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"THE TRUTH SHALL SET YOU FREE"

Women of color leave law firms

HONOLULU (AP) - An American Indian attorney is asked where she keeps her tomahawk. White male partners look past a Black lawyer, assuming she is clerical staff. An Asian attorney is called a "dragon lady" when she asserts herself.

A study by the American Bar Association says that those real-life experiences, along with more subtle forms of discrimination, are prompting growing numbers of minority women to abandon the nation's biggest law firms.

"We're not even talking about trying to get up through a glass ceiling; we're trying to stay above ground," said Paulette Brown, co-chair of the group that produced the study, released Friday during the bar association's annual convention.

The report, "Visible Invisibility: Women of Color in Law Firms," was conducted by the bar association with the help of the National Opinion Research Center at the University of Chicago. Questionnaires were sent to about 1,300 attorneys, both men and women, and responses came from 72 percent, or 920. Law firms exclude minority women from golf outings, after-hours drinks and other networking events, the study says. Partners neglect the women of color they are supposed to help mentor.

In some cases, partners and senior lawyers disregard minority women less because of outright bigotry than because they have less in common with them and thus don't connect well with them, the study found.

Firms routinely hand minority women inferior assignments, such as reviewing documents or writing briefs, that provide little opportunity to meet clients, the study says. That means women of color aren't able to cultivate business relationships and develop the "billable hours" that are the basis of career advancement within a firm.

Among the statistics in the study:

—Forty-four percent of women of color said they were denied desirable assignments, versus 2 percent of White men.

—Forty-three percent of women of color said they had limited access to client development opportunities, compared to 3 percent of White men.

—Nearly two-thirds of women of color said they were excluded from informal and formal networking opportunities, compared to 4 percent of White men.

Such discrimination largely goes unchecked at law firms, forcing women to quit if they want to avoid it, Brown said. The study cited 2005 data from the National Association of Law Placement showing 81 percent of minority female associates left their jobs within five years of being hired. That figure was up from the late 1990s, when it stood at 75 percent.

Elaine Johnson James, who is Black and a partner at the firm Edwards, Angell, Palmer and Dodge, said she has seen such defections.

She recently called classmates from her Harvard law class in an effort to find Black law partners to speak at an alumni panel. Of the 50 or so Black women in her class and in the classes above and below hers, James said she found only one other than herself working at a firm. "Harvard, now; you've got to figure if anybody's going to stick, it would be us," James said. "It's amazing that we have left the private practice of law in droves."

Michael Greco, the bar association president, said managing partners at law firms — mostly White men — need to dedicate themselves to reform.

"This is intolerable," Greco said at a news conference. "It stings the conscience of our profession."



Sentinel-Voice photos by John Broussard

DANCE FEVER

Students in the West Las Vegas Art Center's annual Performing and Visual Arts Camp for Kids participate in a performance to close this summer's cultural arts camp. (See additional photos Page 8)

McKinney's future unsure

ATLANTA (AP) - Following Rep. Cynthia McKinney's second ouster from office in four years, some are closing the book on her political future.

"She's history," said University of Georgia political science professor Charles Bullock. "You don't get another chance to come back after losing two primaries. It's rare to come back after losing once."

McKinney's supporters, however, said losing a bid for a seventh term in no way spells the end of her public life.

"Cynthia McKinney is loved nationally, locally and internationally," said State

Rep. Tyrone Brooks of Atlanta, president of the Georgia Association of Black Elected Officials. "I expect her to move to the international scene, especially as it relates to peace, justice and environmental issues. This is going to elevate her to another level."

McKinney managed only 41 percent of the vote Tuesday to 59 percent for Hank Johnson, an attorney and former DeKalb County commissioner who will compete with Republican Catherine Davis in November to lead the heavily Democratic, predominantly Black district east of Atlanta. Like McKinney, Johnson and

Davis are Black.

McKinney's concession speech sounded more like a call to arms for a future campaign. She ripped Republican leadership and vowed to continue fighting against war, poverty and injustice.

"We love our country, and that is why we dissent," McKinney said early Wednesday, flanked by her son, her parents and supporters.

A change is sweeping the world, and America must not be left out."

McKinney lost her seat in 2002 to political newcomer Denise Majette, but emerged from a crowded primary to regain the seat in 2004, when

Majette vacated the seat to run for U.S. Senate. She had kept a relatively low profile until March, when she struck a Capitol Police officer who did not recognize her and tried to stop her from entering a House office building.

A grand jury in Washington declined to indict McKinney, but she was forced to apologize before the House. She drew less than 50 percent of the vote in last month's primary, forcing Tuesday's runoff.

How much of a role McKinney can play in national politics — and whether she considers another run for Congress — is going to depend. (See McKinney, Page 2)

Clippers owner sued for housing bias

LOS ANGELES (AP) - The U.S. Department of Justice on Monday sued Los Angeles Clippers owner and real estate mogul Donald Sterling for housing discrimination, claiming he refused to rent apartments to Black citizens and families with children. Federal prosecutors contend that Sterling, his wife, Rochelle, and their

family trust refused to rent to many prospective tenants, treated them poorly and misrepresented the availability of apartments to them in the city's Koreatown section.

The defendants also are accused of refusing to rent to Black prospective tenants in Beverly Hills as well as families with children looking to rent apartments that the de-

fendants owned or managed in Los Angeles County.

"Here in Los Angeles, where housing is already at a premium, it is imperative that no one be denied housing simply because of their skin color, ethnic background or because they have children," said U.S. Attorney Debra Wong Yang.

A message left with attor-

ney Michael Kennick, who has represented Sterling in previous lawsuits, was not immediately returned Monday.

Claiming violations of the federal Fair Housing Act, the lawsuit seeks an end to "discriminating on account of race, national origin and familial status," plus unspecified. (See Clippers, Page 3)