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# FROM THE ASHES OF AFFIRMATIVE ACTION

Linda S. Gottfredson

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It is no longer simply a question of common decency, but of business survival.

—R. Roosevelt Thomas

**W**hat can it be that is so critical for decency and survival in business? Answer: valuing, celebrating, and managing work force diversity. Or so say leaders of the diversity movement that is sweeping across corporate America today.

Top diversity consultant R. Roosevelt Thomas, for instance, claims that managing diversity enables employers to get the competitive edge by tapping the full potential of all their workers.<sup>1</sup> Much-quoted diversity author Ann Morrison claims, more specifically, that diversity programs help companies keep and gain market share, increase worker productivity, cut worker turnover and discrimination litigation, and improve the general quality of management.<sup>2</sup>

Critics are beginning to paint a less appealing picture, however.<sup>3</sup> Diversity analyst Frederick Lynch, for example, wonders in February's *National Review* whether the diversity movement is merely political correctness in the work-

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1. R. Roosevelt Thomas, Jr., *Beyond Race and Gender: Unleashing the Power of Your Total Work Force by Managing Diversity* (New York: American Management Association, 1991).

2. Ann Morrison, *The New Leaders: Guidelines on Leadership Diversity in America* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1992).

3. Frederick Lynch, "Workforce Diversity: PC's Final Frontier?" *National Review* (21 Feb. 1994), 32, 34, 36; Heather MacDonald, "The Diversity Industry," *New Republic* (5 July 1993), 22-25.

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place. He has also argued that it may lead to a coercive corporate pluralism, poisoned personnel relations, and intensified race-based politics. Similarly, Heather MacDonald, writing in the *New Republic* last year, suggested that the workplace is being converted "into an arena for the practice of identity politics" without doing much to improve either economic competitiveness or minority advancement.

The notion of managing diversity was virtually unknown in 1988, when the Hudson Institute mentioned it in its report *Opportunity 2000: Creative Affirmative Action Strategies for a Changing Workforce* as one form of "creative affirmative action." By 1990, however, managing diversity was being portrayed as the essence of progressive personnel management in business magazines ranging from *Training*, *Human Resources Magazine*, and *Public Utilities Fortnightly* to the *Harvard Business Review* and *Black Enterprise*.<sup>4</sup> Corporate leaders also began adding their voices to the growing chorus of diversity consultants. Said David Kearns, then chairman of Xerox, "The company that gets out in front of managing diversity will have the competitive edge." Said James Houghton, CEO of Corning, "It simply makes good business sense."

By 1994, according to Lynch's article, about half of the *Fortune* 500 companies had embraced the new movement to value and manage work force diversity. Companies like American Express Travel, AT&T, Coopers and Lybrand, Mobil, and Corning have called it a "business imperative," a "critical busi-

ness issue," and the "right business thing to do."

Although there are many approaches to managing diversity, diversity initiatives generally include one or more of the following activities: aggressively recruiting women and minorities and enhancing their promotability by providing them special opportunities and support; easing work-family conflicts by offering dependent-care benefits or flextime; linking managers' pay and promotions to their success in meeting specific targets in hiring, retaining, and promoting women and minorities; and holding "valuing differences" and "discovering diversity" workshops that urge employees to appreciate cultural differences, explore their own ethnic identities, and "get in touch with their stereotypes and false assumptions." Companies proudly at the forefront of the diversity movement (for example, Xerox, Corning, and Dupont) typically undertake all these activities, and more.

Diversity programs often cost big money. MacDonald reported in 1993 that fees for diversity consultants average \$2,000 a day. Highly sought-after consultants get much more. For example, Thomas, founder and executive director of a diversity consulting firm at Atlanta's Morehouse College, is reputed to get \$8,000 a day. "Cultural audits," the first step in most programs, cost between \$30,000 and \$100,000. One of the most successful diversity consulting firms, Elsie Cross Associates, requires companies to commit themselves to a five-year contract costing at least \$2.5 million. As MacDonald notes, diversity consultants are unable to document their claims to improve worker productivity, but this fact does not seem to dampen enthusiasm for the purchase of their expensive wares. Nor does the resentment among

4. Beverly Geber, "Managing Diversity," *Training* (July 1990), 23-30; Jim Castelli, "Education Forms Common Bond," *Human Resources* (June 1990), 46-49; Lloyd Lewan, "Diversity in the Workplace," *Human Resources* (June 1990), 42-45; R. Roosevelt Thomas, Jr., "From Affirmative Action to Affirming Diversity," *Harvard Business Review* (March-April 1990), 107-117.

