

The New Place of Corporate Law Firms in the Structuring of Elite Legal Careers

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For more than a century, a partnership position in a large corporate law firm has almost universally been held out as the singular mark of success for those with a law degree. We find that despite significant transformations in the profession, including dramatic expansion in size and the opening of corporate law positions to women, minorities, and the graduates of lower-ranked schools, the powerful and prestigious positions of corporate law partners remain largely reserved for those with the most elite credentials and other characteristics—male, white, wife at home—that defined law firm partners before the great period of change. By examining the continuity and change in the sorting of legal elites, we find evidence that the experience of a position in a corporate law firm now bestows advantages even for those who do not make partner. What was once deemed a failure—not making partner—is now a source of valued capital that leads to careers in in-house positions, boutique firms, the federal government, and a host of nonequity partner positions. We draw on thirteen years of lawyers’ career histories from the After the JD study, using the techniques of sequence analysis and qualitative interviews.

INTRODUCTION

The large law firm has long been established as the core of power and prestige in the legal profession. Careers in this setting have long been the most sought after by new law graduates, while recruitment into these positions has been tightly controlled. And while the prestige of the large law firm has remained a constant over the past half century or more, both the structure and meaning of a career in a large law firm have changed in fundamental ways.

At the time of the so-called golden age of corporate law in the 1950s and 60s, most graduates of elite schools sought the coveted position of partner in an elite corporate law

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29 firm. They were attracted by the prestige and high pay of corporate partners (Garth
30 2017) and vied for partnership status. Those unable to attain that rare position were
31 considered failures; they were losers in the tournament of lawyers (Galanter and
32 Palay 1991). Today, there have been significant shifts in the legal profession that have
33 implications for the once coveted corporate law careers. The market for legal services
34 has become much more competitive. Law firms have grown enormously, resulting in a
35 broader recruitment strategy that includes a much larger array of law schools and seem-
36 ingly welcomes the women and the racial, ethnic, and religious minorities who were
37 formerly excluded. Significantly, the corporate law firm today continues to attract
38 top talent, but not because of the coveted partnership position. Instead, the model that
39 has been established for at least the past two decades is one in which an entry-level
40 position in a corporate law firm provides access to a kind of finishing school, a
41 place to embellish one's credentials for a career in another practice setting, such as
42 in-house or in a boutique firm (Wilkins and Gulati 1998; Dinovitzer and Garth
43 2007; Garth and Sterling 2009). The transition out of the corporate law firm has been
44 redefined from being a point of failure to a source of capital, and it is changes in the
45 upper hemisphere of the bar that have allowed for this transformation. Most notably,
46 the rise in prestige of corporate counsel (Rosen 1989; Wilkins 2016) and positions in
47 the federal government (Weiser 2009; Feldman 2017) have accompanied and supported
48 this transformation.

49 Yet we do not know who, from among the select group of individuals that begin
50 their careers in the corporate law firm, chooses to vie for partnership positions, who
51 earns them, who moves on to where, and ultimately, whether the corporate law firms
52 provide an equally valuable starting point for all those who begin there. The career
53 trajectories of lawyers who begin their careers in the corporate law firm thus provide
54 an ideal case study of the sorting of elites. The goal of this article is to understand both
55 the individual attributes and contextual circumstances that surround elite careers in
56 law. Not only will this allow us to gain traction on the sorting of elites at the individual
57 level, but by understanding which individuals attain partnership, which move on, and
58 where they move to, we will be able to build a better understanding of the nature
59 of careers in corporate law firms, and ultimately of the legal field (Bourdieu and
60 Wacquant 1992).

61 This article begins by discussing the nature of careers in large law firms as described
62 by researchers in the 1950s and 60s through to the present day. In the so-called golden
63 age of the legal profession, the career in the large law firm was fairly rigid, following an
64 up-or-out system that rewarded the few who made it, while those who did not were
65 conceived of as failures. As we describe below, changes in the profession and in the
66 economy began to restructure these once rigid careers, opening up new opportunities
67 and closing off others, and changing the language and ambitions of those working
68 in this once rarefied setting. We then turn to an empirical examination of lawyer careers
69 in order to provide insight into how careers in corporate law firms unfold in the modern
70 legal profession. We draw on data from the After the JD project (AJD), a national
71 longitudinal survey of lawyers who began to practice in the year 2000, focusing on
72 the trajectories of those who began their careers in the large law firm. Relying on a
73 statistical technique called sequence analysis, we provide an updated perspective from
74 which to understand the sorting of elites in modern legal careers. We then conclude

75 with a discussion of the implications of our findings, and draw on the sociology of
76 Bourdieu to provide some theoretical insights about the modern legal field. In particu-
77 lar, we suggest that the legal field as structured in the 1950s and 1960s faced a number of
78 challenges, including increased growth and competition, the pressure to provide women
79 and minorities access to corporate positions, and the decline in the attractiveness of
80 corporate partnerships even for most elite lawyers. Consistent with Bourdieu, as detailed
81 in the article, the field changed by absorbing the challenge in a way consistent with
82 refurbishing and maintaining the status of corporate partners while preserving the basic
83 hierarchies of law positions, law schools, and the ability of white males with wives at
84 home to occupy most of the positions of power in the firms.

85 THE GOLDEN AGE OF THE CORPORATE LAW FIRM

86 During the so-called golden age of corporate law firms, the corporate law firm was
87 unquestionably at the pinnacle. The law firms also succeeded in persuading businesses
88 run by people like themselves that only this elite level of law could provide high-quality
89 legal services (Gordon 2008). Corporate partners were also considered naturals for
90 governmental service and held board positions in corporations and nonprofits. At
91 the national level, they dominated leading positions in the government, moving back
92 and forth between corporate law firms and positions such as Secretary of State
93 (Kronman 1995).

94 Law graduates competing for positions on Wall Street were overwhelmingly elite
95 law graduates, but the elite credential alone was not sufficient (Ladinsky 1963; Abel
96 1963; Smigel 1964b, 39; Swaine 2007, 748). Smigel (1964b, 72) explained that the
97 large law firm selected new recruits based on three criteria: “lineage, ability, and
98 personality.” Lineage related to both ethnic and religious background, with very few
99 Jewish, Catholic, or Black lawyers working on Wall Street (see also Note 1964;
100 Spector 1972). Lineage was also very much reflected by ties to elite families, with
101 30 percent of the partners of Wall Street’s largest firms listed in the *Social Register*
102 (Smigel 1964a, 22), an exclusive listing of the nation’s most prominent families.
103 Ability was marked by law school pedigree, grades, and law review membership.
104 Smigel (1964a) found that 71 percent of the partners in his sample had a law degree
105 from Harvard, Yale, or Columbia, while almost half of the law review editors from
106 Harvard Law School took jobs on Wall Street. This exclusivity has been documented
107 by many others: Before 1950, 90 percent of Cravath’s partners attended Harvard, Yale,
108 Columbia, or Chicago and were on law review (Swaine 2007), while two studies from
109 Chicago show that well over half of partners in Chicago law firms before the 1970s
110 graduated from an elite law school (Heinz and Laumann 1982; Nelson 1988).
111 Finally, partners exhibited, as Smigel (1964a, 21) put it: “pleasing personalities and
112 ‘clean-cut’ appearances . . . experience in the affairs of the world, and . . . tremendous
113 stamina.” It went without saying that only men could possess these qualities, with
114 firms refusing to even consider female candidates for an associate position (Smigel
115 1964a, 23).

116 The legal field in the golden age thus rewarded the merit of elite degrees but also
117 had a place for social and family capital (Smigel 1964b). Graduates of nonelite law

4 LAW & SOCIAL INQUIRY

118 schools such as the Catholic schools had no access to careers in large law firms, which
119 undergirded the two very separate hemispheres of the legal profession (Carlin 1962;
120 Ladinsky 1963; Smigel 1964b; Heinz and Laumann 1982). The law firm was not chosen
121 by recent graduates as a resume builder or stepping stone. Smigel suggested that the
122 key decision that law students made before graduating is “whether or not to practice
123 in a large law firm” (1964a, 24). Those who did not want the career did not begin
124 in corporate law firms because, in the words of those he interviewed:

125 “I don’t want to get lost in those law factories.” “They make you specialize too
126 soon.” “I don’t care for that kind of impersonal practice.” “I want to help
127 people with their problems.” “The work is too routine.” “You’re not your
128 own boss.” “You don’t get enough responsibility.” “The work is too hard.”
129 “You have to wait too long to become a partner - you can move up faster
130 in a small firm.” “I want to have some time with my family.” “You don’t
131 see clients or learn how to get them.” (Smigel 1964a, 24)

132 The quotes provide two important insights: First, Smigel’s informants did not assert
133 the view that large law firms were good starting points for all legal careers. They either
134 chose the law factories or decided against them. Second, they highlight the various
135 ambitions that were expressed by those who opted out of the large firm: a lack of interest
136 in long work hours or a strenuous work environment, valuing family over work, and an
137 ambition (or impatience) for advancement that did not fit within the confines of the
138 structured career path of the large firm.

139 The overwhelming proportion of those who started in the corporate law firms
140 aspired to be partner (Smigel 1964a, 91), even though the odds were remote that
141 they would attain that position. Smigel also noted the special efforts that were made
142 to disguise the failures to make partner so that those who left the law firm could save
143 face (77). They went on to acceptable careers, mostly through placement with one
144 of the regular clients of the firm into positions of inside counsel (44). The capital of
145 experience and relationships with the corporate law firm thus brought respectable
146 returns after leaving the firm, but the in-house positions at the time were considered
147 relatively low status—indeed thought of mainly as places of refuge for those who did
148 not make partner (Gordon 2008). Inside counsel were the “second class citizens” of
149 the corporate bar, considered to have “sold their professional souls” in order to become
150 “tame” and “kept” lawyers (Rosen 1989, 479).

