



BLANKROME

OCTOBER 2019

PERSPECTIVES

Celebrating Diversity and Inclusion in Practice



Contents

Perspectives keeps you informed on Blank Rome's latest diversity and inclusion news and events as well as provides you with insight on current diversity and inclusion issues in the legal industry and beyond.

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Grant S. Palmer

A Note from Blank Rome's Managing Partner and CEO

I am pleased to present the October 2019 edition of *Perspectives*, Blank Rome's diversity and inclusion newsletter brought to you by our Chief Diversity and Inclusion Officers [Sophia Lee](#) and [Christopher A. Lewis](#), and our Firm's dedicated [Diversity and Inclusion Committee](#).

Blank Rome's deep commitment to [diversity and inclusion](#) has been the foundation of our core values since our Firm was established in 1946 by attorneys whose mission was to create a work environment where people of diverse backgrounds could gather to practice law and bring their "whole selves" to work. Today, Blank Rome continues to honor and build on our founders' vision through our Firm's strategic plan by implementing innovative goals and initiatives for increasing and harnessing our diverse talents to enhance our Firm's client service.

As such, our attorneys and professional staff know the importance of representation and have made incredible strides in increasing diversity and inclusion within our Firm. Notably, this past summer, Blank Rome achieved [Mansfield Certification Plus](#) after successfully completing Diversity Lab's yearlong Mansfield Rule 2.0 program. The "Certification Plus" status recognized our Firm for affirmatively reaching at least 30 percent women, minority, and LGBTQ+ lawyer representation in a notable number of our current leadership roles, including as office chairs and executive committee members. Blank Rome has also signed on to participate in Diversity Lab's newest iteration of the program, Mansfield Rule 3.0, which will add lawyers with disabilities to the pool of candidates that may be considered in the Mansfield Rule's categories.

Furthermore, our Firm has made it a priority to collaborate with clients to increase diversity and inclusion across different industries through forward-thinking programs, including our annual Women's Leadership Summit, which was held for the third time in September and brought together a group of more than 150 women leaders in law and business to discuss the most urgent challenges facing our professions, as well as our inaugural series of Women's Forum Bootcamps, which covered the important topics of crisis communications and the power of body language.

As a result of our diversity and inclusion efforts, Blank Rome has been named a [Best Law Firm for Women](#) by *Working Mother* magazine and a [Best Place to Work for LGBTQ Equality](#) by the Human Rights Campaign Foundation. Our attorneys have also been individually recognized as [Minority Business Leaders](#) by the *Philadelphia Business Journal*, [Top Women in Litigation](#) by *Benchmark Litigation*, and [Influencers of Law](#) by *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, among other honors.

What you will read in this edition of *Perspectives* are just some of the accolades and commitments that demonstrate Blank Rome's dedication to advancing diversity and inclusion throughout the Firm, the legal industry, and beyond. I am incredibly proud that this newsletter has been so well-received by our clients and community, further highlighting the desire and need for diversity and inclusion in business, and that our Firm is able to fill so many pages each issue with programs and initiatives that matter so greatly.

As always, I hope you enjoy our newsletter and welcome your feedback. □

Blank Rome's Women's Forum Hosts Inaugural Bootcamp Series

Blank Rome was proud to host our Firm's inaugural series of Women's Forum Bootcamps, held between March 5 and June 26, 2019. The series of events was spearheaded by Blank Rome Partners [Deborah Skakel](#), [Cheryl S. Chang](#), [Ana Tagvoryan](#), [Stacy D. Phillips](#), [Jayme L. Butcher](#), [Amy Joseph Coles](#), [Shawn M. Wright](#), [Brooke T. Iley](#), and [Susan L. Bickley](#).

The series kicked off with a crisis communications bootcamp in our Pittsburgh office where guests participated in a lively Q&A program featuring **Judy Smith**, founder and president of Smith & Company, a leading strategic advisory firm, and the inspiration for the hit television series, *Scandal*. Blank Rome's Washington, D.C., New York, Houston, and Los Angeles offices held interactive bootcamps on the power of body language, featuring **Linda Clemons**, world-renowned sales and body language expert and CEO of Sisterpreneur, Inc., an international business organization that empowers and enriches women entrepreneurs.

Featured on the following page are photos from various Women's Bootcamps. Top left: James Barnes, Jayme Butcher, Judy Smith, and Amy Joseph Coles in Pittsburgh. Top right: Judy Smith in Pittsburgh. Center left: Linda Clemons and attendees in Houston. Center right: Linda Clemons in Los Angeles. Bottom left: Shawn Wright, Linda Clemons, and Brooke Iley in Washington, D.C. Bottom center: Linda Clemons and Stacy Phillips in Los Angeles. Bottom right: Linda Clemons and Deborah Skakel in New York. □



2019 Blank Rome Office Updates

Blank Rome Expands to Chicago with Addition of Four-Partner Group

This past summer, Blank Rome [expanded](#) its national platform to [Chicago](#), with the addition of a four-partner group. Our Firm is located at [444 West Lake Street](#) and occupies 12,000 square feet of space on the 16th floor that can accommodate 30 or more attorneys and professional staff.

Known as River Point, 444 West Lake is a 52-story, 1,050,000-square-foot, world-class office tower that just opened in 2017. It is conveniently located in Chicago's West Loop on the corner of Lake and Canal Street and is steps away from the Chicago River, public transportation, and the highway.



“Our Chicago colleagues have been off to a great start,” said [Grant S. Palmer](#), Blank Rome’s Managing Partner and CEO. “When considering locations for our Chicago office, we were committed to finding a location that was modern, efficient, and well equipped to help us best serve our clients. We are thrilled to call 444 West Lake our new Chicago home, and look forward to continued growth in such a vibrant and successful market.”

The Chicago office is led by [Kenneth J. Ottaviano](#). Prior to joining Blank Rome, Ken served as a partner in the insolvency and restructuring group at Katten Muchin Rosenman LLP, where he recently served on Katten’s Board of Directors.

Also joining from Katten in Chicago are [Karin H. Berg](#), [William J. Dorsey](#), and [Paige Barr Tinkham](#). Ken, Karin, and Paige

joined as partners in our Firm’s [Finance, Restructuring, and Bankruptcy](#) group. Will joined as a partner in Blank Rome’s [Corporate Litigation](#) group. They are also members of the [Financial Services Industry](#) group, which has welcomed eight attorneys to date in 2019 and has more than 100 attorneys throughout the United States.

Since its founding in 1946, Blank Rome has grown through a number of significant acquisitions, combinations, and lateral hires. Our Firm has been particularly successful in opening new offices through the hiring of entrepreneurial-minded

lateral groups, and effectively integrating the attorneys and professionals to allow for ongoing growth. In the last decade alone, our Firm opened its Los Angeles office in 2009 with the addition of five laterals and has grown to nearly 60 lawyers; in 2011, our Firm opened its Houston office with five lawyers from Abrams Scott & Bickley, L.L.P., and now has nearly 50 lawyers in Texas; and our Firm opened an office in Pittsburgh in 2015 with five partners,

which has grown to more than 20 lawyers. Additionally, our Firm experienced significant growth in 2016 when it welcomed more than 100 attorneys previously with Dickstein Shapiro to its Washington, D.C., and New York offices.

“With strong roots in Chicago and an exceptional national reputation, Ken, Karin, Will, and Paige are the perfect team to anchor our entrance into the market,” stated [Lawrence F. Flick](#), chair of Blank Rome’s Financial Services Industry group. “Blank Rome has a number of clients who are based in, or do business in Chicago, so having an established presence in the city with a stellar group of attorneys will help us provide enhanced service to our clients. In addition, the team’s significant experience in financing and restructuring in the healthcare industry will further expand our strong healthcare finance capabilities.”