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white men or the infighting among minority groups that some diversity activities generate.

How do we explain big business's rush to jump onto this expensive but unproven bandwagon? Where did this bandwagon come from, anyway? Most importantly, where is it taking us?

#### THE ASHES OF AFFIRMATIVE ACTION

**T**he cultural diversity movement has risen from the ashes of affirmative action. Affirmative action policy lies in ashes around the country because its successes have satisfied few and angered many. The fiery debate over it in recent years has destroyed it as a force for achieving the full race and gender parity in employment that has been its goal. Although most of its advocates continue to deny the charge, many citizens are convinced that affirmative action generally requires race or gender quotas and preferences. This belief has led, in turn, to deep resentment among men and nonminorities, angry claims that affirmative action lowers standards and pits races against one another, and mounting concern that it stigmatizes and disables its supposed beneficiaries, primarily blacks. In the last decade, there has been a virtual flood of critiques making this case, including books by blacks and Hispanics as well as whites.<sup>5</sup>

5. Thomas Sowell, *Preferential Policies* (New York: William Morrow, 1990); Shelby Steele, *Content of our Character: A New Vision of Race in America* (New York: HarperCollins, 1990); Linda Chavez, *Out of the Barrio* (New York: Basic, 1991); Herman Belz, *Equality Transformed: A Quarter-Century of Affirmative Action* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Transaction, 1992); Jared Taylor, *Paved with Good Intentions: The Failure of Race Relations in Contemporary America* (New York: Carroll & Graf, 1992).

Even the advocates of affirmative action are unhappy with it. Many are disappointed and angry that, although affirmative action may have gotten more minorities and women through the door, it has not moved them up the corporate ladder. They speak of glass ceilings and pink ghettos. While critics think affirmative action has gone too far, supporters wish it had gone much farther. Where critics would dismantle it, proponents would replace it with something stronger.

Affirmative action is not going to advance us any closer to its advocates' egalitarian goal. The reason is that it is based on a false premise—or at least an unrealistic promise. The false premise, the assumption of the early civil rights movement, is that equal opportunity (color-blind treatment) would produce equal outcomes (color-blind results). Unfortunately, this is seldom the case. Although we all have the same rights under the Constitution, we do not all have the same interests and capabilities. And what is true of individuals is true for groups.

For instance, women the world over tend to be more interested in nurturing roles (say, the helping professions) and men more interested in dealing with things and machines (say, engineering and technical trades). And as our educators keep telling us, some racial-ethnic groups (primarily blacks and Hispanics) leave school sooner and with fewer skills. The periodic National Assessment of Educational Progress, which is sponsored by the U.S. Department of Education to track trends in educational achievement, reveals that black seventeen year olds (excluding dropouts) per-



form more like white thirteen year olds than other seventeen year olds, no matter what the subject. Similarly, black college graduates perform more like white high school graduates. Hispanic performance falls midway between that of whites and blacks.

Employers are in a bind, however, because they have long been held to this false premise. As personnel psy-

chologists now know, group differences in interests and skills often *guarantee* race and gender imbalances when hiring and promotion are carried out in a color-and gender-blind manner. Under civil rights law (and in public perception), such imbalances are nonetheless enough to establish a prima facie case of illegal discrimination. It is no surprise, then, that many employers turn

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to race and gender preferences "to get the numbers right." They generally deny favoring women or minorities, however, because openly discriminating against white men can also land them in court. Damned if they do and damned if they don't, many employers are (privately) not very happy with affirmative action.