151 THE TRANSFORMATION OF THE LEGAL PROFESSION AND THE 152 CORPORATE LAW FIRM

153 Well-documented challenges to the relatively stable world of the large law firm
154 accelerated in the 1970s and 1980s, and then again in the late 1990s, with implications
155 for the sorting of elites (e.g., Nelson 1988; Galanter and Henderson 2008; Burk and
156 McGowan 2011). The first transformation of the large law firm followed the expansion
157 of education after World War II, and, coupled with the civil rights and feminist move-
158 ments, it brought a new pool of individuals seeking equal access to the most prestigious

159 positions—including large law firms (Abel 1988). These movements brought pressure to
160 open up the corporate law firms beyond the WASP (White Anglo Saxon Protestant)
161 male graduates of elite law schools. Today, 45 percent of associates at large law firms
162 (with more than 700 lawyers firm-wide) are women and 25 percent are a member of
163 a minority group (NALP 2018). Notably, however, these strides in diversity are largely
164 limited to entry-level positions, with women accounting for only 23 percent of large law
165 firm partners, and minorities 8 percent (NALP 2018). As we will discuss below, the
166 changes in the legal field, including the proliferation of nonequity positions and the
167 rise of inside counsel, provided a sort of relief valve for the large firms, making it easier
168 to accept the women and minorities (as well as other traditional outsiders) who might
169 have sought partnerships, but suspected—or were told—that they would lack what the
170 dominant white male partners deemed “the right stuff for partnership.”

171 Alongside the expansion of education, transformations in the economy and the
172 legal environment fueled the growth of the large law firm. Beginning in the 1970s
173 there was simply more “law” as government regulation increased, the service economy
174 outpaced manufacturing, corporate mergers and acquisitions and leveraged buyouts
175 proliferated, and complex litigation flourished (Galanter and Henderson 2008; Burk
176 and McGowan 2011). Globalization of the economy spurred international trade and
177 financial services, and coupled with the “big bang” of the 1980s that opened the
178 lucrative legal markets of London to foreign firms (Faulconbridge and Muzio 2009),
179 large firms flourished and grew exponentially both in the United States and abroad
180 (Faulconbridge et al. 2008).

181 The growth of the large law firm was impressive: In 1980, only 7 percent of all
182 privately practicing lawyers worked in firms with 100 or more lawyers; that rose to
183 23 percent in 1991 and 33 percent in 2005 (Carson 2012). Not only was there a
184 proliferation of large law firms, the definition of large itself expanded. In 1968 the largest
185 firm had 169 lawyers, yet by 2008 the average size of the 250 largest American law firms
186 was 535 lawyers, with many boasting over 1,000 lawyers (Burk and McGowan 2011;
187 Leipold and Collins 2016). At their peak in 2008, the large law firms collectively hired
188 10,000 entry-level associates in one year. It is no wonder that entry-level positions could
189 no longer be reserved for WASP elite graduates alone.

190 As the large firms expanded, they experienced a number of significant changes that
191 fundamentally impacted their economic model and ultimately the careers of the lawyers
192 that worked in this sector (e.g., Galanter and Henderson 2008; Burk and McGowan
193 2011). These changes are described by Galanter and Henderson (2008) as the “second
194 transformation” of the large law firm, and include increased competition among
195 corporations, reflected also in merger and acquisition activity, which undermined
196 the stable relationships between companies and law firms. This competition brought
197 unprecedented business to the corporate law firms, leading to huge growth in numbers
198 of lawyers and in partner profits. Competition among law firms grew as they vied for
199 lateral hires, especially partners with a large “book of business” (Galanter and
200 Henderson 2008), and it was exacerbated by the rise of high-status inside counsel able
201 to shop among law firms and put pressure on the fees charged by law firms.

202 The competition to keep profits high and the sheer number of starting associates
203 within any given corporate law firm (Gilson and Mnookin 1989) led to a significant
204 restructuring of the up-or-out career model for corporate law firm associates. While

205 the pure up-or-out model was likely never strictly adhered to (even Galanter and Palay's
 206 (1991) description of the original tournament model noted that some of the associates
 207 who did not make partner were kept on under various titles), the enshrinement of
 208 nonequity positions as a career track is a fairly recent development. Henderson
 209 (2006) finds that between 1994 and 2003, 51 percent of firms in the AmLaw 100
 210 switched from a single-tier partnership model (equity only) to a multi-tier partnership
 211 model (equity and nonequity).

212 This new modified tournament is characterized by a proliferation of lawyers in
 213 positions other than associate or equity partner—including nonequity partner, of
 214 counsel, and contract attorney (Galanter and Henderson 2008). It also includes a
 215 lengthening of the time to partnership, increasing hours, increasing profits, increasing
 216 salaries for new associates, and, with the rise of technology, a pressure and ability to
 217 serve clients 24/7. Another significant change is that equity partners no longer have
 218 a guaranteed lifetime status. Partners who do not deliver clients and keep associates
 219 busy could be de-equitized. Between 2009 and 2011, it is estimated that large firms
 220 in the AmLaw 100 de-equitized nearly one out of every fifty partners (Herrmann
 221 2011); hence the characterization by Galanter and Henderson (2008) as a “tournament
 222 without end” rather than a “tournament for partnership” (Galanter and Palay 1991).
 223 Taken together, these developments in the legal profession shifted the calculus of
 224 the choices and range of opportunities available to elite law graduates.

225 **ELITE SORTING: LAW SCHOOLS, CORPORATE LAW FIRMS,**
 226 **AND STRATIFICATION IN LEGAL CAREERS: EVIDENCE FROM**
 227 **AFTER THE JD**

228 In today's world there are two key features of continuity with the golden age of
 229 large law firms: the pull of the large law firm for recent graduates and the strong
 230 connection between equity partnership and elite credentials. Today, law graduates
 231 who have access to large law firms via entry-level positions tend to take them:
 232 Since 1999, law firms of over 250 hired between 10 percent and 15 percent of all
 233 graduating law students (Leipold and Collins 2016), with over half of the graduates
 234 of the country's top-ten law schools taking a position in one of these firms
 235 (National Law Journal 2017). Yet, while many continue to flock to the large law firm,
 236 these positions are increasingly conceived of as apprenticeships or finishing schools,
 237 with associates, especially elite law graduates, eschewing a commitment to the partner-
 238 ship track (Wilkins and Gulati 1998; Garth and Sterling 2009).

239 The contrast with the golden age, which is revealed in the AJD data, is that
 240 lawyers who do not make partner are no longer conceived of as failures. They do
 241 not hide the experience but rather make it a leading feature of their resumes. An
 242 excerpt from a qualitative interview from the AJD emphasizes this point:

243 I've always wanted to work for a big firm you know that was my ... that's
 244 what I've always wanted to do, because it just sounds so cool, right? And it
 245 just sounds really cool, because you go into a room and you're like hey what
 246 firm did you used to work for? Everybody's announcing ... and I really

247 wanted to work for somewhere where people immediately recognize you. So
 248 once I got into [the well-known corporate firm] I just felt like it was like the
 249 Holy Grail. Like I did what I wanted to do I just felt like complete,
 250 you know?

251 As a result, the *experience* of a position in a corporate law firm appears to be a new
 252 form of capital that is translated into positions later in one's career. It is no longer a
 253 question of failing to make partner. It is about membership in an elite club of persons
 254 defined in great part by their affiliation with large law firms. This shift aligns with
 255 broader patterns of interorganizational mobility in careers (Bidwell and Briscoe
 256 2010) and with research that identifies the symbolic benefits that accrue to employees
 257 and to firms from lateral mobility. Indeed, based on a study of law firms in the AmLaw
 258 200, Tan and Rider (2017) find that the exit of associates to high-status competitors
 259 sends a signal to other junior lawyers that this firm is prestigious enough to act as a
 260 stepping stone, thus increasing the firm's prestige.

261 The value of starting in a large law firm has also been amplified by changes in the
 262 upper hemisphere of the bar. In parallel with the transformation of the large law firm
 263 in the 1970s and 80s was the rise in power and prestige of inside counsel. This is an
 264 important part of the story because it allowed the lawyers who left the large firm for
 265 positions as inside counsel to maintain—and sometimes even elevate—their status
 266 (Rosen 1989; Wilkins 2016). The prominence of inside counsel as a destination is
 267 evident in the AJD data: One-quarter of those who began their careers in a large
 268 law firm are working as inside counsel by wave 3, significantly more than the 10 percent
 269 who did not begin their careers in the large law firm ($p < .001$, Table 1). Not only are
 270 they more likely to be working as inside counsel, but their salaries in these positions are
 271 50 percent higher ($p < .001$) compared to those who began their careers elsewhere,
 272 indicating more prestigious positions.

273 Also integral to the prestige of starting a career in a large law firm has been
 274 the phenomenal rise in starting salaries since 2000 (Collins 2012), with the media
 275 continually feeding excitement and anticipation over the next “Biglaw pay raise”
 276 (Lat 2016). The value of the large law first start is evidenced not only by higher starting
 277 salaries, but by the enduring effect of this prestigious start on lawyers' lifetime earnings.
 278 Data from AJD show that thirteen years after their first position, the median earnings
 279 of respondents who began in the large law firm—irrespective of where they are
 280 working—are 74 percent higher than those who did not start in this setting
 281 ($p < .001$, Appendix Table 1). And not only are they earning more and working in
 282 more prestigious settings, they are also significantly more satisfied with their decision
 283 to become a lawyer, they are more likely to consider their law degree a good career
 284 investment, and they are more likely to believe that given a choice, they would still
 285 attend law school ($p < .05$ or better, Appendix Table 1).