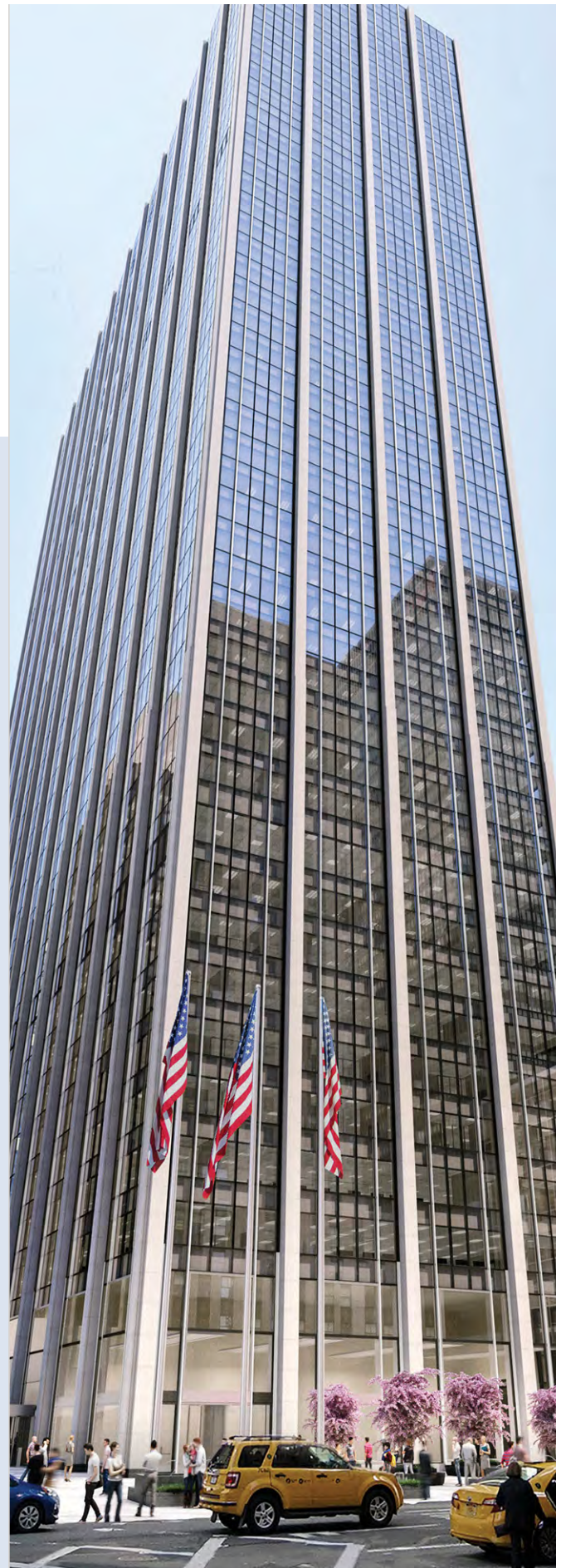
“Blank Rome has a proven track record of opening new offices across the United States through the hiring of lateral groups, and we are very excited to join that legacy,” said Ken. “In talking with Grant, Larry, and other partners from the Firm’s offices and practices, we were energized by Blank Rome’s desire to open a Chicago office and its clear vision and commitment to growing in the market. We were also impressed by the Firm’s strong culture of collaboration, and innovative approach to client service. Joining Blank Rome presented the perfect trifecta for our group—continue to service clients on an expanded, national platform; facilitate growth in Chicago; and contribute to innovation in our field. We are thrilled to be a part of the team.”

Blank Rome Relocates New York Office to 1271 Avenue of the Americas

This past spring, Blank Rome successfully completed the [relocation](#) of its [New York office](#) from the Chrysler Building to the recently redesigned, iconic 1271 Avenue of the Americas, formerly known as the Time & Life Building, located in Rockefeller Center in Midtown Manhattan. Our Firm occupies 138,000 square feet of office space on floors 15 through 17, as well as part of the 14th floor.

“We established our New York presence in 2000 when we combined with Tenzer Greenblatt LLP—a firm with New York roots dating back to 1937. Collectively, we operated out of the Chrysler Building for 40 years,” said [Grant S. Palmer](#), Blank Rome’s Managing Partner and CEO. “With 150 attorneys, our New York office is one of our largest locations and has experienced sustained growth over the past two decades. This move underscores our continued commitment to our clients, the New York market, and our goals for ongoing expansion.”

“We are very excited to be in our new space at 1271 Avenue of the Americas,” said [Norman Heller](#), co-chair of Blank Rome’s New York office. “[Michael Mullman](#), who led this important relocation project; [Martin Luskin](#), my New York office co-chair; [Robert Mittman](#), former New York office chair; and I were committed to finding, on behalf of the Firm, a location with amenities that would support our leading New York-based practices in financial services, corporate, mergers and acquisitions, securities, real estate, maritime, matrimonial and family law, litigation, business restructuring and bankruptcy, business tax, insurance recovery, and trusts and estates. We designed our space to be modern, bright, collaborative, and flexible so that we can continue to grow and meet the unique needs of our clients.” □



Blank Rome Achieves Mansfield Certification Plus for Mansfield Rule 2.0 and Pilots Mansfield Rule 3.0

Blank Rome achieved Mansfield Certification Plus after successfully completing Diversity Lab's year-long [Mansfield Rule 2.0](#) program. Our Firm has also signed on to participate in Diversity Lab's newest iteration of the program, Mansfield Rule 3.0.

The Mansfield Certification for 2019 recognizes 64 "trailblazing law firms" participating in Mansfield Rule 2.0 that have affirmatively considered at least 30 percent women, minority, and LGBTQ+ lawyers for leadership and governance roles, equity partner promotions, formal client pitch opportunities, and senior lateral positions, to boost the representation of diverse lawyers in law firm leadership. In addition to meeting or exceeding the pipeline consideration requirements for certification, Blank Rome and other law firms that achieved Mansfield Certification Plus status have successfully reached at least 30 percent diverse lawyer representation in a notable number of their current leadership roles and committees.

Mansfield Rule 3.0, which runs from July 2019 to July 2020, will further enhance the forward-thinking [inaugural Mansfield Rule](#) pilot program and Mansfield Rule 2.0 by adding lawyers with disabilities to the

pool of candidates that may be considered for the Mansfield Rule's categories, in addition to women, minority, and LGBTQ+ lawyers. The updated program will also split its "transparency" related categories into two distinct categories: one for adopting leadership job descriptions and one relating to publicizing the processes for election or appointment to these leadership roles.

As a reward for achieving Mansfield Certification, Blank Rome and other Mansfield Rule 3.0 participating firms will be able to send their newly promoted partners from underrepresented groups to one of four upcoming Diversity Lab Client Forum events in Chicago, Washington, D.C., San Francisco, and New York. At the client forums, participants will learn from and have an opportunity to connect one-on-one or in small groups with lawyers from more than 60 legal departments from leading companies across the country. As a Certified Plus firm, Blank Rome's newly promoted minority, women, LGBTQ+ partners, and partners with disabilities will also have the opportunity to pitch their legal talent to a variety of in-house counsel. □



Mansfield RuleTM
Certified *Plus* 2019 Powered by DIVERSITYLAB

Advancing Women in the Legal Profession

In addition to Blank Rome's Women's Forum Bootcamp Series, featured in this edition of *Perspectives* starting on [page 2](#), below is an overview of awards, appointments, and events that showcase our Firm's commitment to and recognition for advancing women in the legal profession.

