process. Increased productivity, innovation and creativity are about making effective use of this capacity.

Managing diversity is more than simply acknowledging differences in people. It involves recognizing the *value* of differences, combating discrimination and promoting inclusiveness. Negative attitudes and behaviors can be barriers to organizational diversity because they can harm working relationships and damage morale and work productivity. Negative attitudes and behaviors in the workplace include prejudice, stereotyping, and discrimination.

Big business increasingly understands that a focus on diversity is more than just a feel-good effort. It is clear that well-managed diversity can be a major source of satisfaction for employers and employees of all backgrounds, races, creeds, genders, sexual orientation and levels of physical abilities. However, it must be equally apparent that when diversity is poorly managed it can be source of frustration, anger, fear about personal security and concerns for one’s future. Corporate cultures are enhanced by diversity. Corporate bottom lines are improved through diversity. Shareholders’ pockets are also enriched by diversity. So expect that firms nationwide will meet the challenges of building a more inclusive workplace, thereby meeting corporate expectations.

A diverse profession can only begin with individuals who are willing to examine their personal beliefs and adopt changes to overcome value-based decisions founded on limited exposure to different cultures. The change process requires us to work within each component of the legal profession to develop a coordinated and thorough effort to effect change. It requires proactive advocacy, collaboration, and linkages with goals and objectives supported by all stakeholders. The result will be a naturally diverse profession in which lawyers from all backgrounds have access to opportunities and the value of their inclusion will be realized in revenues and overall culture.

Diversity is a patch in the American journey to the perfect mosaic. America is a beautiful collection of souls, the vast majority from other lands. The American genius lies in allowing these souls to freely contribute their talents to the American tradition, culture and being, to add new tunes and new melodies to the American song. I am proud to be an American with an African soul.

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tion belongs to a minority group. The U.S. Census Bureau reported that the minority population reached an estimated 104.6 million—or 34 percent of the nation’s total population—on July 1, 2008, compared to 31 percent when the census was taken in 2000. Even more telling for the future: 44 percent of children younger than 18 and 47 percent of children younger than the age of five are now from minority families. Growth of other minority groups is also outpacing that of the majority population. Asians, the second-fastest growing group, increased 2.7 percent year-over-year to 15.5

Percentage of Children from Minority vs. White Families as of July 2008.