286 A second finding, which we document below, is that a critical mass of elite law
 287 graduates begin their careers in large firms and become equity partner. Our data
 288 demonstrate that the law graduates able to earn an equity partnership are overwhelm-
 289 ingly those with elite credentials, who also happen to be white men—despite the
 290 opening up of the large law firm to women, minorities, and to those with nonelite
 291 credentials. Just as Smigel (1964a) found that law school eliteness served as a proxy

TABLE 1.
Cluster characteristics (column percentages)

	Biglaw Equity	Mid Firm Equity	Biglaw Lifers	Mid Firm Nonequity	Mid Firm to Business	Business	Fed Govt	State Govt
Demographics & background								
Female	24%**	29%*	47%	52%	41%	52%	45%	77%*
Black	5%	3%	6%	10%	10%	3%	13%*	0%
Hispanic	0%	3%	4%	2%	2%	3%	10%*	0%
Asian	0% [†]	3%	11%	6%	12%	10%	8%	8%
White	95% [†]	84%	75%	79%	76%	82%	70% [†]	92%
Other race	0%	6% [†]	4%	3%	0%	3%	0%	0%
Father education (more than college)	62%	52%	40%*	50%	57%	65%	65%	69%
Father occupational score	69	67	65	63	67	67	63	64
Spouse employed (AJD3)	55%*	72%	76%	81%	64%	64%	71%	72%
Law school								
Ranked 1–10	34%	9%**	22%	27%	28%	32%	58%***	23%
Ranked 11–20	26%	28%	24%	13% [†]	18%	21%*	23%	31%
Ranked 21–50	20%	31%	16%	32% [†]	30%	23%	13% [†]	23%
Ranked 51–100	11%	25%	17%	18%	20%	17%	5%*	8%
Tier 3	6%	3%	17%***	3%	5%	6%	3%	0%
Tier 4	3%	3%***	4%	7% [†]	0%	2%	0%	15%*
Judicial clerkship	75%*	33%	0%	14%	20%	21%	0%	100%
Edited general law review	38%*	18%	21%	20%	23%	23%	25%	42%

TABLE 1. *Continued*

	Biglaw Equity	Mid Firm Equity	Biglaw Lifers	Mid Firm Nonequity	Mid Firm to Business	Business	Fed Govt	State Govt
Law school GPA	3.54	3.45	3.48	3.56	3.33*	3.49	3.53	3.49
Law firm context								
AJD1 Selected sector for prestige	4.95	5.14	5.11	5.1	4.8	4.95	3.71***	4.78
AJD1 Work-life balance very important	18%	36%	23%	28%	45%*	17%	14%	33%
AJD1 Number offers received private	5.11*	3.11	3.64	3.96	3.56	4.06	4.33	4.08
AJD1 Rating potential advancement	5.39**	4.33	4.75	4.64	4.52	4.42	4.11	4.5
AJD1 Joined partners for meals	70% [†]	64%	47%	46%	50%	49%	38%	63%
AJD2 Actual billing hours 2006	2239*	1807*	1957	1719	1720	1793	1725	1400
AJD2 Aspiration equity partner	9	7	6	6	5	5	5	8
AJD2 Probability equity partner	70*	65*	43	44	48	36*	40	38
AJD2 Brought in new clients	58%*	73%*	36%	26%*	50%	30%	8%*	50%
AJD2 Is responsible for clients	68%**	58%	41%	39%	50%	47%	17%*	50%
AJD3 Is practicing law	100%	100%	94%	95%	76%*	72%	97%	100%
AJD3 Income mean	\$472k***	\$261k	\$229k	\$165k*	\$198k	\$273k	\$146k*	\$102k*

[†]p < .10, *p < .05, **p < .01, ***p < .001

292 for family background and cultural capital in the 1960s, our data show that law
293 school eliteness continues to be a necessary condition for an equity partnership in a
294 large law firm. Elite credentials of course also translate into comfort around elite lawyers
295 and businesspeople, and research suggests that such reproduction persists in the
296 modern legal profession (Granfield 1992; Ashley and Empson 2013; Rivera and
297 Tilcsik 2016).

298 In order to map out the career trajectories of lawyers who begin in large law firm
299 today, we rely on two methodologies. First, we draw on a quantitative tool that in effect
300 builds career patterns into collective biographies. Sequence analysis, which we describe
301 below, distills the major career trajectories and allows us to find commonalities among
302 them so that we can construct groupings of the typical career paths. Second, we use
303 qualitative interviews to highlight the personal stories—including experiences and
304 ambitions—that underwrite the careers in each of the career groupings that we have
305 identified.

306 DATA

307 This article relies on three waves of data from the *After the JD* study (AJD), a
308 national longitudinal survey of law graduates (Dinovitzer et al. 2004). The study is
309 based on a sample representative of the national population of lawyers who were
310 admitted to the bar in 2000 and graduated from law school between June 1998 and
311 July 2000. The sampling design used a two-stage process. In the first stage, the nation
312 was divided into eighteen strata by region and size of the new lawyer population. Each
313 stratum was then divided into primary sampling units (PSU), comprising a metropolitan
314 area, portion of a state outside large metropolitan areas, or entire state, and one PSU was
315 chosen within each stratum. The PSUs included all four “major” markets, those with
316 more than 2,000 new lawyers (Chicago, Los Angeles, New York, and Washington,
317 DC); five of the nine “large” markets, those with between 750 and 2,000 new lawyers
318 (Boston, Atlanta, Houston, Minneapolis, San Francisco); and nine of the remaining,
319 smaller markets (CT, NJ remainder, FL remainder, TN, OK, IN, St. Louis, UT,
320 OR). In the second stage, individuals were sampled from each of the PSUs at rates that
321 would, combined, generalize to the national population.

322 The AJD study was designed as a longitudinal study that started with a sample of
323 9,192 lawyers. In addition, the study included an oversample of 1,465 new lawyers from
324 minority groups (Black, Hispanic, and Asian-American). In total, 4,538 eligible sample
325 members responded to wave 1 (fielded in 2003–04) for a 57 percent response rate. In
326 wave 2 (fielded in 2007–08), the initial sample was adjusted to 8,225 after excluding
327 ineligible sample members. An overall response rate of 50.6 percent yielded 4,160
328 respondents. In wave 3 (fielded in 2012), which was restricted to prior respondents,
329 the response rate was 53 percent, yielding 2,984 respondents (Dinovitzer et al. 2004;
330 Dinovitzer et al. 2009). Analyses of potential nonresponse bias due to panel attrition
331 reveal that there are no substantial differences between respondents and nonrespond-
332 ents on characteristics such as race, gender, or type of employment.

333 In addition to the AJD quantitative data, we will draw on qualitative interview
334 data to highlight some of the patterns we see in the quantitative data. The shifting

335 perceptions and satisfactions from three time periods are especially important for
336 identifying the ambitions and attitudes of lawyers as they build their careers. Project
337 PIs¹ conducted 219 interviews with survey respondents who were selected purposefully
338 to overrepresent public interest lawyers, minorities, and small firm and solo lawyers.
339 A key feature of the interviews is that of the 146 individual respondents, 47 were inter-
340 viewed more than once and 26 were interviewed three times; only 32 of the respondents
341 interviewed began their careers in a large law firm. Once our clusters were defined in
342 the sequence analysis, we selected interviews that we believed to be most illustrative,
343 sometimes selecting more than one in order to highlight different aspects of each
344 sequence. The interviews that were selected are representative of those within the full
345 universe of interviews sharing a similar career trajectory.

346 METHODOLOGY

347 Since our primary goal is to uncover the patterns underlying elite sorting, we
348 analyze the career trajectories of lawyers who began their careers in a large law firm,
349 tracking their job transitions over a thirteen-year period. There is significant attrition
350 from this starting position. Of those who began in a large law firm, 28 percent remained
351 in large law firms thirteen years later, with only a handful of these (13 percent) in a large
352 firm equity partner position. Just over one-quarter (26 percent) were working in business
353 practicing law (primarily in positions as general counsel), and the remaining lawyers
354 were fairly equally distributed across small firms (those with 2–20 lawyers), federal
355 government, nonprofits or education, and in business not practicing law.

356 Focusing solely on the final position in a career path gives only a partial picture
357 of the careers that began in a large law firm. In fact, the ordering of positions, number of
358 positions, and sectoral representation within each lawyer's career trajectory between
359 their first job in a large law firm and their final job thirteen years later is distinct.
360 As we will see below, there are 139 unique career patterns among those who began
361 in a large law firm. Some lawyers held only one other position after their first job, while
362 others held up to seven positions. Some lawyers changed sectors, moving from a large
363 law firm to the federal government; some moved laterally to another large law firm
364 before becoming general counsel in a corporation; and others went into business
365 following some time in a smaller law firm setting. This sequencing of events is important
366 for two reasons. First, it highlights the fact that for some lawyers, the experience of
367 working in a large law firm on its own does not offer sufficient expertise or capital
368 to ensconce them in their final position. For example, it may be that working in a
369 smaller firm after a position in a large firm provides some lawyers with the skills that
370 facilitate their move into business, or that a position in the federal government allows
371 one to leverage specific expertise and trial experience into a large law firm as an equity
372 partner—a position the lawyer might not have been able to attain had they remained
373 in a large law firm for their entire career. Second, by examining career sequences
374 holistically, we can discern larger-scale patterns that offer insight into the structure
375 of legal careers and into the relative value of experiences in particular work settings.

1. The vast majority of in-person interviews were conducted by Bryant Garth and Joyce Sterling.

376 For example, one of our findings is that the career path to equity partnership is short and
 377 direct, and never does a nonequity position precede an equity position; similarly, equity
 378 partnership in a mid-sized or smaller firm is never preceded by a nonequity position in
 379 one of these smaller-sized firms. A lateral move must lead directly into an equity posi-
 380 tion, otherwise it does not turn into one.

381 In order to analyze the ordering of positions in a career trajectory, we draw on a
 382 technique that is well suited for finding patterns, similarities, and differences among a
 383 complex group of events such as career histories (Blair-Loy 1999). Sequence analysis
 384 was initially used by biologists to compare DNA sequences in order to find out to
 385 what extent two DNA strands are homologous to each other. The established
 386 degree of similarity then allows for conclusions about a common ancestor of two
 387 DNA strands.

388 The sequences we have constructed in this project are based on a chronology of
 389 the types of organizations (e.g., large law firm, federal government) in which respond-
 390 ents worked over a thirteen-year time window. In addition to organization, we also
 391 include whether respondents hold an equity partnership in large and mid-sized firms;
 392 we also included spells of unemployment. We defined eleven types of organizations
 393 and positions: equity partner in a large law firm (251+ lawyers²); large law firm
 394 (251+ lawyers), not equity partner; equity partner in a mid-sized firm (51–250+
 395 lawyers); private law firm (51–250+ lawyers), nonequity partner; business (practicing
 396 and not practicing law); solo or small firm lawyer (less than 50 lawyers); federal gov-
 397 ernment; state government; and unemployed. Another key variable in our analysis is
 398 law school attended, which relies on respondents' self-report and is grouped based
 399 on the U.S. News rankings for 2003, which is the year most respondents began their
 400 first jobs. To create the sequences, we rely on TraMineR and the optimal matching
 401 package seqdist2 (using seqdistOO) in R, which provides dissimilarity measures between
 402 state sequences.³

403 PLAN OF ANALYSIS

404 Our analysis focuses on the subset of 455 respondents who began their careers in
 405 the large law firm. There are 139 unique sequences in this subset, with a maximum of
 406 seven possible positions. In cases where individuals reported more than seven positions,

2. Law firm size is determined by the number of lawyers working at all locations of the firm.

3. The most frequently used technique for comparing sequences is optimal matching, in which the distance between two sequences is defined as the number of operations it takes to transform one sequence into the other (Cornwell 2015). These operations are “substitution” (changing one element into another), “insertion” (inserting an element), or “deletion” (deleting an element). The more operations it takes to make two sequences similar, the greater the distance between them. Once all the distances are calculated, we group the sequences into those that are most similar. There is a healthy literature surrounding the choice of dissimilarity measures, with each measure offering not only different mathematical approaches but also emphasizing different aspects of sequence comparison (Elzinga and Studer 2015; Studer and Ritschard 2016). Since our goal is to understand the ordering of organizational positions throughout a career, the dissimilarity measure we selected is SVRspell, which is a measure that is highly sensitive to sequencing: “The general idea of the measure is that, the more often a given ordering of tokens in one sequence is observed in the other sequence, the closer the two sequences are to each other” (Studer and Ritschard 2016, 489).