Blank Rome Honored as a 2019 Best Law Firm for Women by *Working Mother*

Blank Rome was named one of the 2019 Best Law Firms for Women by *Working Mother* magazine, marking the third year that our Firm has been recognized for its commitment to creating one of the best women-friendly workplaces in the



United States. *Working Mother's* annual list honors 60 U.S. law firms for their policies in the advancement of women, notably with regards to key factors such as women representation, flexibility, paid-time off and leaves of absence, leadership, and com-

pensation and advancement, as well as the development and retention of women. The winning law firms were honored at the Best Law Firms for Women Gala, held at the Peninsula Chicago on September 19, 2019.

Blank Rome Recognized in Yale Law Women's 2019 Top Ten Firms for Gender Equity and Family Friendliness Report

Blank Rome was honored in Yale Law Women's 2019 Top Ten Firms for Gender Equity and Family Friendliness Report in the categories of:

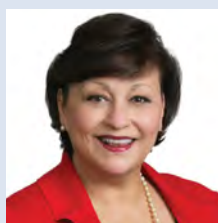
- **Gender Equity – Leadership & Promotions:** At Least 50% of Attorneys Promoted to Equity Partner in 2018 Were Women
- **Family Friendliness – Part-Time & Flexible Work Schedules:** Highest Percentage of Attorneys Who Have Worked Part-Time Schedules in the Last Five Years Promoted to Equity Partner in 2018
- **Family Friendliness – Parental & Family Leave Accommodations:** Greatest Percentage of Associates Who Are Men Taking Any Caregiver Leave

The 2019 Yale Law Women Top Ten Firms Report monitors trends in gender equity and family friendliness among law firms ranked in the 2019 Vault Law 100, raising awareness of disparities within the legal profession, highlighting progress being made in the industry, and identifying areas for improvement.

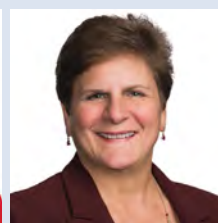
Blank Rome's Women's Forum Hosts Women's History Month Event Honoring Susan Bickley, Jeanne Grasso, and Sheila Riesel

Blank Rome's [Women's Forum](#) hosted a special Women's History Month event on March 25, 2019, which highlighted the achievements of our Firm's women attorneys and honored Blank Rome Partners [Susan L. Bickley](#), [Jeanne M. Grasso](#), and [Sheila G. Riesel](#).

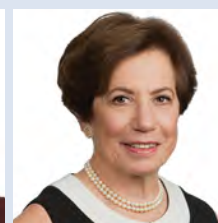
The event began with Blank Rome Partner [Deborah A. Skakel](#), who serves as chair of the Women's Forum, acknowledging the many 2019 elevations and promotions of our women attorneys as well as welcoming the new women partners and associates who have joined our Firm



Susan L. Bickley



Jeanne M. Grasso



Sheila G. Riesel

since the start of the year. Deborah then emphasized the importance of honoring women leaders at our Firm and introduced the program's honorees, who have been influencers of law and who have made a generational impact at our Firm. Susan, Jeanne, and Sheila were each introduced by other attorneys who they have personally influenced. Together, they each discussed valuable topics, such as the importance of mentorship, navigating predominately male-dominated specialties, and other meaningful experiences.

Emery Richards Appointed Co-Chair of Houston Bar Association's Gender Fairness Committee



Emery Gullickson Richards

Blank Rome Associate **Emery Gullickson Richards** was appointed to serve as a co-chair of the Houston Bar Association's Gender Fairness Committee. In this role, Emery helps further the committee's mission of examining issues related to gender fairness in the legal profession and developing

programs that provide a forum for the discussion of issues related to gender fairness. She also continues to lead outreach in the legal workplace to increase support for the Houston Bar's recently updated **Gender Fairness Commitment Statement**.

Victoria Ortega Appointed to Steering Committee of the Coalition of Women's Initiatives in Law D.C. Chapter



Victoria Ortega

Blank Rome Associate **Victoria Ortega** was appointed to the steering committee of the Coalition of Women's Initiatives in Law's newly launched Washington, D.C., Chapter. In this role, Victoria helps build the chapter's local profile and provides strategic direction for its projects and programs.

Through live programming and advocacy, the coalition helps address the many issues facing women lawyers today and serves as an enduring network of women professionals.

Blank Rome Attorneys Recognized as Top Women in Law and the Community

- Partner **Susan L. Bickley** named "Outstanding Leader in Law" by *Houston Business Journal's* Women Who Mean Business Awards (August 2019)
- Partners **Linda Kornfeld** and **Ann Blair Laupheimer** named "Top 250 Women in Litigation" by *Benchmark Litigation* (August 2019)
- Partners **Linda Kornfeld** and **Stacy D. Phillips** named "Top Women Lawyers in California" by *Daily Journal* (May 2019)
- Partner **Caroline Donelan** named "Woman of Business" by the Comerica Bank Women's Business Awards Program (March 2019)
- Partner **Heather Sonnenberg** named "Top Woman in Commercial Finance" by *The Secured Lender* (March 2019)

Philadelphia Women's Forum Summer Social

Blank Rome's Philadelphia Women's Forum hosted a fun and energetic summer social on August 22, 2019, featuring an exclusive Rocky-inspired group fitness class at Rumble Boxing, followed by delicious refreshments at Blume, a colorful, flower-filled restaurant in Center City Philadelphia.



New York Women's Forum Summer Social

Blank Rome's New York Women's Forum hosted a summer social at Partner [Deborah A. Skakel's](#) home on July 15, 2019, featuring a jewelry trunk show from Diamonds Doing Good, which donates a portion of its profits to nonprofit organizations. Attendees socialized, enjoyed refreshments, and participated in a blind wine tasting challenge curated by partner and certified sommelier, [Diana M. Eng](#), in which our summer associates served as team captains.



Blank Rome Attorneys Discuss Topics on Women in Law and Business

- Partner [Stacy D. Phillips](#) moderated the "Her Story" panel at *Los Angeles Business Journal's* Women's Council & Awards event (June 2019)
- Partner [Linda Kornfeld](#) moderated the "Women in the C-Suite" panel and Partner [Stacy D. Phillips](#) moderated the "Women on the Bench" panel at the *California Lawyer* Women Leadership in Law Conference (May 2019)
- Partner [Michelle M. Gervais](#) spoke on the "Women Empowering Women" panel at the National Association of Sports Commissions Women's Summit (April 2019)
- Partner [Sophia Lee](#) spoke on the "Women in Law" panel at Temple Beasley School of Law's Women's History Month event (March 2019)
- Partner [Jayme L. Butcher](#) served as a mentor for the *Pittsburgh Business Times* Bizwomen Mentoring Monday event (February 2019) □

Understanding Unconscious Bias Is Good for Equality and Good for Business

By Sophia Lee and Asima J. Ahmad



Sophia Lee



Asima J. Ahmad

Increasingly, law firms are incorporating programs to raise awareness and understanding of unconscious bias in their diversity and inclusion initiatives. For good reason, because recognizing how attitudes and stereotypes impact our decisions and actions in an unconscious way—and learning how to overcome those unconscious biases (sometimes also referred to as implicit biases)—can help to increase diversity of representation and, in turn, promote inclusion in the legal profession.

