

# African Americans and the Workplace: Overview of Persistent Discrimination

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Despite laws against racial discriminatory practices in the workplace, African Americans still encounter a series of unique problems from individual actions and organizational policies and practices. This article gives a brief overview of some of the major sources of discrimination affecting African Americans. It also discusses Affirmative Action controversy, racism and workplace discrimination as human rights violations of African Americans. Government and organizations' roles and strategies against discriminatory practices in the workplace are addressed.

## INTRODUCTION

The workplace increasingly is more diverse than ever before. For decades African Americans, women, and many minorities were excluded from participating in most of the desirable jobs and institutions. Even when declared unconstitutional, the discrimination against minority groups often persisted (Beauchamp & Bowie, 1993). Although some work organizations are making progress in their efforts to combat discrimination, African Americans particularly still face a series of unique problems imposed on them through the complex interactions of racially motivated negative attitudes and actions of individual and organizational policies and practices (Chima, 1999; Stroman & Seltzer, 1991) not encountered by Caucasians. Some of the major problems African Americans face include: employment process biases, channeling into "minority" positions, lack of access to network and mentors, promotion and advancement difficulties, and emotional and psychological maltreatment (Queralto, 1996).

North America's history of discrimination against African Americans suggests that justice demands effective policies to protect them from human rights abuses. With discrimination and inequities continuing in work organizations, a reality of economic, political, and social constraints persist in perpetuating a system of injustice and societal stratification characterized by imbalances of power and resources. There is a need to further explore and understand the experiences of African Americans in the workplace. This article is intended as an overview of major workplace problems of African Americans that must be addressed in any effort to achieve an inclusive and diverse workplace. This article will address (a) individual, organizational, and structural sources of discrimination against African Americans in the workplace; (b) the Affirmative Action controversy, racism and workplace discrimination, and violations of the human rights of African Americans; and (c) government and organizations' roles and strategies in response to discriminatory practices in the workplace.

## WORKPLACE DISCRIMINATION AND AFRICAN AMERICANS

Although awareness of discriminatory behaviors in the workplace is increasing, African Americans still face unique problems in dealing with oppressive attitudes, policies, and culturally insensitive practices. Unique sources of discrimination presenting African Americans with stress not encountered by Caucasians in the workplace include individual, organization, and structural discrimination (Stroman & Seltzer, 1991; U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, 1981). These will be explained in the following sections.

### **Individual Sources of Discrimination**

Individual discriminatory conduct and deliberately discriminatory actions by consciously prejudiced individuals often are hidden and appear unintentional in the workplace (U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, 1981). For example, personnel officers whose stereotyped beliefs about African Americans contribute to their hiring African Americans for low-level and low-paying jobs exclusively, ignoring their potential experience or qualifications for higher level jobs. Administrators who rely on personal connections or by word-of-mouth recruiting limit potential applicants only to their friends of the same race. Discrimination in hiring and promotion accounts for a sizeable difference in job status between African Americans and Caucasian workers (Laseter, 1997).

Patterns of employment discrimination are found, especially for African American males, for whom employment has become steadily more difficult in almost every sector from the mid 1970's through the early 1990's (Burstein, 1985). In 1985, two independent studies found striking disparities in the employment levels of college-educated African Americans and Caucasians in the Washington, D.C. area. Both studies found that college-educated African Americans have more difficulty than their Caucasian counterparts in securing employment (Beauchamp & Bowie, 1993). Both studies cite discrimination as the major underlying factor. Moreover, a 1991 comprehensive study by the Urban Institute (Turner, Fix, & Struyk, 1991) found that African American job applicants experience discrimination in one out of five searches. These researchers examined employment practices in Washington, D.C. and Chicago. Equally qualified, identically dressed Caucasians and African Americans posing as job applicants to 476 advertised entry-level job openings were used to test for bias in the job market. A Caucasian applicant was able to submit an application in 20 percent of the cases when an African American was not. Further, it was found that the higher the position, the higher they found the level of discrimination against the African American to be (Turner, Fix, & Struyk, 1991).