407 middle positions were truncated, while preserving first and final positions. Once the
 408 data were sequenced, we clustered them by relying on the combined algorithms of
 409 Partitioning Around Medoids (PAM) with Ward clustering (Ritschard 2019).⁴ The
 410 best fit for the data is an eight-cluster solution, which was selected based on examining
 411 a number of alternative scenarios and their related fit statistics. Our descriptions of each
 412 cluster below reference the Average Silhouette Width (ASW), a fit statistic that ranges
 413 from -1 to 1 and that reflects the homogeneity of the cluster. Higher values reflect more
 414 homogeneous clusters, indicating the extent to which the sequences in the cluster are
 415 similar to each other.

416 The sequences and interview data show that career paths are a complex process
 417 with issues of individual agency, fortuity, gender, ethnicity, and race all implicated.
 418 The largest cluster ($n = 147$) features respondents who went directly from a large
 419 law firm to a business setting. The second largest cluster ($n = 81$) we characterize as
 420 the biglaw lifers—those individuals who remained within the large law firm, but not
 421 as equity partners. The third represents lawyers who moved to a smaller law firm of
 422 51–250 lawyers, but who are not equity partners ($n = 63$); the fourth comprises those
 423 who first transitioned to a smaller firm (51–250 lawyers) and then moved into business
 424 ($n = 42$); the fifth represents lawyers who moved from large law firms to positions in the
 425 federal government ($n = 40$); the sixth comprises lawyers who are equity partners
 426 in mid-sized firms, a number of whom were previously equity partners in larger firms
 427 ($n = 32$); the seventh is the small group of lawyers who are equity partners in large
 428 law firms ($n = 37$); and the eighth is the smallest group, those who moved from a large
 429 firm to a position in state government ($n = 13$) (Figure 1).

430 FINDINGS

431 The discussion below draws equally on quantitative and qualitative data. The
 432 descriptive quantitative data are limited because of some very small cell sizes; thus
 433 we report the patterns in the data even when they do not reach standard levels of
 434 significance (all data is reported in Tables 1 and 2 unless noted otherwise).

435 *Biglaw Equity.* The biglaw equity cluster comprises 8 percent of the sample
 436 (37 lawyers). With 97 percent of the lawyers in this cluster reporting equity partnership
 437 in a large law firm as their final position (Appendix Table 2), this handful of lawyers is
 438 among the wealthiest and most elite in the sample. 60 percent of the lawyers in this
 439 cluster graduated from an elite law school, with about one-third graduating from a
 440 top-ten law school and another quarter from a top-twenty law school (nonsignificant);
 441 they also report the highest occupational scores for their fathers (nonsignificant). Mean
 442 earnings (\$471,500) are by far the highest of all the clusters ($p < .001$), yet the hours
 443 worked are no different than the average. Only 24 percent of lawyers in this cluster are
 444 women, the worst gender imbalance of all the clusters ($p < .001$). It is also 94 percent
 445 white, making it the whitest cluster in the sample ($p = .05$). Lawyers in this cluster are
 446 also most likely to have a spouse who is not working in the paid labor force ($p < .05$);

4. The Ward clustering ensures that the data are first clustered hierarchically in order to identify the ideal number of clusters. The medoid (i.e., most central observed case) of each cluster is then identified, and the data are clustered around it.

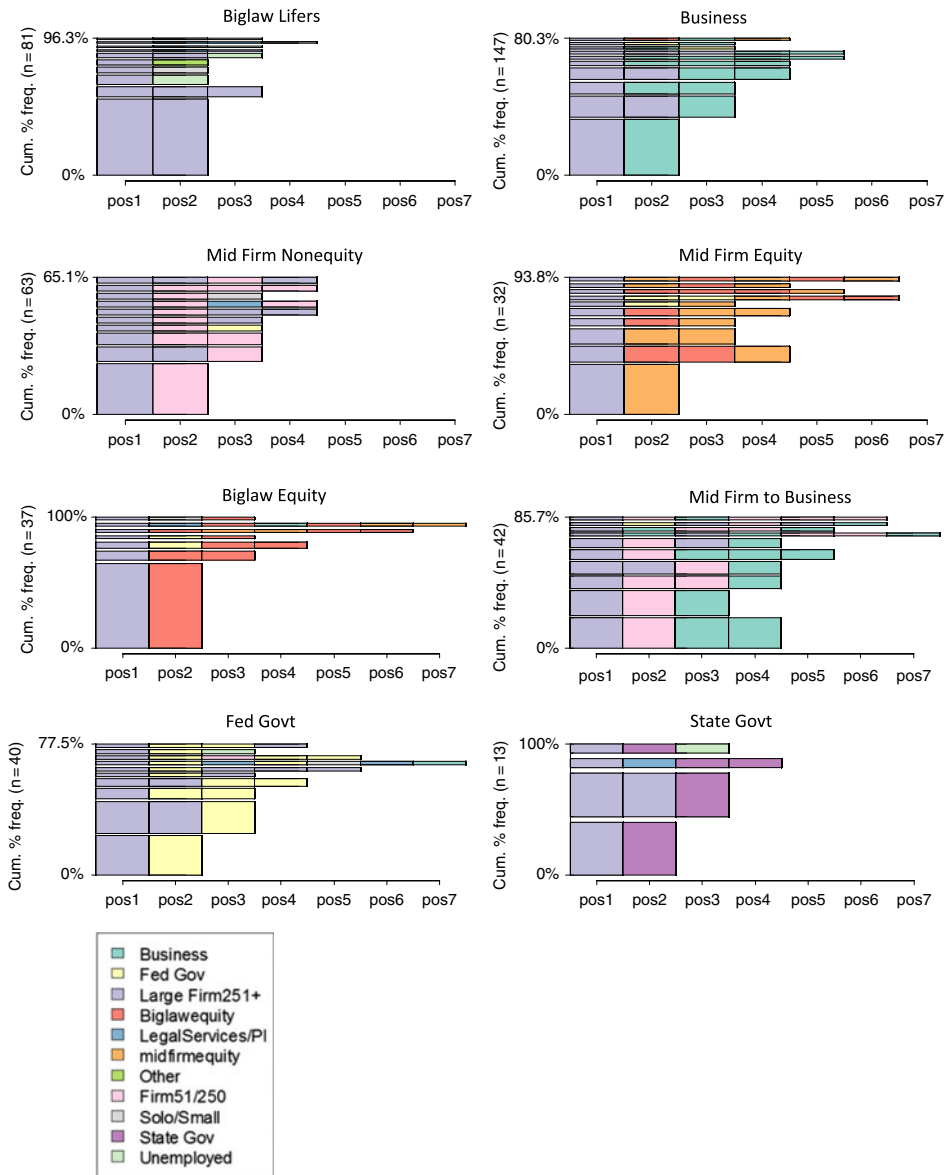


FIGURE 1.
Eight cluster solution, career sequences for large law firm starters.

447 only 55 percent of their spouses are employed, compared to 75 percent for the rest of the
 448 sample ($p < .05$).

449 Prior research has found that elite students in large law firms express the least
 450 satisfaction when they begin their careers, and the highest intentions to leave that
 451 setting within two years (Dinovitzer and Garth 2007). However, the findings for this
 452 cluster are surprising because they indicate the opposite trend. In wave 1 of the After
 453 the JD study, when the lawyers in this cluster were starting their careers, they expressed
 454 significantly *lower* mobility intentions than their peers: 31 percent expressed that they

TABLE 2.
Satisfaction by clusters

	Biglaw Equity	Mid Firm Equity	Biglaw Lifers	Mid Firm Nonequity	Mid Firm to Business	Business	Fed Govt	State Govt
<i>Satisfaction</i>								
AJD1 Moving within 2 years	31%*	42%	45%	48%	55%	59%*	72%*	46%
AJD2 Moving within 2 years	14%*	25%	20%	27%	46%	38%*	29%	29%
AJD3 Moving within 2 years	6%*	3%*	31%	28%	34%	25%	39%*	25%
AJD1 Mod/extremely satisfied	83%	82%	81%	83%	64%*	74%	77%	77%
AJD2 Mod/extremely satisfied	87%	73%	79%	73%	72%	75%	84%	80%
AJD3 Mod/extremely satisfied	87%	91%	74% [^]	75%	83%	84%	80%	92%
<i>Satisfaction Factors</i>								
AJD1 Satisfaction with substance of work	-0.20	-0.23	-0.38*	-0.38	-0.40	-0.50	-0.69**	-0.10
AJD1 Power track	0.08	0.15	0.17	-0.20	-0.20	-0.07	-0.52	-0.20
AJD1 Job setting satisfaction	0.13*	0.01	0.06	-0.02	-0.17	-0.10	0.03	0.16
AJD1 Social index	0.66	0.66	0.72	0.58	0.45	0.75	0.80	1.00
AJD3 Satisfaction with substance of work	0.29*	0.35*	-0.32*	-0.05	-0.01	-0.01	-0.10	-0.14
AJD3 Power track	0.85***	0.68***	-0.07	0.00	0.10	0.01	-0.32**	-0.25
AJD3 Job setting satisfaction	0.01	0.50***	-0.54*	-0.07	0.04	0.03	0.15	-0.04
AJD3 Social index	0.32*	0.16	0.05	-0.25	0.01	-0.32	-0.28	0.13

*p < .05, **p < .01, ***p < .001

[^]

AQ4

455 expected to look for a new position within two years, compared to 51 percent of all
 456 other respondents, all of whom were working in large law firms at the time
 457 ($p < .01$). This pattern suggests an early level of commitment and focus that differenti-
 458 ated lawyers in the large firm equity cluster from their peers working in the same setting.
 459 Moreover, as our qualitative data reveal, this privileged group of lawyers was also
 460 embraced by the firm and its lawyers, with their lower mobility intentions likely
 461 reflecting their degree of integration and acceptance within the firm. As Garth and
 462 Sterling (2009) have noted, they were both “doing the time” and “finding the love.”