This is undoubtedly important from a social justice perspective because, as lawyers, we are champions for justice and equality. It is also good for business because we know from the research that diverse teams and organizations have a competitive advantage in making better decisions and financially outperforming their less diverse cohorts. See, *e.g.*, “Delivering through Diversity,” McKinsey & Company, January 2018. And, corporate clients continue to state their preference for hiring law firms that embrace diversity and inclusion, as most recently demonstrated by the “Open Letter to Law Firm Partners” that was signed by more than 170 general counsel and posted to LinkedIn.

Understanding unconscious bias is good for business in yet another sense: lawyers who are knowledgeable about unconscious bias will better serve and counsel their clients. Business clients face similar challenges to law firms when it comes to diversity and inclusion and often ask the same questions: How do we recruit and retain a diverse workforce? How do we cultivate an inclusive workplace? How do we develop effective policies? How

do we avoid exposure to discrimination claims? Lawyers who have been attentive on the topic of unconscious bias and vigilant about its impact on decision-making are going to be better equipped in advising their clients and helping them to mitigate risks.

Unconscious Bias Education

Employers may be aware of the concept of unconscious bias but may not understand on a practical level the impact of unchecked unconscious bias in the workplace, including that unintentional decision-making can increase a company’s exposure to potential claims of discrimination or, at the very least, create bad press. A lawyer can provide significant value by proactively advising clients about the implementation of unconscious bias education to mitigate risk.

Take, for example, last year’s incident at a Philadelphia Starbucks where a manager called the police on two African American men who were sitting in the café but had not purchased any food or drink items. After a video went viral of the men being taken out of the store in handcuffs, boycotts spread across the country, the company’s CEO issued a formal apology, and thousands of stores were shut down for a day of implicit bias training. While it’s impossible to know whether the manager’s decision to call the police was motivated by intentional discrimination, unconscious bias, or both, this incident serves as an example for how one employee’s actions can have an outsized impact on the company as a whole. Had unconscious bias education been implemented sooner and regularly engaged in to reinforce the company’s workplace values, it is possible this highly publicized situation could have been avoided altogether.

Employment Litigation Advice

As unconscious bias continues to gain more attention, it seems likely that it will play a more significant role in workplace discrimination claims. However, unconscious bias appears incompatible with Title VII of the Civil Right Act, or the legal framework of other anti-discrimination laws, which prohibit intentional discrimination, since by its nature, unconscious bias is unintentional. But, a lawyer

attentive to the rulings on the admissibility of unconscious bias testimony can have a strategic advantage over a lawyer who does not understand the implications of unconscious bias.

The Equal Employment Opportunity Commission's definition of "intentional discrimination" includes "unconscious stereotypes," but courts are generally hesitant to go as far. However, courts also seem reluctant to dismiss the existence of unconscious bias in the workplace and often provide opportunities for its introduction and use through expert testimony.

In 2017, the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Third Circuit acknowledged that implicit bias testimony may be admissible in certain circumstances, but ultimately determined that the district court did not abuse its discretion in excluding expert testimony by Anthony Greenwald (the psychologist responsible for the Implicit Association Test, which measures implicit bias) on age-related implicit bias studies in connection with a reduction-in-force case. See *Karlo v. Pittsburgh Glass Works*, 849 F.3d 61, 84–85 (3d Cir. 2017). There, the district court held Greenwald's testimony did not fit the case as his population-wide statistics only had "speculative application" to the defendant and its decision-makers, and that disparate impact claims do not require examination into an employer's state of mind.

Earlier this year, in a Title VII national origin case, a federal court in Rhode Island acknowledged that "prohibitive implicit and cognitive biases can permeate interviews," especially when an employer disregards objective criterion for determining qualifications, as in *Imbriglio v. Rhode Island*, No. CV 16-396-JJM-LDA, (D.R.I. Apr. 23, 2019). When granting the employer's motion for summary judgment, the court noted the plaintiff's failure to provide any expert witness testimony on implicit bias or introduce other admissible testimony to support her claim. This point suggests that evidence of implicit bias may have been considered by the jury if expert testimony was introduced by the plaintiff. This decision also cited a case from the U.S. District Court for the Northern District of Illinois where a social psychological expert opined that the defendant had a corporate culture that fostered implicit bias, which testimony the court relied upon as circumstantial evidence of discrimination. See *Martin v. F.E. Moran*, No. 13 C 3526 (N.D. Ill. Mar. 30, 2018). This sampling of cases demonstrates that unconscious bias evidence is recognized by courts, although not always introduced or admitted.

Awareness of Unconscious Bias Rewarded

A law firm's consciousness about and attention to unconscious bias and its implications can set it apart from its peers. Whether that means creating value internally within the law firm itself with the result that diverse talent is retained and superior results are achieved, or whether that means creating value externally with clients in the form of differentiated expertise and preferential treatment by clients who value diversity and inclusion, awareness about unconscious bias can give a law firm a competitive advantage over its less aware cohorts. ▢

"Understanding Unconscious Bias Is Good for Equality and Good for Business," by Sophia Lee and Asima J. Ahmad was published in [The Legal Intelligencer](#). Reprinted with permission from the July 3, 2019, edition of *The Legal Intelligencer* © 2019 ALM Media Properties, LLC. All rights reserved. Further duplication without permission is prohibited. For information, contact 877-257-3382, reprints@alm.com or visit almreprints.com.

The Business Imperatives for Diversity and Inclusion

Blank Rome Partner [Sophia Lee](#) recently presented at seminars where she discussed the business imperatives for diversity and inclusion. As the keynote speaker for the Princeton Regional Chamber of Commerce's Diversity & Inclusion Forum event, Sophia spoke on the topic, "Understanding Unconscious Bias: How It Drives Your Decision-Making Process," where she examined how unconscious bias inevitably influences our judgment and how this affects business decision-making processes. At the Pennsylvania Defense Institute's 2019 Annual Conference, Sophia spoke on the panel, "So Why Do We Need Diversity Anyway?" where she emphasized the importance of diversity and inclusion initiatives for business success. ▢



Promoting LGBTQ+ Equality

‘Partners in Life’: How Manatt CEO Donna Wilson and Blank Rome’s Linda Kornfeld Make It Work



Linda Kornfeld

Blank Rome Partner [Linda Kornfeld](#), who serves as vice chair of our Firm’s [Insurance Recovery](#) group, and her partner, **Donna Wilson**, who is the new CEO and managing partner of Manatt, Phelps & Phillips, were recently interviewed on Law.com’s *Legal Speak* podcast. In the episode, the couple talks with Law.com reporter and editor Lizzy McLellan about how they juggle work and family, their experiences as openly gay attorneys, and whether the legal industry has made meaningful strides on diversity and inclusion. To listen to the full episode, please visit [law.com](#).

2019 Lavender Law® Conference & Career Fair

Blank Rome was proud to be a sponsor of the 2019 Lavender Law® Conference & Career Fair, which was held August 7–9, 2019, in Philadelphia, PA. Blank Rome Partner [Beth Bernstein Connors](#) spoke on the session, “Walking the Path to Partnership,” where panelists discussed their experiences moving in the direction of partnership, as well as some of the complexities of intersectionality and how to leverage one’s LGBTQ+ identity to work as an asset. In conjunction with the conference, Beth and [Brady Craig](#), co-chairs of [BR Pride](#), also hosted a networking reception at Porta Philadelphia for clients and Lavender Law attendees.

Blank Rome Earns Perfect Score in 2019 Corporate Equality Index

Blank Rome received a perfect score of 100 percent on the 2019 Corporate Equality Index, a national benchmarking survey and report on corporate policies and practices related to LGBTQ workplace equality, administered by the Human Rights Campaign (“HRC”) Foundation. With this score, Blank Rome has been designated for the [fourth year in a row](#) as a “Best Place to Work for LGBTQ Equality” by the HRC Foundation, and joins the ranks of major U.S. businesses that earned top marks this year.