#### BIRTH OF THE MANAGING-DIVERSITY MOVEMENT

**A**s affirmative action "die[s] a natural death," in the words of Thomas, the diversity movement takes wing. Born of the same egalitarian goal as affirmative action, the phoenix of diversity nourishes itself on the failures and limitations of affirmative action. This is perhaps clearest in Thomas' seminal 1990 article in the *Harvard Business Review*, "From Affirmative Action to Affirming Diversity." There he describes how managing diversity is made necessary by what he describes as affirmative action's "self-defeating" cycle of frustration for women and minorities and crisis for the organization. "Affirmative action gets . . . the new people through the door [but] something else will have to get them into the driver's seat." We need, he says, to learn to manage diversity "to move beyond affirmative action, not to repudiate it."

In fact, how far it ought to distance itself from affirmative action has been a recurring source of contention in the diversity movement. Its ties to the much-maligned affirmative action are uncomfortably close because organizations typ-

ically incorporate their long-standing affirmative action activities into their new diversity programs, which often are themselves run by the organizations' affirmative action personnel. Susan Jackson's *Diversity in the Workplace: Human Resources Initiatives* discusses nine major case studies, including Xerox, Pacific Bell, and Digital Equipment, and shows quite clearly how many initiatives in managing diversity grow from affirmative action activities the companies instituted decades ago.

The problem that diversity advocates therefore face is how to avoid becoming entangled in the nasty debate over affirmative action while still taking over its goal and apparatus. Their partial solution to avoiding the unwanted "baggage of affirmative action" can be glimpsed in their selective use of the Hudson Institute's influential 1987 report on the changing demographics of the work force, *Workforce 2000: Work and Workers for the Twenty-first Century*. Virtually all managing-diversity advocates refer to that one report (and typically only that report) in arguing the importance of their activities.

Commissioned by the Department of Labor, *Workforce 2000* reported that the changing nature of the labor force will pose difficult challenges to employers in the years ahead. The work force will grow more slowly, become older, and contain relatively more women, minorities, and immigrants. New workers will decline in number and skill level. New jobs, however, will require increasingly higher levels of skill. Unemployment will fall for the most highly educated but rise for the least skilled, who will continue to be disproportionately black and His-

panic. Accordingly, *Workforce 2000* focused its policy recommendations on raising skill levels, retraining older workers, and reconciling the needs of women, work, and families. The Hudson Institute's 1988 follow-up report, *Opportunity 2000*, elaborated on those suggestions and added others regarding veterans and the disabled.

*Workforce 2000* and *Opportunity 2000* both suggested, however, that there is a silver lining to the skills-gap cloud. The changing demographics present a great opportunity for blacks and Hispanics because the smaller pool of new workers will make employers hungry for qualified workers and more willing to hire and train people they have traditionally ignored. However, as the reports point out, these trends also pose great risks for minority workers. "Minority workers are not only less likely to have had satisfactory schooling and on-the-job training, they may have language and attitude problems that prevent them from taking advantage of the jobs that will exist."

Emphasizing *Workforce 2000's* silver lining (but largely ignoring its cloud), most diversity advocates put a very different spin on the demographic news. They broadcast simply that work force "diversity" (a term the report never uses) is increasing and will compel companies to hire more "nontraditional" workers. Only those companies that work to unleash the potentials of the new more diverse work force will remain competitive. "This ever-increasing diversity is one of our great strengths," enthuses Lloyd Lewan in his 1990 cover story in *Human Resources* magazine. Capturing the angry edge of the movement, Beverly Geber states in her 1990 *Training* cover story that *Workforce*

*2000* is to some companies "as unpleasant as fingernails scraping a chalkboard" because "the book made it plain that the homogenous work force, long composed of and dominated by white males, is as doomed as South Africa's white government."

Where *Workforce 2000* assigned responsibility to both workers and employers for reducing the skills gap and accommodating to each other's needs, managing-diversity advocates argue that organizations must "transform themselves" so that nontraditional workers can "be themselves." Where *Workforce 2000* described great risks as well as opportunities for disadvantaged workers, diversity advocates argue companies should see "diversity as an opportunity to be seized, not a problem to be avoided."