463 A few other features of their early careers stand out: Lawyers in this cluster were
 464 more likely than others to have been an editor on their law school’s general law
 465 review ($p < .05$), as many as three-quarters of them completed a judicial clerkship
 466 ($p < .05$),⁵ and they received the highest number of job offers in their initial job search
 467 ($p < .05$). They were significantly more likely than lawyers in other clusters—all of
 468 whom began in a large law firm—to say that they selected their job because of the
 469 opportunities for advancement ($p < .001$), but they were least likely to say that they
 470 chose this sector because work-life balance was important to them (nonsignificant).
 471 Their initial experience in the law firm was fundamentally different, with 70 percent
 472 reporting that they joined partners for meals ($p < .10$), the highest of any cluster.
 473 When we surveyed respondents at wave 2, lawyers in this cluster reported the strongest
 474 aspirations (nonsignificant) and expected probability ($p < .05$) of making equity
 475 partner among all large firm starters, they billed the highest number of hours
 476 ($p < .05$), and a higher proportion of respondents than in any other cluster reported
 477 that they were the primary responsible attorney for some of the firm’s preexisting
 478 clients ($p < .01$). At wave 3, lawyers in this cluster report an above-average level
 479 of satisfaction with the substance of their work (an index comprising satisfaction with
 480 the intellectual challenge of the work, the substantive area, the tasks performed, the
 481 skill-building opportunities, the level of responsibility, and the value of the work to
 482 society), the power track (an index comprising satisfaction with compensation and
 483 the method of compensation, opportunities for advancement, recognition received
 484 for the work, and performance evaluation) and the social index (an index comprising
 485 satisfaction with opportunities to do pro bono work and diversity of the workplace)
 486 (all $p < .05$ or better).

487 The most common sequence in this cluster is characterized by a mere two
 488 positions: the first position in a large law firm followed by equity partnership. The clus-
 489 ter has a high average silhouette width (ASW) of 0.73. This high degree of homoge-
 490 neity demonstrates that the pathway to equity partnership is very narrowly defined; in
 491 other words, deviations from the mold will not lead to an equity partnership in a large
 492 law firm. There are a handful of interesting departures that demonstrate which devia-
 493 tions are indeed valued, such as a number of individuals who held positions in federal
 494 government before becoming equity partner, and a few who also held equity positions in
 495 medium-sized firms; there is only one sequence in which a lawyer moved back to being
 496 an equity partner from a position in business. There are also notable absences. There are
 497 no sequences that indicate a position in another large firm *without* an equity position;

5. While there is missing data here, it is clear that this group was more likely to have had a judicial clerkship than the rest of the sample.

498 there are also no sequences that include a position in state government, and no spells of
 499 unemployment. In other words, experiences outside of the narrow tournament to part-
 500 nership are indicators that a lawyer's career is not on track to an equity partnership in a
 501 large firm.

502 Taken together, the lawyers in this cluster are indeed very reminiscent of those
 503 who made partnership a half century ago: They are demographically white, male,
 504 and elite, typically with wives at home, and their trajectories are narrow and precise,
 505 ticking off all the boxes of achievement, and never straying from their commitment or
 506 their paths to partnership. The homogeneity in this cluster shows that they follow essen-
 507 tially the same path and represent the same forms of capital that led to partnership in
 508 the golden age—before the opening of corporate law firms to women and minorities and
 509 to graduates of nonelite law schools.

510 Our interview with John,⁶ who is a white male lawyer, illustrates many of the
 511 features we identified in the data. John attended an elite undergraduate college and
 512 a top-ten law school, but he was the first in his family to attend college, even though
 513 his father had a solid middle-class occupation. Following law school, he clerked for a
 514 judge and expected to work for the government, but on the recommendation of a friend,
 515 he interviewed with just one firm, and decided he liked it. He made equity partner at
 516 this same firm at the first opportunity. He is married to a lawyer whom he met when
 517 they were associates at this same firm and who is now a stay at home mother. There are a
 518 few features of John's trajectory that are worth emphasizing. He did not have a
 519 substantial (or even any) book of business before he made partner; the firm's clients
 520 were sufficient for him. His billables were always high, around 2,200 hours. From his
 521 very first interview he expressed that he was satisfied, and was not planning on leaving
 522 his firm, a fact that remained constant over three interviews. At the same time, he never
 523 said that he was gunning for partnership.

524 With his drive, credentials, and background, he found a fit at the law firm. In his
 525 words, "I really like the people here and I think that they're very welcoming and you feel
 526 like you're a part of the team from the beginning and, you know, at the time, I was a
 527 young associate but more senior people on teams would care about what I thought and
 528 would solicit my thoughts . . . so I felt that it was a very welcoming, supportive, team-
 529 type place. I think that, over time, my sense has been and a gradual one but just that I
 530 am . . . I am more of this place."

531 This perfect fit is consistent with a story of continuity amid considerable change in
 532 the legal field. Stories such as John's are consistent with the maintenance of a critical
 533 mass of equity partners from elite law schools despite the fact that most elite law
 534 graduates joined large law firms with no expectation or even desire to become a partner.

535 *Business.* As we documented above, the rise of legal careers in business is one of the
 536 most significant transformations in the modern legal profession. Given the ubiquity of
 537 careers in business, there are two clusters that represent these sequences. In both clus-
 538 ters, almost all the careers culminate in a position in business, but the sequences in this
 539 cluster are characterized by a direct path to this endpoint: Three-quarters of careers in
 540 this cluster include only positions in large firms and in business, with one-third exiting
 541 the large law firm for a position in business after their first job in the large firm. In short,

6. We rely on pseudonyms for confidentiality reasons.

542 the sequences in this cluster exhibit very little cross-sectoral movement, a
543 homogeneity that is confirmed by the high ASW of 0.63, which is particularly striking
544 given that this is the largest of all the clusters ($n = 147$). As with the biglaw equity
545 cluster, the lack of heterogeneity demonstrates a strong differentiation among the
546 practice settings.

547 The data point to the eliteness of this cluster, with prestigious law school
548 credentials and family social background well represented: 32 percent graduated from
549 a top-ten law school (nonsignificant) and a higher-than-average percentage reported
550 that their father completed graduate education (65.4 percent, $p < .05$). Individuals
551 in this cluster knew or decided that they were not on the partnership track early in
552 their career: They expressed higher-than-average mobility intentions at waves 1 and
553 2 and had a lower-than-average expectation of making partner at wave 2 of the survey
554 (all $p < .05$). This helps in part to explain the direct move from law to business. The
555 gender balance in this group tips toward female ($p = .09$), and there is no pattern by
556 race or law school tier.

557 Angela's story is instructive. Angela is an Asian-American woman who attended
558 an elite public institution for college and after graduating from a top-ten law school
559 began working in a large firm in Silicon Valley. She worked long hours without com-
560 plaint but expected that once she had children she would want to move in-house
561 because "I couldn't envision myself being partner because I looked at every woman
562 there and either the husband didn't work or they had a nanny and they never saw their
563 kids" Moreover, she said that making partner was never a goal so "I knew I needed
564 to get out at some point." At the same time, the firm never gave her any indication that
565 she could make partner.

566 Angela knew that in order to move in-house she needed broader experience, so she
567 moved laterally to another large law firm where she knew some associates and soon
568 began interviewing for inside counsel positions. An avid networker—almost exclusively
569 within the Asian-American community—Angela knew someone who had also moved
570 in-house who offered her a position. She reported that in this position her hours were
571 very flexible, like her husband's, who is also an in-house lawyer. She has two children,
572 and at the time of the interview was pregnant with her third.

573 With the business cluster representing a fairly prestigious and elite grouping, it is
574 not surprising that her story is characterized by ambition, commitment, effort, and,
575 ultimately, success. Yet at the same time, because of the rigidity of the large law
576 firm model, she knew her skills could not be rewarded within that setting. The
577 in-house position at a major corporation valued both her elite credentials and her
578 law firm experience, but it also did not penalize her for an unwillingness to conform
579 to the time demands of the large law firm. It also provided a nicer fit perhaps for an
580 Asian lawyer at a time when Asian partnerships were still quite rare. This career
581 trajectory both helps to recruit individuals such as Angela into large law firms and
582 allows them to recognize their lack of fit, move on, and still validate the law firm
583 experience.

584 *Mid Firm Equity.* The typical career in this small cluster ($n = 32$) is that of a lateral
585 move from a large firm to an equity position in a mid-sized firm. While 94 percent of the
586 sequences in this cluster end with an equity partnership in a mid-sized firm, the careers

587 in this cluster show more varied job mobility, which is reflected in the mid-ranged ASW
588 of 0.39. Sequences in this cluster show a higher degree of lateral mobility: In a number
589 of cases mid-firm equity positions come after equity positions in large law firms and in a
590 few cases they follow careers in federal government, suggesting that having established
591 one's career elsewhere is necessary for success on this path. Again, the cross-sectoral
592 mobility is very selective, with no positions in business, small firms, or state government
593 appearing in this cluster, and no other positions in a large law firm with a nonequity
594 status.

595 While undoubtedly a coveted set of job sequences, there is a meaningful
596 differentiation in the profiles of individuals in this cluster compared to those in
597 the biglaw equity cluster. It is less elite, with a significantly lower proportion
598 of top-ten law graduates ($p < .01$). Earnings are substantially lower than in the
599 biglaw equity cluster, and are not significantly different than the subsample's average.
600 Equity partnerships continue to be the privilege of white men, however, with women
601 representing only 29 percent of the lawyers in this cluster ($p < .05$), while 84 percent
602 are white (nonsignificant). Lawyers in this cluster received fewer than the average
603 number of job offers when they graduated from law school (nonsignificant),
604 and a lower proportion than average were editors on the general law review
605 (nonsignificant).

606 On the other hand, that lawyers in this cluster have largely remained in the law
607 firm setting, and that they have succeeded along a very difficult track of becoming
608 equity partner, is partly due to their ambitions: They expressed a higher-than-average
609 estimation that they would make equity partner when they were interviewed at
610 wave 2 ($p < .05$). Data from wave 3 further suggest that lawyers in this cluster feel
611 good about their careers and their work. They report higher-than-average levels of
612 satisfaction with almost all aspects of their work: the substance, power track, and
613 job setting ($p < .05$). Given that most did not come from as privileged a social
614 position as those working in larger firms, yet they have still obtained coveted equity
615 partnerships, they feel their hard work has paid off and they are satisfied with where
616 they are.

