

Civil Rights

Diversity: The Pendulum Factor

Minorities need to be vigilant of Affirmative Action abuses.

BY JOE HENRIQUES

A recent article in *The Chronicle of Higher Education* ("Diversity at What Cost?") reported that a female, African-American associate dean at Virginia Tech had hired minorities and females to the virtual exclusion of white males. The impetus for these drastic measures to diversify the faculty and staff of the university was the dean of the College of Arts and Sciences.

He decided, after looking at the racial and gender diversity of the college, that something substantial had to be done to improve the racial and gender makeup of his departments. Although all of VT's academic departments previously had been asked to develop plans to diversify, the attempts had been "spotty," he said. So the dean, who is an Anglo Saxon, hired an African-American female associate dean to lead a drive for diversity.

And what a driver she was.

Under her leadership, a set of rules adopted by the College in 1999 virtually ensured that, in about a year's time, nearly all hires in this college of the university were female or minority scholars. The *Chronicle of Higher Education* gives the example of an African-American assistant professor of Spanish who committed two gaffes in the interview process that would have normally eliminated any other candidate from the shortlist. Yet he became the first black man to win a tenure-track post in his department.

He says, "You hire me because of my color, and I find that out, I'm out of here tomorrow. Period." But another minority professor claims that that is exactly what happened. It is no wonder that many Anglos have cried out, "Foul play!" For the same reason, African Americans and Latinos cry out when the tables are turned.

While conducting diversity workshops,

I have listened with amazement at minorities bashing the white non-Hispanic "good ole boy" club. I have asked them, "Do you really think this 'club' is a uniquely white phenomenon?"

Naturally, denying any group equal opportunity has serious social and economic consequences. Although it's important to acknowledge the fundamental protective tendency of any ethnic group to ensure the success of its own, every group decries another group's

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attempt to benefit its members at the expense of others.

Historically, women, racial minorities, the handicapped, criminals and the mentally ill have benefited from our free society, which generally promotes better treatment of all its members. Yet the very mechanism of the free-market system that has allowed for incredible reforms in the past is now often viewed as ineffective in the current quest for racial diversity.

Walter E. Williams, professor of economics at George Mason University, says that, "in the name of ideals such as income equality, sex and race balance, affordable housing and medical care, orderly markets, consumer protection and energy conservation, to name just a few, we have imposed widespread government controls that have subordinated us to a point at which considerations of personal freedom are but secondary or tertiary matters."

Yet limiting the freedoms of one member or group in order to accomplish good for another—exactly what Affirmative Action quotas do—strikes at the very foundation of what makes a free society so successful. Professor Williams sees it

as "using bad means (coercion) to achieve what are seen as good ends (helping people)." Quotas or not, the actions of VT's dean are equally counterproductive.

Being connected to a specific group is vital to our psychological, emotional, and physical health and provides a link to the larger community. It is *normal* and advantageous to desire unity with—and improvement of—those in your group. Yet as important as is homogeneous unity, unity and harmony among the

diverse members of the society is of equal importance.

Why are scientists so concerned about the balance of nature? Because all of nature suffers when one part is allowed to be para-

sitic, sucking energy and life from other elements with only its own survival in mind. Nature is at its best when in a state of mutual symbiosis. While it's natural and beneficial for birds of a feather to flock together, it still flies against a basic rule of creation for one flock to keep another from soaring as high as it was designed to fly.

The mere existence of the Office of Equal Opportunity is a testament to how difficult it is to create equity to everyone's satisfaction. Many minorities rally to bring society back to the original rule-book: equal opportunity for all. However, in our efforts to expand the opportunities available to the various groups that make up our communities, we cannot afford to discard the principles that have thus far enabled our society to move towards unity, among diversity.

To diminish the personal freedoms of one to benefit another is like "robbing Peter to pay Paul." **H**

JOE HENRIQUES is vice president and dean of the Moody Graduate School in Chicago, Illinois