We begin to see in its portrayal of *Workforce 2000* how the diversity movement insulates itself from the ugly controversy over affirmative action even while it pursues the same goal. First, it equates diversity with the goal of race and sex proportionality, thus giving the old affirmative action goal a fresh new name. The term *diversity* is also rhetorically effective because it connotes uncontested, deeply American values, such as pluralism. Who could be against "diversity" in this land of immigrants?

Second, the diversity movement gives the goal of group proportionality a new and noncontroversial rationale—improving worker productivity. Managing diversity is not done "out of some '60s sense of social justice," reports Geber, but "for downright dirty economic reasons." Likewise, Thomas advises his brethren to help people understand that managing diversity is "primarily for the manager's benefit and not that of minorities

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BEYOND AFFIRMATIVE ACTION

**B**ut managing diversity is not merely affirmative action in disguise. As diversity advocates proudly remark, diversity goes beyond affirmative action, beyond what is required by the law. And they can often be justly proud of that. There is no doubt that the typical workplace has not been "family friendly." Nor is there doubt that workplaces, like many other social settings, have too often been hostile or insensitive climates for people who are "different." Nor can we dispute the fact that organizations too often have required a stifling uniformity that blunts the potential and saps the morale of some workers. We might recall the concern some decades back about the unfortunate, overconforming company men in "gray flannel suits." Many diversity-inspired activities simply are good management for *any* type of worker, as many consultants point out—things like helping workers develop their skills and removing interpersonal barriers to effective communication and teamwork.

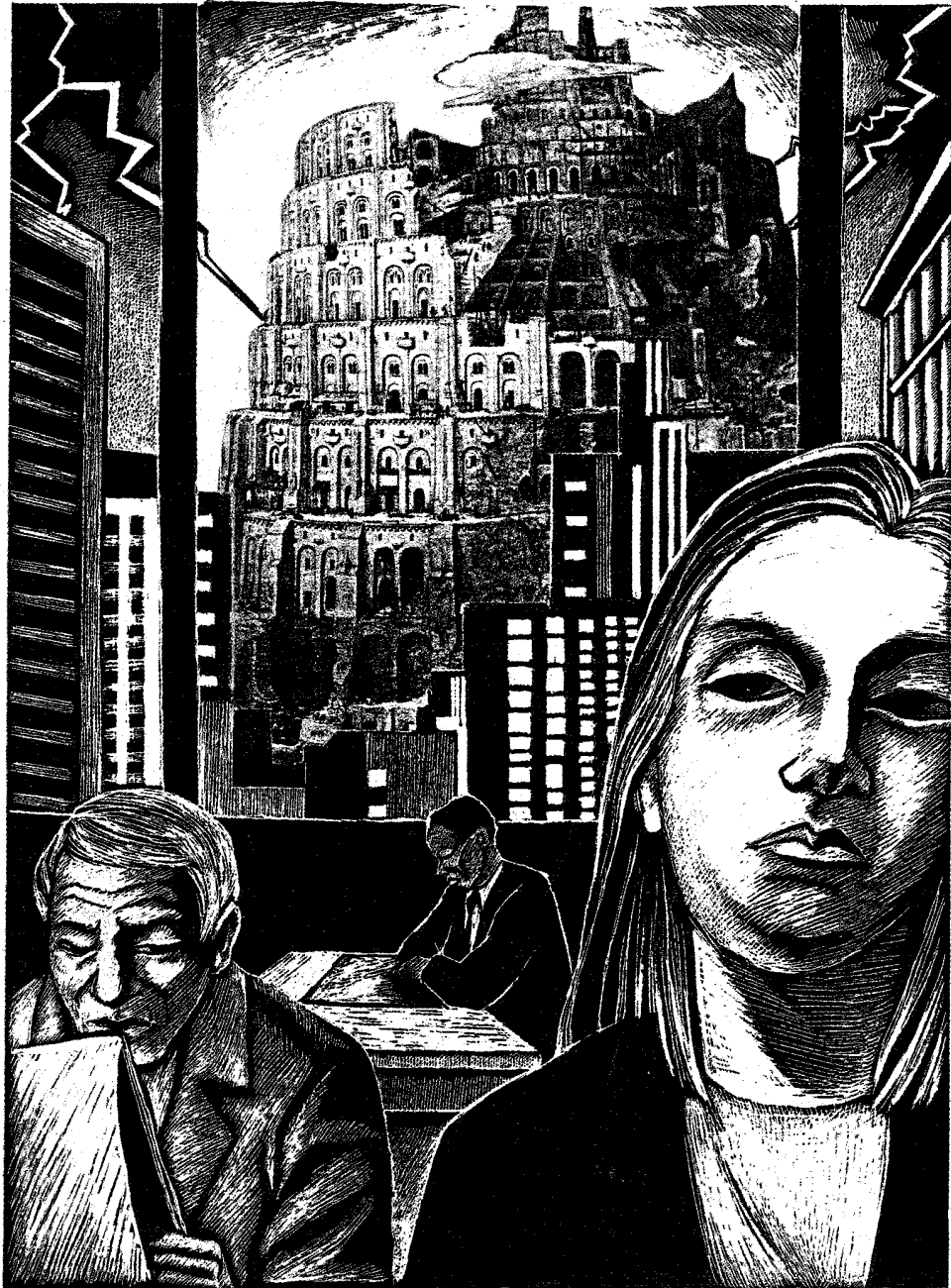
But "going beyond affirmative action" can signal something more radical. It often means attempting to reshape belief and action according to the anti-Western multicultural ideology sweeping through education today. Not all organizations and consultants who are committed to diversity approve of this trend, but most seem to accept two crucial multicultural premises. One works to erase all doubts about the competencies of "nontraditional" workers. The other works to raise doubts about all traditional standards by which such workers are sometimes found wanting.