A similar study in San Diego showed discriminatory treatment of African Americans in 20 percent of the workplaces studied. Ford (1994) revealed that a Los Angeles employment firm used code words to disguise its discriminatory hiring practices. When an employer called seeking a new employee: Talk to "Maria" actually meant "I prefer Hispanics," "See me" meant "no people of color," and "No T" meant "no Blacks." Chideya (1995) noted that many employers did not hesitate to generalize regarding racial differences and associated negative images about African American young men. The employers often believed that young African American men were lazy, did not want to work, were immoral, and were not as smart as Caucasian youth.

### **ORGANIZATIONAL SOURCES OF DISCRIMINATION**

Discrimination, though practiced by individuals, is often reinforced by the well-established rules, policies, and practices of organizations. Once employed, discrimination at the organizational level results in advancement difficulties for African Americans. They do not seem to get the same opportunities for promotion and advancement to supervisory, middle management, and higher administrative positions as Caucasians of equal abilities. Qualified African Americans and other minorities are routinely passed over for jobs and promotions in favor of less qualified Caucasian males (McCoy, 1994). Most high paying positions still remain occupied by Caucasian males. For example, in 1995, about 40 percent of all managers were women, while 97 percent of the senior

managers of Fortune 1000 industrial and Fortune 500 companies were Caucasian, and about 96 percent of all of them were males. In Fortune 2000 industrial and service companies, 5 percent of senior managers were women, virtually all of them were Caucasian. Of the senior managers, 40 percent were Caucasian women, and 4 percent African American men (Kilborn, 1995). African American women account for more than 12 percent of the female workforce at large, but make up only 7 percent of 2.9 million female managers in the private sector. For every \$1 Caucasian male managers make, Caucasian female managers make 59 cents, and minority women earn 57 cents (McCoy, 1994).

Another organizational source of discrimination relates to the practice of channeling into "minority" positions. For example, in the total U.S. population, 3 out of 7 employees hold white collar positions, whereas the ratio is only 1 of 7 for African Americans. They occupy over 50 percent of the nation's jobs as garbage collectors and maids, but only 4 percent of the nation's management positions (Jaynes & Williams, 1988). A study of African American and Chicano top-level administrators that included both men and women found that these administrators perceived themselves as being required to have greater job entrance qualifications than their Caucasian peers. They reported that they received less organizational support, had less intrinsic authority, had limited channels of communication, and less opportunities for upward mobility (Kenney & Wissoker, 1994).

A 1993 report by the Committee for Racial Justice and the Center for Political and Economic Studies noted that Caucasian people perceive another Caucasian as competent until proven incompetent but perceive an African American person as incompetent until proven competent. Often, African Americans are presumed to have limited expertise and to have been hired preferentially. Consequently, their supervisors commonly shy away from giving them challenging tasks, refrain from giving them consistent performance feedback for fear that any constructive criticism may be misinterpreted as prejudiced (Chideya, 1995). African Americans are disadvantaged by these practices because it fails to prepare them for challenging tasks with advancement opportunities within the organization. Tomaskovic-Devey (1993) noted that African Americans have to work in extraordinarily Caucasian dominated environments, experience direct face-to-face discrimination, and are more supervised than Caucasian employees because they are Black. Caucasian workers, particularly men, tend to have profound advantages in their access to the most desirable jobs. Their jobs are relatively autonomous, have high prestige and power over other workers, and provide career ladders and skill training.

African Americans in the workplace encounter limited access to network and mentors. They often have difficulty becoming full participants of the buddy or the "old boy" network. Exchanges of information and corporate strategies by business acquaintances often occur in racially exclusive country clubs and locker rooms. While these actions are not acts of conscious prejudice, they place African Americans at a disadvantage, since these networks are sources of tactical assistance, informal feedback on performance, and emotional support (Collins, Kamya & Tourse, 1997). Mentorship across racial and ethnic lines is difficult to initiate and sustain. Mentorship relations between males and females are often subject to sexual interpretations. Role model relationships and mentorship between Caucasian women and women of color is more frequent than between Caucasian males and minority men. The power elite in work organizations, mostly Caucasian

males, prefer to mentor other Caucasian males, because they feel more comfortable working closely with others like themselves.

