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## Belief *in* Change

*Greenberg Traurig's  
Ernest LaMont Greer  
challenges the status quo,  
in the office and  
out of it.*

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A SPECIAL ADVERTISING SUPPLEMENT TO  
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PHOTO BY BYRON SMALL/ATLANTA BUSINESS CHRONICLE

# Belief *in* Change

*Greenberg Traurig's  
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By Eva Saviano

**W**hen Ernest LaMont Greer first assisted in litigation work during summer clerkships at top law firms Armstrong Teasdale, Skadden Arps, and Alston & Bird, he realized fairly quickly that he patently wanted nothing to do with litigation. Instead, he felt a calling to do corporate work. Yet today, Greer is co-president of Greenberg Traurig, a global law firm with more than 1,900 attorneys in nine countries, and one of Atlanta's prominent litigators. He previously served as managing shareholder of the firm's Atlanta office and co-chair of the firm's U.S. strategic committee—all of which implies the younger Mr. Greer had spoken too soon.

Even before Greer rebuffed the initial idea of litigation, he balked at the prospect of law school at all. He declined a full-tuition-paid offer to attend law school at Washington University in St. Louis, because they would not let him defer his admission for a year. Later, Greer accepted an offer of full tuition and a stipend from Northwestern University, an offer that just made sense—dollars and cents. Greer says, “My original intent was to go to law school, then enroll in the Kellogg School of Management at Northwestern. But in the meantime, I got married, my wife enrolled there, and she was in business school with new friends....” So stick with the law he did, and the professional legal world saw the birth of one of its most talented attorneys.

In 1992, the Harvard University and Northwestern Pritzker School of Law graduate was a clerk for Hon. Damon J. Keith, U.S. Court of Appeals for the Sixth Circuit, and noticed that in the corporate law game, a solo practitioner's chances were slim. With his eye on the prize of being able to best serve his future and that of his family, he once again turned to litigation, and he hasn't looked back since.

Originally from St. Louis, Missouri, Greer's family moved to the suburbs when he was six years old, and that is where, after completing eighth grade in the University City school system, Greer found himself at St. Louis Country Day School, a private school where Greer, a scholarship and financial aid student, was the only African-American in his ninth grade class. By the time he graduated in 1984, only a second black student was matriculating in Greer's high school class at Country Day, numbers that, as Greer moved into his higher education and professional life, did not necessarily see significant improvements.

## “No matter how educated people may be, that cultural dynamic still exists.”

“Law firms have to do a better job of making minority students and attorneys feel comfortable in their ranks,” says Greer. “We must recognize that, as a fundamental matter, many minorities do not grow up in the same communities as Caucasians. Segregation typically starts in high schools and occurs even more in the college ranks; someone integrated in high school often tends to segregate in college, and segregate even further in graduate school. It is not a forced but a learned segregation.” It is the duty of each law firm, according to Greer, to go out of its way to deliberately create an environment where minority attorneys feel included.

“Many minority attorneys leave law firms relatively quickly; they might feel uncomfortable or fear being considered arrogant or pushy,” says Greer. “No matter how educated people may be, that cultural dynamic still exists, which means firms have to intentionally go out of their way to create opportunities for minority men and women to experience inclusion.”

And Greer is committed to doing his part. He has made endeavors to enhance and further efforts in education, the arts, and the law all across his community. The father of two is on the board of directors for Achieve Atlanta, on the board of trustees

for Children's Healthcare of Atlanta, and on the board of trustees for The Woodruff Arts Center. His recognitions and accolades include being listed in *The Best Lawyers in America* for mass tort litigation/class actions – defendants since 2015, being listed in *Savoy's* “Most Influential Black Lawyers” in 2015, and receiving the 16<sup>th</sup> Annual Justice Robert Benham Award for Community Service from the State Bar of Georgia in 2015. He was formerly chairman of the Georgia Chamber of Commerce—the first attorney in its one-hundred-year history and just the second African-American to hold the position.

“It is fundamentally important to me to be involved with arts, education, and public health...all areas that are critically important to the wellbeing of our children,” says Greer. “I believe, as a general matter, that if two people go to the same school, but one is exposed to the arts, he or she has a better chance to excel than the one who is not. We know that the education gap exists and the challenges that it brings. It's our job as community leaders to help level the playing field.”

In 2005, Greer and his deceased brother, Jose, created an enrichment fund at his high school, Country Day, to provide scholarship money to disadvantaged students. The fund ensures that anyone—not necessarily a minority student—with limited financial means can participate in school-directed extracurricular activities such as visiting New York with the school or going on a trip with the Spanish club, just like his or her peers. Greer also serves as vice chair of the Atlanta History Center, where he intends to make culture and history even more accessible by making exhibits—which speak not just to African-American and Latino communities, but everyone—open to children and visitors who cannot afford to pay admission fees.

