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## Debo P. Adegbile Featured in New Book on Diversity in Big Law

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[Debo P. Adegbile](#), a WilmerHale partner, is featured in a [new book](#) about the challenges of achieving greater diversity in Big Law and what it takes to succeed as a lawyer from a historically underrepresented group in a profession where white men still hold a hugely disproportionate share of partnerships and leadership positions.

The book, *Raising the Bar: Diversifying Big Law — A Conversation with Four Partners of Color at Leading Law Firms*, (The New Press: 2109) resulted in part from a fall 2017 roundtable discussion at New York University Law School's Center on Race, Inequality, and the Law. Besides Mr. Adegbile, the conversation included partners at several other firms: Lisa Davis at Frankfurt Kurnit Klein & Selz; Damaris Hernandez at Cravath Swain & Moore; and Theodore Wells at Paul, Weiss, Rifkind, Wharton & Garrison LLP.

The lawyers acknowledged the real progress the legal field, like American society at large, has made in lifting barriers to women and people of color. For instance, two women and two African Americans have held the post of US attorney general (Loretta Lynch was a twofer). Black lawyers have become leaders of some of the nation's largest corporations and law firms.

But none of that offsets the still-small numbers of partners of color in Big Law, or the fact that women are not close to reaching parity with men in their percentage of partnerships. The partners spoke of the special challenges that come with their partnerships, including being perceived as "the conscience" of the firm and their sense of obligation to help younger lawyers of color succeed.

"...My fundamental contention is that great lawyers are not born, they're made," Mr. Adegbile said. "There is nobody who is born a great lawyer... Great lawyers are made through experience, through hard work, through studying the craft, through making mistakes, through taking some lumps and getting back up and learning from them. And from connecting with people who are willing to invest in you, take you under their wing, and help guide you in whatever environment you're in. So the contribution I try to make is to give back in some small way to lawyers who are looking for guidance in their careers."

At another point, Mr. Adegbile emphasized that for more diversity to happen, firm management must

be intensely focused on it. "...It's critical to have some firms and firm leaders who are making an affirmative commitment to move the dial—to change things and to go boldly in that direction, perhaps to show what it looks like to lead, and then folks will follow. It happens with salaries, it's going to happen with diversity."

In [a review](#) of the book published in *Law360*, US District Judge Ruben Castillo wrote: "'Raising the Bar' is one of the first honest assessments about life at a large firm. It is a must-read for Big Law management as well as any minority or female law student who is contemplating a career in Big Law. It offers candid assessments by experienced and capable Big Law partners and provides a real guide for female and minority associates who are currently navigating the difficult waters of Big Law. The most significant potential readership of this pathbreaking book are Big Law management committee members. This last key audience arena represents the key target for real change in the future."