Discrimination and maltreatment of African Americans in the workplace can lead to negative psychological and emotional consequences. They encounter both sexual and racial harassment in the workplace. Racial harassment involves creation of a hostile work environment on the basis of race. It is a form of discrimination involving verbal harassment through actions such as: name calling, verbal abuse, epithets, threats, slurs, derogatory comments, unwelcome remarks, or innuendoes in attributing an individual's behavior to his or her racial or ethnic affiliation. Studies (Jackson, 1994; Janofsky, 1993) show that African American women encounter both sexual and racial harassment and tend to leave a workplace culture they perceived to be negative and oppressive. An examination of the racial harassment and discrimination claims filed with the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) shows that race-based claims have been on the rise since 1990 (Chideya, 1995).

People typically respond to workplace discrimination and racial harassment with anger, rage, hostility, resentment, bitterness and aggression (Keashly, 1998). Some displace their feelings of frustration onto others through abuse of their spouse or children. Graham-Berman and Levandosky (1998) noted that emotional maltreatment may be as damaging to victims as abuse that involves physical aggression. Feelings resulting from psychological and emotional abuse in the workplace include confusion, depression, feelings of helplessness, hopelessness, despair, and attitude of distrust and paranoia toward the hostile environment. Nonetheless, research suggests that workplace environment characterized by hostility based on race/ethnicity contributes to poor mental health of employees (Leymann, 1990). Such environment causes low productivity, increased accidents, increases rate of turnover, absenteeism, and contributes to increased abuse of alcohol and other drugs by some employees as a coping means.

## **STRUCTURAL SOURCES OF DISCRIMINATION**

In addition to barriers from individual and organizational discrimination, structural discriminatory practices that disadvantage African Americans are readily accepted aspects of everyday behavior in the United States. Such self-sustaining discriminatory processes occur not only within the fields of employment, education, and housing, but also between these structural areas. Racism in the United States has been and remains a potent force in shaping and controlling the African American experience. For African Americans, racism involves those practices and beliefs that maintain their subordination even in the face of changed legal and political circumstances that call for equal opportunity for all (Business Higher Education Forum, 1990).

In 1990, the African American population represented about 13 percent of the U.S. population and 29 percent of the poor. Structural discrimination in housing, education, and employment interlock and make it more difficult to rise above poverty (McFate, 1995). However, discrimination and stereotypes in education discourage many from obtaining the credentials and skills to get good jobs. Discrimination in housing confines African Americans to school districts providing substandard education, perpetuating the circle of barriers to self-determination (Laseter, 1997). Residential segregation becomes even more problematic when African Americans are concentrated in occupational niches and/or regions that have suffered heavy job losses. Residents of these neighborhoods (McFate, 1995) tend to be stigmatized, and observers charge that "cultures

of dependency" develop, demanding heavy expenditures on social services. Discrimination in employment deprives African Americans of the economic resources to buy housing. However, there is the problem of real estate practices such as redlining. Employers' discriminatory behaviors toward African Americans emanates from a society that has historically undermined their human dignity (Landrine & Klonoff 1996; Netting, Kettner & McMurtry, 1998).

### **AFFIRMATIVE ACTION CONTROVERSY AND DISCRIMINATION**

Contemporary controversy has centered on Affirmative Action as one of America's most pressing issues. The Affirmative Action pioneer legislation includes these federal laws and one executive order: Title VII of the 1964 Civil Rights Act, the Equal Pay Act of 1963 as amended, Title IX of the Educational Amendments of 1972, and Executive Order 11246 as amended by 11375 (Skidmore, 1995). Title VII, as amended in 1972, bans all discrimination in employment based on race, color, religion, sex, or national origin. This action is one part of an effort to remedy past and present discrimination and is considered essential to assuring that jobs are "genuinely and equally accessible to qualified persons." Although Title VII in its language referred to race in general, the policy's momentum was to address the condition of millions of African Americans who were systematically denied economic and educational opportunity in the United States for hundreds of years. The legacy of slavery resulted in separate and unequal institutions for the African American population and segregation in all aspects of life (Stein, 1998). One of the most important accomplishments of the struggles of African Americans to challenge this inequality was the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964.