“There are many African-American children who do not have the opportunity to be exposed to the arts. Patrice [his wife] and I try to take whatever blessings we have and share them,” says Greer. And he sticks to that principle not only in his off-duty hours.

Three years ago, Greenberg Traurig began its Lawyer for a Day program, a six-week workshop during which students from B.E.S.T. Academy in Atlanta experience realistic business situations, learn how to research, prepare opening statements, and present a case, as well as other real-life skills.

The legal profession continues to lag in diversity, compared with other fields, notes Greer, with big law firms performing the worst on that front, but Greer is focused on reaching out and giving back to attorneys who are new to the craft. “The legal profession must do more than hire minorities,” Greer says. “We have to reach out to the community, get involved with schools and mentoring, encourage minority interest in the law—and keep it there.” ●

# From the Director of Publications



**WELCOME TO THE ANNUAL EDITION** of *Georgia's Best Lawyers*, featuring the **1,453** selected by their peers to be included in *The Best Lawyers in America* for 2016 in Georgia. In this focused yet comprehensive guide you will find top lawyers from **420 firms** practicing in **119 key areas of specialization**. Our aim is to provide you with a shortlist—fewer than five percent of

the region's registered attorneys, in fact—of highly qualified, vetted lawyers in your area of residence. To refine your search and to find out more, we encourage you to visit [BestLawyers.com/Georgia](http://BestLawyers.com/Georgia), our dedicated site for the attorneys listed here, where you can view detailed contact information, in-depth practice area definitions, firm and attorney profiles, office location maps, client testimonials, and more.

We congratulate all who have earned a place in this year's guide and offer special recognition to the **108 lawyers selected for the first time by highlighting their names in green** throughout the publication. In addition, we are thrilled to announce the **103 recipients of the "Lawyer of the Year" award**. Only one lawyer per practice area per metropolitan zone is granted this distinction, based on the highest peer ratings received. Go to page 15 to see the full list.

Turn to page 6 to read our new **In the News** feature, which is a collected sampling of some of the remarkable achievements these lawyers have

accomplished in the last year. Every month, our staff painstakingly searches for noteworthy news items, culling them and whittling them down to one page of content. We couldn't possibly fit all the buzzworthy news in the print edition, so please go to [BestLawyers.com/Georgia](http://BestLawyers.com/Georgia) to find the unabridged list of lawyers in the News. Did we miss something big? Let us know! Email us at [news@bestlawyers.com](mailto:news@bestlawyers.com) and we may include you in the online edition. Plus, don't forget to add us to your firm mailing list also so we can keep track of what's happening in real time.

On the move? Simply scan the QR code on page 4 with your smartphone and take *Georgia's Best Lawyers* with you, wherever you go: **each lawyer with a profile on BestLawyers.com is hyperlinked and highlighted in blue** within this publication, truly putting the power to make an informed decision at your fingertips. Because it's inevitable—at some point in your life, you're going to need a lawyer, and you won't always be able to predict when that need will arise. The lawyers listed in this guide are here to help.

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Best Lawyers' peer-reviewed listings are now published in almost 70 countries around the world, and our presence has grown substantially in the international legal community. The 22<sup>nd</sup> edition of *The Best Lawyers in America* (2016) includes **55,041** attorneys in **139** practice areas, covering all 50 states and the District of Columbia, and inclusion in this year's publication is based on more than **6.7 million** detailed evaluations of lawyers by other lawyers.

### Methodology

1

#### NOMINATION

Lawyers can be nominated by anyone but themselves.

2

#### PEER REVIEW

Current listed lawyers provide feedback on the nominee's work.

3

#### ANALYSIS OF FEEDBACK

Results are calculated and feedback is reviewed.

4

#### ELIGIBILITY CHECK

Nominees are confirmed to be in good standing with their local bar associations.

5

#### RESULTS RELEASED

Firms are informed of results and the list is published.

The Best Lawyers Board of Advisors includes legal luminaries from almost every major world economy as well as general counsel from global companies with business on every continent. This very distinguished group of professionals contributes to our knowledge of an ever-changing legal marketplace to ensure that all of our initiatives are responsive to both the concerns of the legal profession and the needs of clients. Our lists reach more than **17 million readers** in dozens of city and regional publications in the U.S., including *The New York Times*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *The Washington Post*, and *The Chicago Tribune*, as well as in major business and general publications around the world, from *Les Echos* in France to the *Australian Financial Review*, *Business Day* in South Africa, *Expansión* in Spain, and *Handelsblatt* in Germany.

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