A Panel Discussion on Current Issues Facing the LGBTQ+ Community

In celebration of Pride Month, **BR Pride** held a special Firm-wide program highlighting the pressing issues facing the LGBTQ+ community today and the importance of protecting against recent rollbacks of advances made over the past decade. The event was held on June 24, 2019, at our Firm's Washington, D.C., office, and featured a panel discussion, Q&A session, and cocktail reception.

The panel featured guest speakers from Whitman-Walker Health, The Trevor Project, and SAGE. Ahead of the event, Blank Rome held a Firm-wide Jeans Day, with proceeds benefiting these nonprofit organizations, each of which advocates for and provides crucial services to members of the LGBTQ+ community. Learn more about our esteemed group of panelists below.



Amy Nelson, Whitman-Walker Health

Amy Nelson is the director of legal services at Whitman-Walker Health (“WWH”), a community health center offering holistic services, including free legal services, to the LGBTQI and HIV communities, and others regardless of status or income. WWH works with 3,000 clients every year where 20 percent identify as trans and 24 percent identify as immigrants. Amy currently serves on the board of May Is All About Trans and the Mayor’s Advisory Committee on Street Harassment. Amy also serves on the D.C. Bar Board of Governors and co-teaches “Public Interest Lawyering: Access to Health Care” at Georgetown University Law Center.



Casey Pick, The Trevor Project

Casey Pick serves as a senior fellow for advocacy and government affairs at The Trevor Project. Casey leads The Trevor Project’s work in advancing policies and positions that support LGBTQ youth in crisis by executing The Trevor Project’s advocacy agenda on the federal, state, and local level and in the executive, legislative, and judicial branches. Casey’s role focuses not just on LGBTQ issues, but also on mental health and suicide prevention overall, with a major focus on leading The Trevor Project’s efforts to end conversion therapy.



Aaron Tax, SAGE

Aaron Tax is the director of advocacy for SAGE, the country’s largest and oldest organization dedicated to improving the lives of LGBT older people. He advocates for LGBT-inclusive federal aging policies that account for the unique needs of LGBT older adults. Until June 2011, Aaron served as the legal director at Servicemembers Legal Defense Network (“SLDN”), the leading organization challenging “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” (“DADT”) in Congress and in the courts. He started there as a staff attorney in 2006, and for nearly five years at SLDN, he took part in a multifaceted approach to advancing the civil rights of LGBT servicemembers through law, policy, outreach, and education. As the legal director, Aaron was responsible for running the legal services program at SLDN, the only organization providing free legal services to service members impacted by DADT and related forms of discrimination, including those who are HIV positive and/or transgender. □

A Conversation with Human Rights Campaign President Alphonso David

By Sophia Lee



Alphonso David

Alphonso David is a civil rights attorney, policymaker, advocate, and law professor with significant litigation and management experience in the public, private, and nonprofit sectors. Alphonso has been at the forefront of the movement for LGBTQ+ equality for more than a decade and worked at both the state and national level. This past summer, the Human Rights Campaign announced that Alphonso will serve as its incoming president. I was fortunate enough to have the opportunity to speak with Alphonso, a longtime friend since law school and a former Blank Rome litigation attorney, about his accomplished career and his new journey ahead.

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I want to start off by congratulating you on your new appointment as president of the Human Rights Campaign! What an amazing accomplishment. What are some of the opportunities you're looking forward to in this new role?

I am proud to serve as the new president of the Human Rights Campaign, which is the largest lesbian, gay, bi-sexual, transgender, and queer ("LGBTQ") civil rights organization in the world. As I embark on this journey, I am focused on ensuring that we break down barriers and silos that too often separate us as human beings. LGBTQ people face a myriad of obstacles and challenges, both in this country and globally, which range from bias in the workplace to violence on the streets; from persecution in other countries to lack of economic opportunity in this country. We will be working on multiple fronts with our community, corporate, and global partners to ensure that the rights of LGBTQ people are protected, and we will use all tools available to us, including legislation, litigation, education, and outreach efforts to protect those rights.

Q

And how has your career as a civil rights attorney prepared you to lead the Human Rights Campaign?

My extensive management, legislative, policy, and advocacy experience has prepared me to take on this role. At this time when we are confronting daunting challenges and threats against the LGBTQ community, my experience working with a variety of tools to protect the rights of the disenfranchised and marginalized will be essential.

Q

You began your legal career as a summer associate and then litigation associate at Blank Rome. What skills or lessons did you learn during your time here?

At Blank Rome, I acquired key negotiating, drafting, and courtroom skills that served as pillars for my growth and development as a lawyer and advocate.

Q

You were recently named to *City and State New York's* 2019 Pride Power 100. Could you tell us more about the integral role you played in securing marriage equality in New York?

After spending three years litigating the right to marry in New York, I shifted from litigation to legislation and from the not-for-profit sector to the government sector. In the courts, we fought for the right to marry, arguing that marriage was not only a fundamental right for all, but that refusal to allow same-sex couples the right to marry violated the equal protection clause. The trial court agreed but, ultimately, the New York high court failed to honor those principles. I then shifted my practice to government—serving as the deputy attorney general for civil rights at the New York Attorney General's Office and then serving as the deputy secretary for civil rights in the New York Governor's Office. As deputy secretary, I played a key role in drafting, negotiating, and advancing the Marriage Equality Act in New York. The text of the bill is two and a half pages, but the drafting and negotiation took months. Central to the debate were two questions: 1) whether same-sex couples should have the right to marry; and 2) which exceptions could or should apply. The first question was not negotiable. We felt that marriage was a fundamental right that should be afforded to all adults. The second question resulted in extensive deliberations and, ultimately, we refused to allow carve outs that would have eradicated the human rights law, which is the oldest civil rights law in the country (drafted in 1945). Allowing carve outs would have effectively created a second tier of marriages, effectively enshrining discrimination into law. We were able to successfully engage with all stakeholders to create a bill that not only secured the right to marry for same-sex couples, but did so without diminishing those relationships under law or eroding existing civil rights laws.

Q

You were the first black and openly gay man to serve as chief legal counsel to the governor of New York, and you are now the first person of color to serve as president of the Human Rights Campaign. Can you share with us, in your own words, why representation in these kinds of roles matter?

Representation matters in all roles, and particularly in positions of influence and leadership. When companies and institutions recognize the value and the talent that diverse candidates bring to the table, they not only develop better work product, but they create a better working environment.

Q

Given your busy career and active life, what do you like to do in your spare time or as a hobby?

Recognizing the limited free time I have, I work to incorporate things I love into my life. I love films (Krzysztof Kieslowski, Pedro Almodovar, Steve McQueen, Wong Kar Wai, Barry Jenkins), books (James Baldwin, Gore Vidal), music (Aretha Franklin, Sia, Ludovico Einaudi), exercise (cross training, rock climbing, running), yoga (vinyasa), and spending quality time with family and friends.

Q

What's the best life advice you were ever given, either professional or personal?

Your life will shrink or expand proportional to your courage. □



Celebrating Heritage History Months

ASIAN PACIFIC AMERICAN HERITAGE MONTH

The Blank Rome Houston Diversity Committee with guest speaker **Mai Tran** (pictured third from left).