The initial focus of the legislation under the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission was to eliminate discrimination in hiring policies of the federal government and private corporations. Later, the 1972 amendments expanded the jurisdiction to include educational employers, major educational public elementary and primary school systems, and public and private institutions of higher education (Skidmore, 1995). Moreover, the 1972 amendments upgraded the Equal Pay Act of 1963 which prohibits sex discrimination in wages or fringe benefits to cover executive, administrative, and professional workers. Executive Order 11246, amended by Executive Order 11375 in 1968, includes sex discrimination. The executive order mandates that all employers with federal contracts of more than \$10,000 must take Affirmative Action to eliminate all discriminatory practices against women and minorities and to eliminate underutilization of women and minorities, and most recently people with disabilities, in their workforce.

Initially, the government's policy objective with Affirmative Action was to enable talented people to enter various occupations and educational programs without regard to race (Macionis, 1995). In practice, Affirmative Action means that employers and college admissions offices solicit applications from people of all races and ethnicities and carefully monitor hiring and promotion or admissions policies to eliminate discrimination against minorities, whether intended or otherwise. Because employers can no longer defend themselves by claiming that a decision not to hire a minority group member was based on some criterion other than the applicant's minority membership, employers must demonstrate according to a checklist of positive measures that they are not guilty of discrimination. Consequently, in certain circumstances, some organizations have used quotas under which specific numbers of qualified minority members must be accepted to fill vacant positions. For example, a university with a high proportion of Caucasian male faculty may

be required to fill half of its faculty vacancies with women and other minorities (Zastrow & Kirst-Ashman, 1997).

Recently, however, the aspects of Affirmative Action policies that establish use of quotas, timetables, and goals intended to ensure more equitable opportunities have provoked controversy. A major dilemma with this practice involves reverse discrimination, where qualified majority-group members, primarily Caucasian males, are sometimes arbitrarily excluded. This has been referred to as preferential hiring and refers to hiring that gives preference in recruitment and ranking to groups previously and presently discriminated against. In recent years, both the opponents and advocates of Affirmative Action have exhausted the argument as to the pro's and con's of the programs. Details of those arguments are not intended for this discussion.

Nevertheless, evidence of discrimination against African Americans in the workplace is abundant. For example, in 1993, race and gender-based discrimination claims filed with the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) totaled 55,614 cases (Chideya, 1995). Few examples of race and gender discrimination suits in the workplace include: a class-action discrimination suit for \$300 million against State Farm Insurance, a more than \$40 million suit against General Motors, and another for \$42 million against USX Corporation. Northwest Airlines settled a racial discrimination case for \$1.2 million. African American employees and job seekers who had been denied employment and promotion by Shoney's restaurant chain settled for \$132.5 million in damages. The average discrimination case brought against a company by an individual costs the company about \$75,000 (Chideya, 1995; Gordon, 1992; Henderson, 1994).

Brimmer (1993) noted that employment discrimination against African Americans costs the nation tremendously. He indicated that in 1991, racial bias deprived the American economy of about \$215 billion and was equal to roughly 3.8 percent of the gross domestic product (GDP). The bulk of the loss is related to bias that hampers access to higher paying jobs. Further, emotional harm to victims of employment discrimination results in increased health care costs for the nation. Consequently, employers lose money from increased absenteeism. A review of publications exposing specific factors of ethnicity that influence entry into management concluded that there is sufficient information to concede that minority administrators' ascendance to top management positions continues to be blocked by numerous barriers attributable to their ethnicity (Skidmore, 1995). Many of these barriers are invisibly rooted in long-held attitudes and beliefs about the inferiority of minority members. Many are residual vestiges of the overt oppression to which minority groups were exposed.

The historical and sociological literature is replete with axioms, facts, and research conceding that African Americans have been and are still victimized by discrimination in the workplace. Despite the awareness, much of the controversy over various "equal opportunity" and "Affirmative Action" programs has been on whether these programs are needed any more and on the issue of "reverse discrimination." Although it is common to think of racial inequalities as public policy issues they are essentially human rights policy issues. Government policy provides inducement to help organizations make wise human rights choices. There is a strong need to appreciate the fact that the persistent exclusion and segregation of African Americans from desirable jobs is not simply a result of irrational prejudices, but a violation of their human rights. Advantaged employees, including managers, and many employers may have strong interests in excluding African

Americans from rewarding jobs, training and promotion opportunities. Tomaskovic-Devey (1993) contends that market mechanisms cannot be expected to erode racial inequalities without organizational and public policy initiatives. Governments have the responsibility to protect their citizens from human rights abuses that occur in workplaces.