617 Since most lawyers who begin in large law firms end up leaving, many white men
618 are in this category. Dan's story illustrates one such case. With an Ivy League under-
619 graduate degree and a law degree from a top-twenty school, Dan worked for eleven years
620 as a litigator at a major law firm in Washington, DC, billing very long hours. He was
621 told he was on track for partnership, but the recession changed the firm's attitude and he
622 was instead made a senior attorney off the partnership track, a position he rejected. In
623 his words, "I have a reputation here of being a real company guy, team player, but, you
624 know . . . for the first time I'm, you know, looking for other jobs. I could stay here
625 indefinitely and make a very nice salary, but, you know . . . I was really, really angry
626 at how it worked out"

627 Ultimately, he left the firm, left DC, and found a position back in the state
628 where he came from, and now he is a partner at a small but prominent litigation
629 law firm there. What distinguishes Dan's story is that he was promised partnership
630 and he felt betrayed by his firm for being misled. He was not valued in the way that
631 John, the equity partner from an elite law school, was. Yet he was able to convert the

632 capital accumulated from his first position in a large law firm into a respectable and
633 locally prestigious position. He did not settle for the of counsel position.

634 One other instructive example is a Mexican-American lawyer from a modest
635 background, named David, who graduated from a top-ten law school and began at
636 an elite law firm. He described the elite firm practice as follows:

637 It's great people at [the firm]. It's great people, really smart people, committed
638 people, but I was there . . . for almost three years, and I did three depositions
639 . . . and the rest of the time was just . . . doing those document reviews
640 But, again, you have to remember where I started from, the first person from
641 my family to graduate from college, the first person from my family to be a
642 lawyer It was a shock going into [the elite law school], and then it
643 was an even bigger shock ending up at [the law firm].

644 When he started, he thought about becoming partner and initially had good
645 mentors, but within a couple of years they left, and, unfortunately, “you have to find
646 somebody to be a mentor.” David moved to a small litigation-focused firm, becoming
647 partner during that time. After ten years he formed a new firm with a friend, taking
648 several key clients from the prior practice. Given its location in a major legal market,
649 we would define this as a boutique firm, one that also emphasizes its diversity and has
650 been very successful.

651 David's story resonates with those of other outsiders, who begin their careers in
652 large law firms but experience a lack of fit and mentorship despite their elite creden-
653 tial, and yet they can draw on that experience and the value of the big firm symbolic
654 capital (see, e.g., Payne-Pikus, Hagan, and Nelson 2010). Boutiques such as David's
655 depend on the large corporate law firms for their hiring, and for much of their business
656 (referrals from smaller matters and stemming from the conflicts of interest that require
657 the large firms to refer clients elsewhere), and they provide specialized services that big
658 firms may require (Southworth and Fisk 2014). They also are a place of refuge for
659 lawyers who do not fit in large law firms or have lifestyle reasons for leaving. Like
660 the corporate counsel positions, they help to promote careers beginning at large
661 law firms and leaving after a few years—helping to sustain the large law firm at the
662 top of the hierarchy.

663 *Federal Government.* The federal government cluster represents a smaller
664 ($n = 40$) set of career paths that diverge from what was available in the golden
665 age, with 83 percent of careers in this cluster ending in the federal government. It
666 is a uniquely elite grouping, with the highest proportion of top-ten graduates of all
667 the clusters ($p < .01$). At the same time, the ambitions expressed by lawyers in this
668 sequence diverge dramatically from those in the biglaw equity group. Lawyers in this
669 cluster expressed early on that the large law firm was not the right fit for them, with 72
670 percent expecting to leave their large firm position within two years ($p < .01$) and
671 experiencing lower-than-average levels of satisfaction with the substance of their work
672 at wave 1 ($p < .05$). Respondents in this cluster also gave the lowest value to prestige
673 in their choice of sector for their first job ($p < .001$). While this is an elite group, they
674 are earning significantly less than their peers in other clusters, with average earnings of

675 \$145,917 ($p < .05$). It is perhaps not surprising that lawyers in this cluster report lower
 676 levels of satisfaction with the power track ($p < .05$)—a composite measure reflecting
 677 satisfaction with earnings and satisfaction with prospects to advance. This cluster is
 678 also the most demographically diverse, with 30 percent reporting that they are non-
 679 white ($p < .05$).

680 With an ASW of 0.47, there is more heterogeneity than the average in this cluster,
 681 which suggests that careers in this cluster include a wider array of career paths. There are
 682 more job changes than average, with a number of moves between the federal govern-
 683 ment and large firms and some back and forth between these two sectors. It is notable
 684 that none of the large firm positions include an equity partnership, there is only one
 685 instance of a position in business, and there are no sequences with a position in state
 686 government.

687 Our interview with an African-American lawyer provides some insight into this
 688 career path. John completed his undergraduate and law school education at top-ten
 689 universities. He is not a child of advantage, however, with both his parents working
 690 blue-collar jobs. His first job was at a large prestigious law firm in DC, the same firm
 691 at which he summered, but he quickly moved laterally to another DC firm because
 692 he wanted to do litigation. He was promoted to senior associate, but when asked about
 693 partnership, he was ambivalent, saying “I value my family, I have a son and a daughter
 694 and I don’t know” When asked where he would be in four years he said, “At this
 695 point my cynical nature tells me that I’ll be surprised if in four years if you find me in this
 696 type of private practice. You might find me in a smaller firm, you might find me working
 697 for the government . . . I don’t know - all I can tell you is I’m almost 100% certain I
 698 won’t be in this environment.”

699 Four years later, at the time of the economic crisis, he was still at the firm, but he
 700 said, “I don’t expect to last the year here.” He noted that he had very little work, and he
 701 also reflected on his fit within the firm: “I’ve had a few people that . . . were very nice to
 702 me, gave me great advice,” but explains that they couldn’t help him maneuver because
 703 they themselves were not well grounded in the firm. Ultimately, he secured a position in
 704 the federal government.

705 John’s career, much like David’s, illustrates the lack of investment and integration
 706 reported by many minority lawyers in large law firms (Payne-Pikus, Hagan, and Nelson
 707 2010), leaving him not only without a source of work within the firm, but also without
 708 the strategic career advice and support that is required to make partner in this setting. It
 709 also illustrates how the federal government provides another safety net available to
 710 those who are undervalued despite their elite law degrees.

711 *Biglaw Lifers.* As the modern law firm has grown, the traditional up-or-out model
 712 has been abandoned (Galanter and Henderson 2008). Long-term careers in large law
 713 firms are now no longer restricted to equity partners, and this reconfiguration has
 714 shifted the composition and status of individuals within these firms. The lawyers in
 715 the biglaw lifers cluster embody this new dynamic, and the size of this cluster ($n = 81$)
 716 is a testament to the ubiquity of these “new” careers. Three-quarters of the careers in
 717 this cluster report a final position in a large law firm with no equity stake, in positions
 718 as nonequity partner or of counsel, with a small number working as associates
 719 (Appendix Table 2). Another 14 percent report that they are unemployed, with

720 9 percent reporting a final position in solo or small practice. The ASW of 0.57 reflects
721 a fair cohesion because the majority of the careers in this cluster are restricted to a
722 small handful of positions. There are no sequences that include positions in the gov-
723 ernment sector and none of the respondents ever had a promotion to equity partner-
724 ship (the lawyers in this sample are not yet senior enough to have experienced being
725 de-equitized).

726 This cluster has heavier representation from the relatively less elite law schools:
727 21 percent graduated from a tier-three or tier-four law school, compared to 10 percent
728 in the overall large firm starter sample ($p < .001$). They also report a less elite social class
729 background: Only 40 percent had a father with graduate education compared to
730 57 percent in the sample ($p < .001$). This pattern helps round out the story of the
731 second transformation of the large law firm: As law firms grew and thrived, they needed
732 to recruit ever more associates, which necessitated hiring law graduates from less elite
733 law schools. Unfortunately, as these data demonstrate, these graduates were relegated
734 primarily to the less lucrative and prestigious nonequity track.

735 Despite (or perhaps because of) their elite start in the large law firm, there is a
736 sense of disappointment with how their careers unfolded. Lawyers in this cluster report
737 the lowest level of satisfaction with their decision to become a lawyer in wave 3
738 ($p < .10$). They also report lower-than-average levels of satisfaction with the substance
739 of their work ($p < .05$) and with their job setting ($p < .05$), suggesting that the large
740 law firm track without the equity partnership results in disappointment. As we argued
741 above, nonequity positions have been key to the diversification of the legal profession,
742 and we find that about half of this cluster is female (nonsignificant), with almost
743 20 percent of the lawyers in this cluster reporting that they are nonwhite
744 (nonsignificant).

745 The experience of Emily, an Asian-American woman who graduated from a
746 top-twenty law school, is illustrative. Emily began in a large law firm in DC, where
747 she had also summered. Emily had two children, taking maternity leave and returning
748 to work on reduced hours after each child. Throughout, she continued to express her
749 desire to remain on the partnership track, even after her firm delayed her partnership
750 consideration, although she recognized that “I’m just kind of on a slower track gener-
751 ally.” Her discomfort at work was also evident. At both her interviews, when asked
752 where she would be in five years, she said she expected to be elsewhere, but, notably,
753 had no concrete plans about where she might be.

754 By her third interview in 2014, she was still with the same firm, having been
755 promoted to of counsel in a nonequity position. Reflecting on her career, Emily
756 expresses that she likes the work she is doing and the people she is working with,
757 and that her work situation “works” for her family. She is surprised that she is still
758 at the firm after all these years, and comments that it suits her personality, but that
759 she is thinking about more meaning in life and would consider a position in-house or
760 government. Emily’s interview again highlights the impact of gendered roles in her
761 interactions with the law firm, with the of counsel position providing a secure location
762 for someone who is pushed or pulled off the partner track but stays in biglaw. Again,
763 as an Asian-American woman with children, her lack of fit in comparison with the
764 typical white male equity partner is consistent with leaving the equity partnership

765 track. But here, too, the of counsel position provides a landing place that pays well,
 766 offers a more manageable work schedule, and of course validates the experience in the
 767 large law firm.

768 Albert is an Asian-American male who graduated from both a leading state uni-
 769 versity and a top-forty law school. He began his career in a large firm in intellectual
 770 property under the tutelage of a partner who generated considerable business. He hoped
 771 to rise to partnership through that connection. That partner left the firm, however, and
 772 Albert had to generate his own business in a recessionary period. He was still hoping
 773 for partnership at his second interview, but eventually he moved to another large law
 774 firm, taking a position as “Special Counsel.”