Houston Asian Pacific American Heritage Month Event

Blank Rome's Houston Diversity Committee held a special event in honor of Asian Pacific American Heritage Month on May 28, 2019, at our Firm's Houston office. The event featured guest speaker **Mai Tran**, now an American citizen and successful business owner, who shared the experience of her family placing her on a fishing boat to escape communism in Vietnam. She survived multiple attacks by pirates, spent a year in a United Nations refugee camp, and ultimately arrived in the United States as a teenager.



(Left photo) L to R: **Diana Eng**, **Michael Kim**, **Morgan Mouchette**, **Diedra Idehen**, and **Brian Idehe**.

(Right photo) L to R: **Alphonso David**, **Jane Kauh**, **Sophia Lee**, and **James Boney**.



New York Asian Pacific American Heritage Month Event

The New York attorneys of Blank Rome's **BR United** affinity group celebrated Asian Pacific American Heritage Month with clients by hosting an event on May 14, 2019, at the Museum of Chinese in America ("MOCA"), which pays tribute to Chinese immigrants' contributions to America. MOCA provided a private tour for attendees followed by a networking reception with dim sum and drinks from the iconic Nom Wah Tea Parlor.

And Then They Came for Us: Lessons for Today from Japanese-American Incarceration During World War II

Blank Rome and the Asian Pacific American Bar Association of Pennsylvania (“APABA-PA”) hosted “*And Then They Came for Us: Lessons for Today from Japanese-American Incarceration During World War II*,” on May 16, 2019, at our Firm’s Philadelphia office. The program began with a screening of the documentary, *And Then They Came for Us*, which examines the cultural and political environment that enabled the incarceration of more than 120,000 Japanese-Americans following the signing of Executive Order 9066 in 1943 and which received a 2018 American Bar Association Silver Gavel Award.



L to R: **Nydia Han**, Philadelphia Court of Common Pleas Judge **Stella Tsai**, **Sophia Lee**, **Karen Korematsu**, and APABA-PA President **Melissa Pang**.

A panel discussion followed, addressing the parallels that can be drawn between Japanese-American incarceration during World War II and current events. The panel, moderated by Blank Rome Partner **Sophia Lee**, featured APABA-PA member **Gerald Kita**, a U.S. patent attorney, whose family was incarcerated during World War II; **Karen Korematsu**, founder and executive director of the Fred T. Korematsu Institute; **Craig Green**, professor of law at Temple University James E. Beasley School of Law; and **Tuan Samahon**, professor of law at Villanova University Charles Widger School of Law.



L to R: **Sophia Lee**, APABA-PA President **Melissa Pang**, **Craig Green**, **Karen Korematsu**, **Gerald Kita**, and **Tuan Samahon**.

Black Women Making History

Blank Rome held a special program focusing on the unique challenges and accomplishments of black women in America, “Black Women Making History,” on Thursday, February 28, 2019, at our Firm’s Philadelphia office. The event featured a networking reception, Q&A discussion, and cocktail reception. Blank Rome Associate **Melanie S. Carter** moderated the panel, which included the **Honorable Gladys M. Brown**, Chairman, Pennsylvania Public Utility Commission; **Tianna K. Kalogerakis**, President, Barristers Association of Philadelphia, Inc.; the **Honorable Denise Smyler**, General Counsel, Commonwealth of Pennsylvania; and **Sharmain Matlock-Turner**, President and CEO, Urban Affairs Coalition.



L to R: **Sophia Lee**, **Hon. Denise Smyler**, **Hon. Gladys Brown**, **Sharmain Matlock-Turner**, **Tianna Kalogerakis**, **Christopher Lewis**, and **Melanie Carter**.



L to R: **Santiago Vallejo**, **Chris Joseph**, **Judge Darrell William Jordan**, **Julie Seifert**, **Tameka Smith**, **Peggy Averett**, and **Andre Davison**.

Houston Black History Month Celebration

Blank Rome’s Houston Diversity Committee hosted a Black History Month lunch celebration on February 28, 2019, for staff and attorneys. Attendees were both educated and entertained by guest speaker **Darrell William Jordan**, Judge for the Harris County Criminal Court at Law No. 16,

who spoke about cash-bail reform in Harris County and across the nation. He provided practical examples of why the cash-bail system in Harris County is a violation of poor people’s rights and explained how diversity played an important role in overcoming adverse circumstances in his life.

A Celebration of D.C. Black History

Blank Rome's **Diversity and Inclusion Committee** and **BR United** affinity group held an event to honor Black History Month on February 21, 2019, at our Firm's Washington, D.C., office. The event featured an inspiring celebration and educational discussion about the historical figures who contributed to Washington, D.C.'s remarkable black history. The esteemed guest speaker for the event was **Dr. Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham**, Harvard University-Chair of the Department of History and Victor S. Thomas Professor of History and of African and African American Studies, and a revolving slide show presented facts about African Americans who were influential in black history in Washington, D.C.



L to R: **Sophia Lee, Saminaz Akhter, Dr. Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, Shawn Wright, Brooke Iley, Christopher Lewis, Karyn Cleveland-Barnes, and Kenneth Morrow.**

Leading the Charge with New York State Attorney General Letitia James

Blank Rome's **BR United** affinity group hosted the discussion, "Leading the Charge with New York State Attorney General Letitia James," on February 20, 2019, at our Firm's New York office. The event offered an exclusive opportunity to hear from the **Honorable Letitia James**, the newly elected attorney general of New York. With her victory, she became the first woman in New York to be elected attorney general, the first African American woman to be elected to statewide office, and the first black person to serve as attorney general.



L to R: **Christopher Lewis, Diana Eng, Hon. Letitia James, Morgan Mouchette, Sophia Lee, and Alan Rubin.**

Reflections on Irish American History Month

By Krystal Kane



Krystal Kane

March was Irish American History Month and while for some that just means St. Patrick's Day, for me it is an opportunity to reflect on my family's Irish heritage and the way in which it has impacted my life. My great-great-grandmother emigrated from Ireland in her late teens, after she was

widowed at a very young age. She raised my great-grandfather and his siblings in Chester, PA, before moving the whole family up to Scranton. At the time, Chester was a booming industrial town, and Scranton was one of the most happening cities in the entire state of Pennsylvania. I'm not sure why they relocated, exactly, but it may have been to be closer to other Irish/Irish-American people. All of this information was found by my sister, who did a lot of family history research.

My great-great-grandmother died a few years before I was born, but I grew up with my great-grandfather, John Arthur Kane, who we all called Papa. He and my great-grandmother, Grandma Lil, lived so close that I could walk to their house alone, and raid their cookie jar and refrigerator for Donald Duck grapefruit juice. (I found out much, much later that Grandma Lil kept the grapefruit juice just for me, because apparently, normal children don't generally like sour juice.) Papa loved telling us absolutely wild stories, in the Irish tradition, and we were so young that we believed them all. My cousin Brian and I spent hours looking for buried treasure, which *obviously* existed on their property. He would take us on long walks, using his shillelagh, which was a very ornately carved walking stick. He would point out fairy mounds and other magical things to us. Brian and I were very fortunate to get to spend so much time with our great-grandfather. We were the oldest cousins on that side of the family, and we lost Papa when Brian was 10 and I was seven. None of our younger siblings or cousins really remember him.