## **HUMAN RIGHTS AND RACISM IN WORKPLACE**

Evidence accumulated since the beginning of the United States shows that racism against African Americans existed then and continues to exist (Cose, 1997). While undeniable progress has been made in removing the more blatant forms of discrimination and segregation, social and economic difficulties afflict African Americans more than their Caucasian counterparts because of subtle and covert racism. The concept of social justice is commonly viewed as society's way of making choices and responding to its obligations regarding resource utilization. The major arenas in which equality of opportunity is paramount to achieving distributive justice are in the workplace and professions, in gaining money or market power, in freedom of choice and expression, and in attaining political power.

## **HUMAN RIGHTS PERSPECTIVE**

The rationale for incorporating a human rights framework in the discussion of equality of opportunities and Affirmative Action is justified by both the United States' Constitution and the United Nations' (UN) Declaration of Human Rights. Following World War II, the United Nations created a Commission on Human Rights and, with input from nations around the world, the commission developed a Universal Declaration of Human Rights. On December 10, 1948, Eleanor Roosevelt, the widow of former U.S. President Franklin D. Roosevelt and Chairwoman of the Commission read the Universal Declaration of Human Rights to the General Assembly for approval and adoption (Cloud, 1998). As adopted, this document, consisting of a preamble and thirty articles, sets forth the basic civil, economic, political and social rights, and freedom of every person.

Article I of the Declaration laid down the basic philosophy of the document: "All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood" (United Nations, 1987). The declaration that all people are "equal in dignity and rights," means not only that laws apply equally to all but that people have a right to be treated equally regardless of their actions or place in life. Article 3 declares that: "Everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of person," thus forming the basis for human beings' civil and political rights listed in Articles 4 to 21. Further, Article 22 states, in part, that everyone is entitled to the realization of the rights "Indispensable for his/her dignity and the free development of his/her personality" (United Nations, 1987). This Declaration supports Articles 23 to 27, which explicates human beings' economic, social, and cultural rights. Just as America's Declaration of Independence and Constitution provide a solid foundation for developing a fully open and equitable society in the United States more than two hundred years after these documents were written, so the Universal Declaration of Human Rights provides the world a beacon as we move toward the 21st Century (Cloud, 1998). Yet in the United States, the strongest voice for human dignity was that of Martin Luther King, whose fight for civil rights began in a revolt against the indignities of segregation inflicted on African American. (Locke, Garrison & Winship, 1998).

## **RACISM AS VIOLATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS**

Although there is only one human race, the concept of race becomes a very dangerous myth when it is assumed that differences in physical traits are linked to intellectual differences and cultural achievements. Racism has been a concern for the United Nations for many years. In 1970, the convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination was established (Scott, 1995). From 1983 to 1993, the UN observed the "Second Decade to Combat Racism and Racial Discrimination." The 1993 session of the UN Human Rights Commission adopted a resolution on measures to combat "Contemporary forms of racism, racial discrimination, and related intolerance." Statements of the resolution (Scott, 1995) include that:

- (1) the scourges of racism and racial discrimination are continually assuming new forms, requiring a periodic re-examination of the methods used to combat them,
- (2) that racism and racial discrimination, in whatever form, are intensified by conflicts over economic resources, in developed as well as developing countries, and can best be defeated by a combination of economic, legislative and educational measures,
- (3) all human rights and fundamental freedoms, economic, social and cultural, as well as civil and political, are indivisible and interrelated,
- (4) all governments are urged to undertake immediate measures and to develop strong policies effectively to combat racism and eliminate discrimination.

**WORKPLACE DISCRIMINATION AS HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATION** Although an international convention against discrimination in employment and occupation was adopted by the UN in 1958 (Ford, 1994), the violation of the human rights of African Americans persist through racism and discriminatory practices in the workplace. The role of the United States in the post--Cold War period is obvious, whether as the last remaining superpower or as the most significant voice in the world of political affairs (Epps, 1995). Transnationalization, that is, the growing world interdependence and increasing integration of the world's political economy, expects leadership from the United States. This leadership from a human rights stance is problematic when people of color in the U.S. suffer the effects of human rights violations just as Tibetans do at the hands of the Chinese, or East Timorese do in Indonesia.

