

Goodwin Liu Tackles Asian-American Stereotypes



Summary: *California Supreme Court Justice Goodwin Liu is one of very few Asian-Americans in top positions in the legal industry throughout the country and he explains some reasons why.*

Asian-Americans hold very few top legal jobs in the country. Of the top positions on state supreme courts, other state courts, federal benches, and as top prosecutors, there are very few of Asian-American descent. There is just a handful serving on state supreme courts.

Goodwin Liu became the fourth sitting member of Asian descent in 2011 on the seven-member California Supreme Court. In a study done by Liu and Yale law students, the grasp on how few there are is understood better. The highest positions are lacking even though Asian-Americans are well-represented among the country's attorneys.

Liu said, "They have a foot in the door in virtually every sector of the legal profession. The question now is how wide that door's going to swing open for them."

He accredits his success to two mentors: U.S. Rep Bob Matsui and former Yale Law School Dean Harold Koh. With these two Asian-American leaders to look up to, Liu became a law professor and then associate dean at the University of California, Berkeley. President Barack Obama nominated him to the federal appeals court in 2010. California Gov. Jerry Brown swore Liu into the state Supreme Court soon after.

As of 2015, of the 97 appellate court judges only two were Asian-American. The California Supreme Court currently has three Asian-American justices since one retired in 2014.

Asians are the fastest-growing racial group in the country, making up over 5 percent of the population. They make up an even larger percent of law school students, with many of them graduating from top institutions. Even with these large numbers, there are very few in leadership positions.

In the survey, they asked over 600 Asian-American lawyers. The responses showed several points that may be serving as barriers. One of those points was the lack of parents or mentors in the legal field. As a way of countering the lack of mentorship providing Asian-Americans with the motivation to take on leadership roles, Liu suggests that law students seek out public speaking opportunities and to "break from what came" before them.

On a final note, Liu urges Asian-Americans to not let stereotypes hold them back. He said, "I think for people who feel like they are going into places that are unfamiliar to them and who defy what perhaps is conventional expectation, you always feel like you're an imposter. There's always that feeling like, 'Oh, one day they're going to find me out.'"

Do you think Asian-Americans face unfair barriers in the legal industry? Tell us in the comments below.

To learn more about stereotypes in lawyers, read these articles:

- [Why Are Older Female Attorneys Leaving Law?](#)
- [Law Firm Under Fire For Keeping Male and Female Attorneys Apart](#)
- [Law Recruiter Explains Why Older Attorneys Struggle to Join Firms](#)

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