775 Neither Albert nor Emily fit the ideal typical white male model of an equity
 776 partner, and while they provide different accounts for the lack of embrace by
 777 their firm, both ultimately found positions within corporate law, though not as equity
 778 partners. Albert’s story in particular highlights the importance of personal networks—
 779 and the pitfalls of hinging one’s career prospects on one person or within too small
 780 a niche.

781 *Mid Firm Nonequity.* As large law firms have transformed their partnership tracks
 782 and created a multiplicity of nonpartnership track positions, mid-sized law firms have
 783 done the same. While the majority of the sixty-three individuals in this cluster are work-
 784 ing in mid-sized firms in nonequity positions, such as associate, nonequity partner, and
 785 of counsel, there is more heterogeneity in the final position among these careers
 786 (Appendix Table 2), which is reflected by the low ASW (0.30). Some of the sequences
 787 suggest a fluidity between the mid-sized and large firms, with an almost back-and-forth
 788 pattern—though never as equity partner in the large firm.

789 The data again point to nonequity positions as a less elite outcome, with the
 790 lawyers in this cluster graduating from middle-ranked law schools: almost one-third
 791 graduated from schools ranked 21–50 ($p < .10$). Their mean earnings of \$165,098
 792 are significantly lower than those of the sample as a whole ($p < .05$), with more than
 793 half of this cluster comprising women (nonsignificant) and about 21 percent nonwhite
 794 (nonsignificant).

795 The early experiences and ambitions of this group also suggest a downward
 796 mobility from their elite start. Only 46 percent (nonsignificant) of lawyers in this cluster
 797 joined partners for meals at the start of their careers, one of the lowest rates in the sam-
 798 ple. Only a quarter ($p < .05$) ever brought in new clients at wave 2, and almost half
 799 expected to be leaving their position within two years (nonsignificant). Their current
 800 level of satisfaction is among the lowest (nonsignificant), and three of the four indica-
 801 tors of satisfaction at wave 1 were below average (nonsignificant).

802 A qualitative embodiment of the rocky road from a large firm to a small-to-mid-
 803 sized firm is Adam. Adam went to a liberal arts college in the Midwest and then to a
 804 top-forty law school, where he excelled; he was an editor of the law review and secured
 805 an associate position at a well-known Midwest-based national corporate law firm. He
 806 worked there for two years and then moved to another large firm in the same city. At
 807 that point the partner who had brought him in, and who was the source of 90 percent of
 808 his work, left the firm. To get more work he switched to a branch office in California,
 809 leading to a divorce and a period of personal instability, which included termination

810 from his job. Ultimately, he found a position in Massachusetts through a contact, stayed
 811 for two years, and then found another position back in California, where he had begun a
 812 new relationship. He did not make partner at that firm, and now he is in practice by
 813 himself.

814 Lori, a woman who graduated from a top-ten law school, worked for two elite law
 815 firms in environmental law, hated the work, and then moved to a permanent position as
 816 a law clerk for an appellate court. She stayed in that position for almost five years. Her
 817 husband, also a lawyer, then took a position in-house in a city in a relatively small
 818 legal market. She moved with her husband and eventually secured an of counsel
 819 position in environmental law at a leading regional firm. Adam and Lori's stories
 820 bring to light the range of events that take people off the singular path to equity
 821 partnership in a large firm—be it family constraints, geographic mobility, or the
 822 recurring theme of a connection to the wrong individuals. Any deviation from the
 823 norm is enough to derail the path to equity partnership. But we can also see in each
 824 case that the large law firm experience helped keep them afloat as a valuable
 825 resume asset.

826 *Mid Firm then Business.* This is the second cluster to represent the transition from
 827 private law firms into business. This cluster is the smaller of the two ($n = 42$), and the
 828 typical sequence in this cluster is characterized by three positions: the first in a large
 829 firm, the second in a mid-sized firm (nonequity partner), and the final in business.
 830 Almost all the sequences in this cluster include positions only in these three settings,
 831 hence the fairly high ASW of 0.59. None of the positions indicate any time as equity
 832 partner.

833 This is the less elite of the business groupings, with 50 percent of lawyers having
 834 graduated from schools ranked 21–100 (nonsignificant) and with earnings lower than
 835 average (nonsignificant). At the start of their careers, lawyers in this cluster reported a
 836 significantly lower-than-average level of career satisfaction at wave 1 ($p < .05$), and 45
 837 percent reported that work-life balance was a very important consideration for them in
 838 their job choice, far higher than any other group ($p < .05$). While most are working as
 839 senior or general counsel for a corporation, a small number report that they are business
 840 owners, such that only 76 percent report that they are practicing law ($p < .05$). This
 841 cluster is somewhat more male (nonsignificant) and somewhat more diverse than
 842 the average (nonsignificant).

843 Claire is a Chicago woman who attended a local college, attended a tier-four law
 844 school, and began her career in an insurance defense firm. She sought partnership in
 845 the law firm at which she began but was denied by one vote because of what in retro-
 846 spect she describes as gender discrimination. She was systematically undervalued at
 847 the law firm by some of the partners but used that as an incentive to work harder
 848 on her skills. When she left the firm in 2010, her prospects appeared bleak: "It
 849 was very tough and . . . there was not a lot of openings at all." While she pursued
 850 a potential lead to open up a new office for a firm from another city, it did not work
 851 out. She then obtained a position in the general counsel's office of an international
 852 bank, and recounts that she believes her range of skills secured her the position.
 853 During her third interview, Claire was thriving and advancing at the bank, although
 854 working very long hours—she was also single, with no children. Claire's experience

855 illustrates both the push out of the large firm and the difficulty that some encounter in
 856 translating their law firm experience into a new position. At the same time, however,
 857 her law firm credential helped her find an in-house position where she could thrive
 858 and be recognized rather than discounted.

859 *State Government.* Positions in state government, after a start in a large law
 860 firm, are a rare sequence ($n = 13$). By wave 3, 92 percent of positions in this cluster
 861 are in state government, with the remainder of respondents reporting they are
 862 unemployed.

863 Given its size, most of the significance tests show a null effect. Lawyers
 864 working in state government were among the least likely to have attended a
 865 top-ten law school. The lack of fit in the large law firm is apparent: Over one-third
 866 of lawyers in this cluster report that work-life balance is very important to them
 867 (among the highest in the sample), and they report some of the lower levels of
 868 satisfaction at wave 1 when they were working in the large firm. Earnings in this
 869 cluster are the lowest in the sample ($p < .05$), and three-quarters of the lawyers are
 870 women ($p < .05$). At the same time, lawyers in this cluster express the highest levels
 871 of satisfaction in the sample (92 percent versus 81 percent), which suggests that there
 872 is a fit between where they are currently working and their expectations for their
 873 careers.

874 One example from the qualitative interviews is somewhat unique but nevertheless
 875 instructive. Julie graduated from an elite public university and top-ten law school and
 876 began working in a large law firm in San Francisco. She described her time at the firm by
 877 saying, "I actually liked working there. I mean it was a little bit of a grind on the hours,
 878 but it's just not compatible with family life I don't think in my opinion anyway." She
 879 stayed at that firm for two years and then changed jobs because she married and
 880 relocated to a smaller city. No longer at the firm during her second interview, she
 881 explained that when she had her first child, the firm was closed to any possibility of
 882 offering a part-time position. She left the paid labor force, had two more children,
 883 and started doing some hourly contract work for smaller local firms. Eventually she
 884 began a job search for settings other than a law firm, landing a position as general coun-
 885 sel for a state university. She enjoys her work, she finds it challenging, the organization's
 886 mission fits with her own values, and she is happy. When asked whether she expects to
 887 still be in this position in five years she answered, "Definitely, yeah."

888 The group going into state government is very small, demonstrating that the pres-
 889 tige gap between a career in a large law firm and in state government is very large. As
 890 Julie's career path demonstrates, state government can offer a way out for some who did
 891 not find a fit in the large firm setting—both in terms of work-life balance and values. It
 892 is a path that is largely outside of the legal careers that have grown up and evolved along
 893 with the transformation of the position of large law firms in lawyer careers.

894 THE TRANSFORMATION OF THE LEGAL FIELD

895 Partners at corporate law firms have long been at the top of the hierarchy of the
 896 legal profession. In the golden age their position was assured by recruitment of WASP
 897 graduates of elite law schools supported by wives at home. A relative few became

898 partner, but those who joined the firms aspired to the coveted position and were con-
899 sidered failures if they did not succeed. The desirability and prestige of the corporate law
900 firm partnership fueled the genteel tournament. To be sure, a number of partners went
901 back and forth between their firms and the federal government or the federal judiciary.
902 But the platform was the law firm. The prestige of the firms was cemented by the close
903 ties they had to the elite law schools.

904 Today, the large corporate law firms remain at the top, yet the legal field has
905 changed in important ways as a result of, among other changes, growth in the large
906 law firms, dramatically increased competition among law firms, and a much more open
907 recruitment process. The law schools and law firms have opened up to new groups from
908 outside the WASP male core. There are many women and a much larger number of
909 minorities in the elite schools and in the many other law schools that also now feed
910 the corporate law firms at the entry level—even if not in the same numbers as the elite
911 law schools. The question is how the legal field has absorbed these groups that, in a
912 number of ways, challenge the traditional hierarchy. The combination of the sequence
913 analyses and the qualitative interviews shows that by tracing the sorting of elites, we can
914 begin to understand the structure of the modern legal profession and the ways in which
915 the dueling pressures of elitism and diversity that characterize this new era have been
916 resolved.

917 We find that, consistent with the long-standing hierarchies of the legal field, the
918 so-called upper hemisphere represented by the corporate law firm remains dominated by
919 white male graduates of elite law schools with wives at home. The sequence analysis of
920 equity partners shows a group that touched all the bases to fit the institutionalized
921 hierarchies of the large law firm, including both the capital (law review, high grades,
922 elite schools, and judicial clerkships) and the ambitions and fit required. They also
923 continue the white male dominance within the equity partnership tracks. Because of
924 this story of continuity, we term them “the inheritors” from the golden age of corporate
925 law firms. It is almost surprising how happy they are with their lot even in the era of the
926 tournament without end—and it is counter to the popular narrative that elites are no
927 longer interested in this prize.