While Affirmative Action, a program to provide equal opportunity for all Americans, is being debated for its fairness, the United States has the ultimate responsibility to seek new paradigms of sustainable human development and protection from abuses for all citizens. The effort to end discrimination against African Americans or anyone in the workplace almost certainly should come with increased awareness of this problem. Such effort should come from a combination of respected public leaders, think-tank intellectuals, religious groups, and plain ordinary citizens prepared to charge their local and federal politicians with human rights accountability.

## **GOVERNMENT ROLES AGAINST WORKPLACE DISCRIMINATION**

Most certainly, government policy and workplace organizational policy must respond to discrimination in the workplace. The ubiquitousness of committed policy to end discrimination is warranted by significant demographic changes in the years around the close of the 20th Century and the dawn of the new millennium. It has been estimated that minorities of color will constitute about 40 percent of the populations by the year 2020 and will approach a statistical majority by 2050 (Census Bureau, 1992). According to a 1992 Census Bureau report, 42 percent of the workforce in 1990 were Caucasian males who will constitute only 15 percent of all new entrants



into the workforce in the next 10 to 15 years. The remainder will be people of color, women, and immigrants (Census Bureau, 1992).

American political and legislative will should be strong enough to direct policies against racism and discrimination in the workplace mostly based on the democratic ideals, constitutional rights of citizens, and human rights obligations. Cose (1997) has argued that if discrimination is permitted to continue, poverty will inevitably deepen and become more persistent within a large share of the African American communities. Consequently, crime and drugs will become more fully rooted, and social institutions will fragment further under the weight of deteriorating conditions. Not all Caucasians oppose Affirmative Action. In fact, most support Affirmative Action insofar as quotas are not used (Henderson, 1994). It is the government's responsibility to enforce Affirmative Action as it is or enforce a modified form of the program.

Historically, people and organizations have resisted government social initiatives. For example, businesses resisted government's family leave initiative at first. They resisted the accommodation requirement for people with disabilities initially. Federal troops were used to desegregate schools. It took government efforts to enforce the voting rights of women and African Americans. The point is that the need to respond to the persistent racial inequality is imperative. As racial inequality (Cose, 1997) sharpens, Caucasian fears will grow, racial prejudices will be reinforced, and hostility toward African Americans will increase, making the problem of racial injustice and equal opportunity even more insoluble.

Furthermore, if we can afford to send troops to some nations around the world to keep peace and enforce human right compliance, we can definitely fund the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC), which continues to remain underfunded and backlogged with discrimination cases. The Civil Rights Act of 1964, which made it unlawful for any employer or labor union to discriminate against any individual in employment because of race, also established the EEOC to enforce this provision by investigation, conference, conciliation, persuasion, and if need be, civil action in federal court. In light of the debate over Affirmative Action, the EEOC should be adequately staffed and funded to provide leadership in eliminating discrimination.

## **ORGANIZATIONAL ROLES AGAINST DISCRIMINATION**

Although federal government and state policy have traditionally induced workplace management to address racial inequalities at work, many corporations are committed to creating more equitable workplaces. In 1990, one-fourth of the companies surveyed already had a minority workforce of more than 25 percent (U.S. Census Bureau, 1992). Many organizations are paying attention to research findings showing that companies "with progressive and inclusive practices" showed unusually high profitability and financial growth over a 25-year period (Gordon, 1992). Racial harassments are common responses of employees who are threatened by integration. The fear of integration among workers has a long history, in part on the management practice of hiring minority and female workers to drive down wages (Tomaskovic-Devey, 1993).

Affirmative Action programs, along with corporate commitments to equal opportunity, have affected U.S. businesses in profound ways. For example, in 1971, Monsanto Chemical Company found itself with few African Americans or female employees. In that same year, the Department of Labor announced that Affirmative Action would be enforced. Monsanto Chemical, in complying,

tripled the number of minority employees in the next fourteen years, aggressively promoted women and African Americans into middle management positions, and eliminated racial hiring patterns in technical and craft positions. These goals were achieved without diluting the quality of its employees and the company today has no intention of abandoning its Affirmative Action programs. The focus of Monsanto's programs has, however, shifted from hiring minority employees to the promotion of minorities within the company (Beauchamp & Bowie, 1993). A few examples of similar organizations include: IBM, Proctor and Gamble, Aetna Casualty, Digital Equipment Corporation, Grand Metropolitan Foods, Exxon, and the Internal Revenue Service.