**Premise 1: "Cultural differences are job competencies."** The first premise is that different races, sexes, and ethnic groups in the United States *differ in culture only, not competence*. The argument generally goes as follows. The races, sexes, and ethnic groups are different cultures with different ways of thinking and doing. A 1988 cover story in *Nation's Business* and a piece in *Management Review* on "bias busting" report some of the more typical contentions about how different "cultures" in this country think, act, and communicate. For example, our system is said to emphasize white male values such as objectivity, critical thinking, competition, and getting down to business. It is said that this system disadvantages women because they gain much of their knowledge subjectively through intuition, preferring a nonadversarial style. Many such differences are explored in the widely used training videos produced by diversity consultants Lewis Griggs and Lennie Copeland.

Not surprisingly, such instruction in how thought and behavior are grounded in race and gender creates some discomfort in the diversity movement because it resembles the stereotyping the movement professes to eliminate. However, the next step of the culture-as-competence argument partially resolves that problem: *different* does not mean *deficient*. There are to be only positive stereotypes (except perhaps for white males). In fact, differences are good, it is said, because different cultures have different perspectives, knowledge, and talents that can enrich and energize an organization.

Probably no one would dispute that a mix of people, ideas, and talents is gen-





erally a healthy thing in a corporation. But diversity advocates imply something much narrower by “diversity”—they mean equality. They lead us to believe that differences among protected groups are only good and never represent deficiencies. All groups are inherently different but equally good, they say. While the diversity advocates all agree that many important differences among individuals

have nothing to do with race or gender, few show any real interest in them. Their illustrations of the problems and successes of managing diversity deal almost exclusively with race and gender.

The reason minorities and women are not making faster progress up corporate ladders, the argument continues, is that organizations have expected all workers to fit into a “monocultural” mold, thereby



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stifling the potentials of women, minorities, and others who are "different." The solution to "unleashing" those stifled potentials is to affirm the value of cultural (race and sex) differences and to support women and minorities in "being themselves." We are not a melting pot but a salad (or mosaic), the advocates reiterate. Economic competitiveness therefore requires that organizations stop demanding assimilation to white male culture and start welcoming and nourishing the nontraditional.