928 Instead we find a reconfiguration in which the corporate law firm sits at the apex of
929 a set of new careers that almost seem tailor-made for those who are not seeking or
930 cannot attain the equity partnership position. The new careers, all of which began
931 in the once exclusive corporate law firm, hover in its orbit and provide a sort of release
932 valve for those who were “let in” but who are not meant to stay. The careers are not
933 themselves completely new, but they are redesigned for the new era.

934 The numerically most important career pattern, which is slightly skewed toward
935 women, is the business in-house counsel position. It accommodates those who seek
936 a somewhat better lifestyle, especially rewards those with elite credentials, pays very
937 well, and now provides a relatively high level of prestige and prospects for further
938 upward mobility. The career is a far cry from the in-house position that housed the
939 failures of the golden age of corporate law firms. The large corporations validate the
940 corporate law firms by hiring those who move out of the firms, cementing reciprocal
941 relationships that are different than they were in the golden age, and as Schleaf

942 (2013, 409) concludes, this results not in “a severing of ties or an indication of bad
 943 blood, but a continuous moving back and forth that fosters and maintains elite class
 944 dominance, and more specifically, the professionalism projects of elites.” The networks
 945 are much more complex than they were in the era of stable relationships between law
 946 firms and clients, but they continue to support the new structure of eliteness in the legal
 947 profession.

948 Positions in the federal government provide another cluster that is symbiotic
 949 in many respects with the large corporate law firms, attracting and selecting a more
 950 elite segment. At the same time, this group is the most diverse in terms of ethnicity
 951 and race. There are also still suggestions of potential mobility to and from
 952 the federal government at the time of wave 3, which may provide paths back
 953 into corporate positions with power for some minorities among other relatively
 954 elite lawyers.

955 The second most numerical sequence is the biglaw lifer, and the most common
 956 pattern is two positions—partnership track and then off the partnership track. Not only
 957 does this cluster represent a radical departure from the original up-or-out Cravath
 958 model, the size of this cluster suggests the importance of this new career track to the
 959 sustenance of the large law firm. It is not surprising that these sequences accommodate
 960 many of those from nonelite schools who began their careers in large law firms. We also
 961 find that women occupy the majority of these positions, in part because of lifestyle and
 962 in part because they do not fit into the equity partnership mold. While a large body of
 AQ5 scholarship has investigated the career pathways of women in law firms (Epstein 1993;
 964 Kay and Gorman 2008), Gorman and Kmec’s (2009, 1465) explanation for women’s
 965 lack of upward mobility in large law firms is particularly apt: “[R]eliance on gender as a
 966 proxy for competence, use of sex-labeled roles and gender stereotypes as heuristics to
 967 assess candidate suitability for particular roles, and in-group favoritism . . . lead decision
 968 makers to prefer men over women in selection decisions at all levels. The high status,
 969 work uncertainty, and traditional male domination of upper-level positions intensify
 970 these decision-maker gender biases.”

971 The remaining clusters show movement of both associates and partners of large law
 972 firms into positions in smaller firms, suggesting the importance of lifestyle and the
 973 impact of less than elite credentials. The potential lack of fit is evident in the greater
 974 presence of lower-ranked law schools attended by those in this sequence and by the
 975 overoptimism of a substantial number who thought they would make equity partner
 976 in the large law firm. This also includes the small grouping of lawyers in state govern-
 977 ment, who again hail from less elite law schools.

978 The story of the sorting of lawyers suggests that the legal field has absorbed the
 979 influx of lower-tier law graduates seeking places in large law firms by offering mainly
 980 entry-level positions and then channeling them into second-tier corporate counsel posi-
 981 tions, smaller firms of which some will be more prestigious boutiques or regional firms,
 982 and above all nonequity positions within the large law firms. This is reminiscent of the
 983 seeding and tracking system described by Wilkins and Gulati (1998), in which elite law
 984 graduates are seeded from their start at the firm to the partnership training track rather
 985 than to the paperwork (or “flatlining”) track.

986 Finally, we also observe a stark separation in the sequences that lead to positions at
 987 small firms versus large firms and business. Echoing Heinz and Laumann's (1982) obser-
 988 vation about the two hemispheres of the profession, then, we continue to see a strong
 989 differentiation among the settings in which lawyers work. The most elite careers never
 990 include spells in state government or small practice, for example. What is new com-
 991 pared to the profession observed by Heinz and Laumann is that the starting point
 992 for all these careers was the large firm. Thus, the growth and transformation of the large
 993 firm meant that it absorbed those who were previously relegated to the lower hemi-
 994 sphere of the bar, yet those lawyers were not able to maintain this newfound eliteness
 995 over the course of their careers.

996 CONCLUSION

997 The process of elite sorting remains significant in the modern legal profession. The
 998 legal profession is far more open to graduates of lower-ranked law schools than was
 999 depicted by Smigel in the 1960s and by Heinz and Laumann in the 1970s. Even
 1000 the most prestigious corporate law firms have opened their doors to a broader range
 1001 of law schools and a much more diverse population. The legal field is therefore in many
 1002 respects very different from what it was in the golden age of law firms. The structure of
 1003 the legal field is much more complex, with much more mobility and exchange. The top
 1004 positions in law firms, in-house, and in the federal government are now open to and
 1005 sometimes occupied by women, minorities, and graduates of nonelite law schools.
 1006 The sequence analyses and qualitative interviews show the accommodation of the
 1007 new relative openness and the change in the role of the large law firm from a career
 1008 choice to primarily an apprenticeship or finishing school.

1009 More theoretically, we note how this story of elite legal career pathways can be
 1010 examined instructively from the point of view of Bourdieusian field sociology. From
 1011 this perspective, we can examine the legal field as a semiautonomous space in which
 1012 actors compete according to the rules of the game for the rewards—wealth, status,
 1013 power. Those who possess the assets valued in the field obtain the positions at the
 1014 top of the hierarchy (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992). In the golden age of corporate
 1015 lawyers, then, the valued capital assets were elite law degrees, some family capital,
 1016 merit in the form of law review and high grades from the elite law schools, and
 1017 WASP status with wives at home. A good portion of those who had these assets
 1018 elected to join the corporate law firm partnership tournament. Of those only a few
 1019 had the drive, sponsorship from clients and partners, and perhaps social sophistication
 1020 to make partner. Those who “failed” gained much lower-prestige careers mainly in the
 1021 shadow of the large firms—for example, they were placed in-house with one of the
 1022 firm's clients.

1023 The expansion of the field, competition, and social changes brought challenges to
 1024 the insular and inbred world of elite corporate law. The partners had to open up to
 1025 nonelite law schools, minorities, and women, whose identities now had value in the
 1026 legal field that corporate law firms needed to recognize (because of external social
 1027 pressures, ratings, client demands, and changes in the pool of elite and nonelite law

1028 graduates, among other things). The lengthening of the partnership track and the move
 1029 to a “tournament without end” made the corporate partnership track much less
 1030 desirable than in the past to the elite law graduates that are central to elite law firm
 1031 identity.

1032 The law firms contained this challenge by opening up their recruiting
 1033 dramatically and by redefining what it means to work in a large law firm. In this
 1034 new model, a position in a law firm is treated as apprenticeship that is recognized
 1035 and valued in all practice settings (because the hierarchy of the legal field puts
 1036 corporate law on top) as a great place to begin one’s career. This transformation
 1037 meant that nearly all who could get corporate jobs took them nevertheless.
 1038 Furthermore, while the partnership ranks opened up, partners were overwhelmingly
 1039 white (not necessarily WASP) males, graduating with membership on law review,
 1040 with high grades, from elite law schools, and with wives at home. The firms changed,
 1041 becoming more open and legitimate, and yet those lawyers with the characteristics of
 1042 the partners of the golden age still reaped the rewards. The legitimacy of the large
 1043 firm was further maintained by the desirability of all the “choices” available to those
 1044 leaving law firms and the fact that each one granted especially high value to those
 1045 with corporate law service on their resumes. In short, large law firms retained their
 1046 legitimacy and their place at the top of the hierarchy, did not change much in equity
 1047 partner composition despite the dramatic changes in hiring at the entry level, and
 1048 could pick from a pool of potential partners that for various reasons “fit” the law
 1049 firms. Consistent with Bourdieu, the field changed by absorbing the challenge in a
 1050 way consistent with refurbishing and maintaining the basic hierarchies of law
 1051 positions, law schools, and the ability of white males with wives at home to occupy
 1052 most of the positions of power in the firms.

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TABLE 1.
Descriptive statistics for large law firm starters

	AJD1 All Other Settings	AJD1 Large Law Firm Starters
Law School Rank		
Ranked 1–10	6.6%	30.4%***
Ranked 11–20	8.5%	19.2%***
Ranked 21–50	19.7%	23.2% [†]
Ranked 51–100	29.5%	17.9%***
Tier 3	18.8%	6.7%***
Tier 4	16.8%	2.5%***
AJD3 Setting		
Solo	11.3%	3.6%***
Firm 2–20	17.9%	8.1%***
Firm 21–100	8.7%	5.1% [†]
Firm 101–250	3.8%	2.3%
Firm 251+	4.6%	27.9%***
Firm – unknown size	0.9%	1.5%
Fed Govt	5.8%	7.5%**
State Govt	13.9%	3.6%***
Legal Services or PD	3.7%	1.3%*
Public Int	1.5%	0.2%
Non Profit or Educ	6.4%	6.0%
Business – Practicing	9.9%	25.8%***
Business – Not Practicing	7.4%	6.0%
Other	4.2%	1.1%***
AJD3 Mean Income by AJD3 Setting		
Solo	\$108,431	\$113,000
Firm 2–20	\$142,125	\$177,875
Firm 21–100	\$176,666	\$245,042***
Firm 101–250	\$240,443	\$211,400
Firm 251+	\$240,199	\$341,880***
Firm – unknown size	\$300,644	\$250,000
Fed Govt	\$123,292	\$139,516***
State Govt	\$85,801	\$92,679
Legal Services or PD	\$87,917	\$84,400
Public Int	\$90,624	\$78,500
Non Profit or Educ	\$92,455	\$129,658***
Business – Practicing	\$201,382	\$301,996***
Business – Not Practicing	\$142,856	\$220,261***
Other	\$126,142	\$55,600
AJD3 Mean Income across All Settings	\$138,793	\$240,206***
Satisfaction		
AJD3 Mod/Ext Satisfied Decision to Become Lawyer	74.8%	81.3%**
Agree/Strongly Agree Law Degree Good Career Investment	75.5%	85.2%***
Agree/Strongly Agree Would Still Attend Law School	60.7%	66.8%*

[†]p < .10, *p < .05, **p < .01, ***p < .001