Organizations interested in promoting fairness in hiring, promotion, and pay along racial lines must be sensitive to the sources of internal racial job segregation and its effect on how the work is organized as well as paid (Tomaskovic-Devey, 1993). Reliance on patterns of traditional and unmonitored interaction in employment practices are more likely to produce discriminatory workplace practices. Organizations that hold line managers accountable to both employees and upper management for complying with formal rules, tend to have less exclusionary practices. It is essential to note that human behavior responds to its environment. Since behaviors are learned they can also be unlearned. Racial discrimination is a learned behavior and can only be sustained by behavior as well as structures that support it.

Cockburn (1991) contrasted racial harassment policies of three companies with similar policies forbidding racial harassment in the workplace and found significant differences in the implementation of their policies. In one, workplace management was committed and aggressive, and racial harassment was strongly disciplined and publicly pursued. In the other two companies, harassment charges were handled quietly for fear of embarrassment and Caucasian male backlash. Cockburn also reported that although the aggressive company received complaints from Caucasian male workers, those employees reported that they felt the standard of behavior had greatly improved since the equality policy had raised issues of harassment, unlike the other two companies.

In most large organizations, it is within the purview of human resources management to provide leadership in dealing with the challenges of workplace discrimination. In recent years, experts (Henderson, 1994; Thomas, 1991) had recommended the need for organizations to value diversity and diversity management. Valuing diversity calls for moral and ethical imperatives to appreciate culturally diverse peoples. Managing diversity emphasizes managerial skills and policies needed to optimize every employee's contribution to the organizational goals. Organizations may require all new employees to read and sign a contract that specifies their understanding and agreement with the organization's policy against discrimination, prejudice, and racial harassment. While organizations cannot manage all attitudes, they can manage behavior with accountability, rewards, and punishment, just as in other significant areas of concern such as the drug-free workplace contract.

Companies can increase their ability to manage racially oppressive attitudes by establishing a reporting (grievance) procedure for those employees who have been subjected to racial mistreatments. The effectiveness of this reporting procedure can be increased by encouraging all employees to report any discriminatory and harassing behavior or action. All employees should be

made aware that because the employer is liable for racial discrimination and harassment, their cooperation will increase the organization's chances to solve such problems.

Another approach to involve all employees in the effort of their organization in managing diversity is to form a workplace diversity committee. This committee will be comprised of men and women of different ethnic backgrounds. Their function should include initiating organizational audit to remedy practices that can prevent minorities and women from reaching their full potential. The committee can assist management with ideas on how to provide mentors to minorities and all employees and reduce exclusionary practices. Most importantly, the committee should represent to all employees that the organization does not tolerate racial discrimination and that the organization does not use skin color or race as criteria for according privileges and advantages.

## CONCLUSION

No other technique for the conduct of life attaches the individuals so firmly to reality as laying emphasis on work; for his work at least gives him a secure place in the position of reality, in the human community.

- Sigmund Freud (1961), p. 27

Overwhelmingly, research shows that African Americans are being discriminated against in recruitment and promotion, and are victims of racial harassment in the workplace. Despite the knowledge that work is essential to the well-being of all humans, some African Americans are forced to leave their employment because of stresses from hostile work environment (Leymann, 1990). Some stay and may turn to substance abuse as a coping mechanism, while some develop mental or emotional health problems that further devastate them and their families. Although racism and racial discrimination in workplaces have been declared to constitute human rights abuses and violation, they persist in America and in the workplace.

The debate about whether we need Affirmative Action any longer is premature, since there are racially motivated abuses in the workplace. Racially, the American goal of a level playing field still remains to be achieved. While the 1996 Welfare Reform has a focus on employment as a major source of moving recipients out of dependency, racial discrimination practices in the workplace continue to hinder African Americans from developing their full potentials and growth. Governmental policies to empower American organizations in the effort to eliminate discrimination in the workplace is crucial. To do this is not to do any favors for African Americans and other oppressed minorities, but it is about enforcing nondiscriminatory laws of our country and those of the United Nations.

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