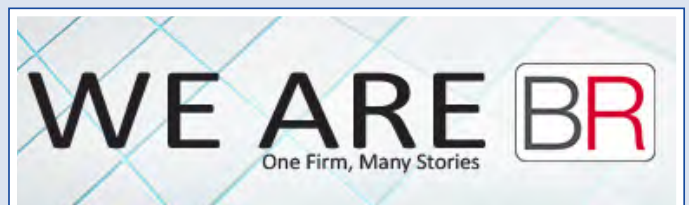
Scranton has a very large Irish American population, so even without Papa, we were immersed in Irish culture. Scranton has one of the largest St. Patrick's Day parades in the entire United States, which we went to every year as kids. We also regularly ate Irish food at home, including ham and cabbage, and were raised to know that part of our heritage.

As an adult, I have been involved with Irish and Irish American groups. In law school, I was president of the Brehon Law Society, the affinity group for Irish American students and other "friends of Ireland." I ran an immigration clinic at the Irish Immigration and Pastoral Center in Upper Darby, working with mostly Irish immigrants in need of citizenship assistance. We also put on community information sessions regarding immigration topics, and the center hosted regular programming to bring the Irish community together. The seniors group would meet before our immigration clinic, and would fill us up on biscuits and Barry's Tea ("never that American garbage," as one of the ladies told me).

One of the highlights of my law school career, and as president of the Brehon Law Society, was the opportunity to participate in the 2012 U.S./Ireland Legal Symposium. We volunteered to help with registration and check-in, in exchange for the ability to sit on in some of the sessions. At this event, while I was handling the registration table, the Taoiseach (Prime Minister) of Ireland, Enda Kenny, came over and introduced himself to me. The Taoiseach was the guest of honor at this event, and I am still amazed that I had the opportunity to meet him, and that he was kind enough to introduce himself to a group of law students.

I am very, very proud to live in a country where we all have different backgrounds and experiences, and I like to think we're carrying on Papa's legacy for my niece and nephew, who are extremely proud of being Irish even if they aren't quite old enough to know what that means yet. I am also very fortunate to have had the influence of my great-grandmother until she died in 2010 at age 96. ▢

This story was originally published in the March 2019 edition of WE ARE BR, an internal forum created to foster deeper connections amongst Blank Rome's colleagues by sharing the many rich and diverse stories that weave together to create our collective Firm culture.



Blank Rome's 2019 Summer Associates Class

Blank Rome was proud to welcome a diverse and talented group of summer associates to our Firm's Houston, Los Angeles, New York, Philadelphia, and Washington, D.C., offices this past May. The 2019 class featured 23 first- and second-year law students from 15 law schools who participated in various legal assignments and professional development activities throughout the summer. Notably, on July 16, 2019, our summer associates from across the country convened in our Firm's New York office to participate in our inaugural Innovation Hackathon. Participants collaborated in teams to develop and present fresh ideas focused on client service and new associate integration. Our Firm received some creative and compelling ideas that we look forward to implementing. ▣



Blank Rome's summer associates at the Philadelphia Art Museum.



Blank Rome's summer associates at our Firm's inaugural Innovation Hackathon in July.

More Blank Rome in the News

In addition to the accolades and stories featured throughout this edition of *Perspectives*, below are some recent recognitions, appointments, and events that our attorneys have made headlines with. For a full list of recent news items, visit blankrome.com/diversity-inclusion.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Blank Rome Welcomes Experienced Government Contracts Partner Dominique Casimir



Dominique L. Casimir

Blank Rome is pleased to announce that [Dominique L. Casimir](#) recently joined our Firm as a partner in the [Government Contracts](#) group in the Washington, D.C., office. Dominique's practice focuses on government contracts law with an emphasis on litigation, regulatory counseling, and responding to government enforcement actions. A native Spanish speaker and daughter of immigrants, Dominique is committed to continuing her pro bono work at Blank Rome with a focus on aiding immigrants and those seeking asylum in the United States. Dominique is also dedicated to networking and bringing greater racial diversity to the practice of government contracts law. She recently launched a group of diverse government contracts attorneys (from the government, in-house, and law firms) that convenes quarterly to help with business development, building goodwill among government attorneys, and raising awareness of potential diverse recruits.

Michelle Gervais Joins Top Women in Sports for 2019 NCAA Women's Final Four Tampa Bay Local Advisory Committee



(Left picture) **Michelle Gervais** cutting the net at the NCAA Women's Final Four VIP Tip-Off Party. (Right picture) **Michelle Gervais** (second from right) and other committee members at the NCAA Women's Final Four "Beyond the Baseline—Selection 101" event.

Blank Rome Partner [Michelle M. Gervais](#) was appointed to the 2019 NCAA Women's Final Four Tampa Bay Local Organizing Committee, consisting of 20 local top women in sports responsible for developing a series of community initiatives and events leading up to the NCAA Women's Championship Weekend, held April 5–7, 2019, at the Amalie Arena in Tampa Bay, Florida. The ultimate goal of the committee was to elevate the student-athlete, fan, and visitor experience; drive attendance to the ancillary events and games; and build on the social impact initiatives Tampa Bay started in 2008 and 2015. Michelle and other committee members played a crucial role in organizing a series of family-friendly activities that guests could enjoy leading up to and during Championship Weekend along with the Tampa Bay Sports Commission, Visit Tampa Bay, and the NCAA.



AWARDS

Mark Lee Named to *Philadelphia Business Journal's* Class of 2019 Minority Business Leaders

Blank Rome Partner **Mark M. Lee** was named a Minority Business Leader of 2019 by the *Philadelphia Business Journal*. This recognition honors minority men and women in the greater Philadelphia region for their professional accomplishments, contribution to company and city success, community leadership, and philanthropy. The 25 honorees were celebrated at the annual Minority Business Leader Awards program, held on August 15, 2019, at the Ballroom at the Ben, and profiled in special section of the *Philadelphia Business Journal*.



Mark Lee pictured with his wife **Nayahmka Lee** and their children at the *Philadelphia Business Journal's* Minority Business Leaders Awards.

Stephen Orlofsky Inducted into the Officer Candidate School Hall of Fame at Fort Benning

Blank Rome Partner **Stephen M. Orlofsky**, a former district judge and magistrate judge for the District of New Jersey, who served as a captain in the U.S. Army, Field Artillery, from 1966 to 1970, was inducted into the Officer Candidate School ("OCS") Hall of Fame, at Fort Benning, Georgia, on April 29, 2019. Stephen was also inducted into the OCS Hall of Fame (Durham Hall), at Fort Sill, Oklahoma, on May 21, 1999. The OCS Hall of Fame is intended to honor individuals who have distinguished themselves in military or civilian pursuits.



Stephen Orlofsky joins the OCS Hall of Fame at Fort Benning, Georgia.

Russell Wong Receives Justice David Wellington Chew Award from the Asian Pacific Interest Section of the State Bar of Texas

Blank Rome Partner **Russell T. Wong** received the 2019 Justice David Wellington Chew Award, the highest honor awarded by the Asian Pacific Interest Section ("APIS") of the State Bar of Texas, which recognizes the outstanding achievements, commitment, and leadership of a lawyer who has paved the way for the advancement of other Asian Pacific American attorneys. He was presented with the prestigious award at the 24th Annual APIS Conference and Awards Gala, held on April 26, 2019, in Austin, Texas.



L to R: APIS Chair **Chi Reece**, **Russell Wong**, and APIS Council Member **Daniel D. Hu**.

Judge James T. Giles Receives Distinguished Advocate Award by the Support Center for Child Advocates

Blank Rome Of Counsel [James T. Giles](#), a former chief judge of the U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of Pennsylvania, received the Distinguished Advocate Award from the Support Center for Child Advocates in recognition of his extraordinary efforts and countless hours devoted to improving the lives of abused and neglected children. James was presented with the award at the Support Center for Child Advocates 2019 Annual Benefit Reception and Auction, held on Wednesday, April 10, 2019, at the Crystal Tea Room in Philadelphia.



L to R: Thomas Szymanski, James Giles, Asima Ahmad, and Rosemary McKenna.

Blank Rome Attorneys Recognized as *The Philadelphia Inquirer's* 2019 Influencers of Law

Blank Rome Of Counsel [James T. Giles](#) and Partners [Sophia Lee](#) and [Anthony B. Haller](#) were selected as *The Philadelphia Inquirer's* 2019 Influencers of Law award recipients, a recognition that honors Philadelphia's leading lawyers who have "shaped, changed, and transformed the legal industry." As part of the select group of 54 winners, James was honored in the Lifetime Achievement category, Sophia in the Business Litigation category, and Anthony in the Employment Litigation category.



L to R: [Sophia Lee](#), [James Giles](#), and [Anthony Haller](#) at the 2019 Influencers of Law Awards Luncheon.

EVENTS

U Street Walking Tour

Blank Rome's attorneys and summer associates from our Firm's Washington, D.C., office went on a U Street Walking Tour on June 28, 2019, which highlighted historical African American landmarks in the area. The tour was coordinated by Shellee Haynesworth of Black Broadway on U, and was guided by Rahulamin Quander, a retired administrative judge from Washington, D.C. Pictured is the group at the YMCA on 12th Street, which was established in 1853 by Anthony Bowen, a former slave, and was the first YMCA in the country to admit African Americans.



Blank Rome's summer associates from our Philadelphia office and members of our Firm's Diversity and Inclusion Committee at the Philadelphia Chinese Lantern Festival.



Blank Rome's D.C. summer associates on a U Street Walking Tour.

Evening at the Philadelphia Chinese Lantern Festival

Blank Rome's Philadelphia summer associates and members of our Firm's Diversity and Inclusion Committee and BR United and BR Pride affinity groups gathered for a night of food, arts, and entertainment at the Philadelphia Chinese Lantern Festival on July 9, 2019. The lantern festival is a famous, one-of-a-kind event held in Philadelphia's Franklin Square that features beautiful, large illuminated sculptures and authentic performances.

Nathaniel R. Jones Professor of Law Reception

The Loyola University School of Law held a reception on March 14, 2019, celebrating the appointment of Neil Williams, J.D., as the inaugural Nathaniel R. Jones Professor of Law. The professorship was established this year to honor the distinguished legal career of Blank Rome Of Counsel [Nathaniel R. Jones](#), who has served as a judge on the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Sixth Circuit and as general counsel of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. The professorship will support meaningful research and scholarship that exemplifies the distinguished legal career of Nathaniel R. Jones and his abiding commitment to the pursuit of justice and equality for all.



Neil Williams (far left) and **Nathaniel Jones** (second from left) at the Nathaniel R. Jones Professor of Law Reception.

An Afternoon with District Attorney Kim Ogg

Blank Rome, in collaboration with the Stonewall Law Association of Greater Houston and the Houston Bar Association's Gender Fairness Committee, was proud to host "An Afternoon with District Attorney Kim Ogg" on March 4, 2019, at our Firm's Houston office. The event featured a conversation with Harris County District Attorney Kim Ogg about issues affecting the LGBTQ+ community and women in the bar, perspectives from her trailblazing career, and professionalism. Following her remarks was an interactive Q&A and a networking reception.





L to R: **Russell Wong**; Harris County District Court **Judge Ravi K. Sandhill**, and Assistant U.S. Attorney **Daniel D. Hu**.

Reception Celebrating Diversity and Houston's Newly-Elected Judges

Blank Rome was proud to sponsor The Coalition of Houston Diverse Bar Association's judicial reception celebrating the newly elected judges in Harris County, held on February 4, 2019. Blank Rome Partners [Russel T. Wong](#) and [John A. Adkins](#) attended the event. The coalition includes the Asian American Bar Association of Houston, Hispanic Bar Association of Houston, Houston Lawyers Association, Korean American Bar Association of Texas, Mexican American Bar Association of Houston, Middle Eastern Bar Association of Houston, and the South Asian Bar Association of Houston.



Harris County's newly elected judges at The Coalition of Houston Diverse Bar Association's judicial reception.

Blank Rome Hosts Transgender Name Change Clinic at William Way LGBT Community Center

Blank Rome was proud to once again partner with the Transgender Legal Defense and Education Fund ("TLDEF") and PECO/Exelon to host a transgender name change legal clinic on July 24, 2019. The clinic was held at the William Way LGBT Community Center. Through the TLDEF initiative, Blank Rome has worked with name change clients in Philadelphia, Houston, New York City, and Pittsburgh.



SPEAKING ENGAGEMENTS

Philadelphia Diversity & Inclusion Conference CEO Roundtable

Blank Rome Partner **Sophia Lee** moderated the “CEO Roundtable” panel at the 2019 Diversity & Inclusion Conference Philadelphia, held March 25–26, 2019. The panel featured national business leaders from the private and public sectors who are fostering a positive and productive workplace. The esteemed group of panelists were **Don Welsh**, President and CEO, Destinations International; **Nina Vaca**, Founder, CEO and Chairman, Pinnacle Group; **Angel Montesdeoca**, Product Manager of AI Technology, IBM & Chairman of IBM’s Generation Next; and **Anu Saxena**, Senior Vice President & Global Head, Hilton Supply Management.



Sophia Lee (far left) at the 2019 Philadelphia Diversity & Inclusion Conference CEO Roundtable.



Sophia Lee (left) and **Judge Stella Tsai** at the Temple APALSA Lunar Banquet.

2019 Temple APALSA Lunar Banquet

Blank Rome Partner **Sophia Lee** and **Stella Tsai**, Judge for the Philadelphia Court of Common Pleas, delivered the keynote address on “Cracking the Bamboo Ceiling” at Temple University’s Asian Pacific American Law Student Association (“APALSA”) 2019 Lunar Banquet, held on February 8, 2019. Temple APALSA serves as a resource group for Asian Pacific American law students and offers a forum to examine issues relevant to the Asian Pacific American community locally and nationally and to explore the various opportunities for Asian Pacific American lawyers. □

DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION COMMITTEE

Chair: Sophia Lee

Houston: Jeremy Herschaft • Domingo Llagostera

Los Angeles: Shadi Enos Jahangir • Jason Kim •
Linda Kornfeld

New York: Michael Scheffler

Philadelphia: Yelena Barychev • Lisa Casey Spaniel •
James Giles • Mark Lee • Charles Marion

Pittsburgh: Eddie Edwards

Princeton: Adrienne Rogove

Washington, D.C.: James Kelly • John Gibbons

Wilmington: Victoria Guilfoyle

Ex-Officio: Alan Hoffman • Grant Palmer •
Brooke Iley • Kathleen Cunningham •
Mark Rabinowitz • Julie Dressing •
Donna Branca • Ori Portnoy • Lisa Bochner •
Karyn Cleveland-Barnes • Ellisa Cruz

Emeritus: Susan Bickley • Deborah Franzblau •
Nathaniel Jones • Christopher Lewis

DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION MISSION STATEMENT

Blank Rome is committed to excellence in our fields of endeavor. We recognize that a diversity of ideas, backgrounds, and experiences is crucial to fulfilling this commitment. We endeavor to recruit, hire, promote, and retain—on the basis of demonstrated talent and initiative—individuals throughout our Firm representing, among other things, different races, genders, ethnic groups, religions, sexual orientations, and national origins. We also endeavor to be inclusive of individuals with disabilities. □

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blankrome.com/diversity-inclusion

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