This "culture as competence" premise thereby preempts the criticism that felled affirmative action, namely, that it requires race and gender preferences. The premise does so by turning upside down the meaning of merit and nondiscrimination.

First it denigrates any traditional merit standards that women and minorities disproportionately fail to meet: educational credentials, training and experience, objective tests, and the like. These standards are all suspect, no matter how objective they may seem, because, we are told, they were created by and for white European males. By this premise, *qualifications, standards, and tradition* become little more than codewords for *white male privilege*. "Qualified" translates to those individuals who are most likely to mesh with the corporation's current culture," says Thomas.

Having denigrated traditional standards, the "culture as competence" premise then elevates the importance of "nontraditional" qualifications that women and minorities are presumed (but not shown) to possess by virtue of being female or nonwhite. Such race and gen-

der differences are real, says diversity trainer Griggs, and can be "relevant to the job at hand." Sex and race themselves thus become components of merit that can be used to help fill any gaps in "traditional" skills and experience.

With *merit* redefined to include race and gender, nondiscrimination now takes on a new meaning. Affirmative action advocates usually have felt compelled to argue that there are no race or gender preferences (reverse discrimination) in the workplace. To support their claim, they often also argue that preferences are not needed because there are plenty of qualified women and minorities—the "pipeline" is not the problem that employers make it out to be, they say. However, neither their denial of preferences nor their denial of meaningful race and gender gaps in qualifications rings true anymore to many citizens.<sup>6</sup>

Multiculturalists thus take the opposite tack by emphasizing the differences among groups. They argue that the races and sexes do indeed have different needs, values, and skill sets and therefore must be treated differently to unleash their particular potentials. As Geber reports, "sameness" is exactly what managing diversity is not supposed to be about." Thus, diversity advocates urge us to reject the Golden Rule ("Do unto others as *you* would have *them* do unto you") in favor of what some call the "Platinum Rule" ("Do unto others what *they* would have *you* do unto them"). Many diversity

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6. Male-female gaps in educational level have narrowed quickly, but the two sexes still tend to major in different subjects and prefer different fields of work.

advocates advise us, as one diversity manager at Hewlett-Packard put it to the *Wall Street Journal*, "The way to color-blindness is through color-consciousness." Conversely, color- and gender-blindness become *discrimination* (and bad management) because they supposedly do not respect the fundamental differences between the races and sexes. The objective, we are told, should be "fair" treatment, not equal treatment.

The group preferences that affirmative action advocates must deny therefore become acceptable, even required, under managing diversity. It is no surprise, then, that some diversity advocates unabashedly advocate race and gender quotas ("statistical goals") and "demand results."

The multiculturalists' redefinitions of merit and nondiscrimination also allow them to turn the tables on the critics of race- and gender-conscious practices. Presenting themselves as the true defenders of those principles, they accuse their critics of clinging to a racist and sexist status quo. They use their critics' own principles against them.

In summary, the culture-as-competence premise allows the diversity movement to take over affirmative action's egalitarian goal, activities, and personnel while overturning the principles of merit and nondiscrimination. It requires race and gender consciousness in the name of fairness and economic productivity.

**Premise 2: "The least visible racism and sexism are the most frequent and debilitating."** The second multicultural premise neutralizes a second problem that has embarrassed affirmative action—overt discrimination in the workplace has virtually disappeared, but large race and gender disparities have not. The premise is that *hidden prejudice*,

*not overt discrimination, is what holds women and minorities back today.* Capturing the sentiment of the diversity movement, Morrison reports that "prejudice is still the number one barrier" for women and minorities. Instead of the old overt discrimination, however, minorities and women now face "modern" racism and sexism, also referred to as subtle, aversive, or institutional racism and sexism. These consist of largely unconscious attitudes, beliefs, values, and expectations about women and minorities—"hidden biases," "subconscious expectations," and "unconscious sabotage"—that are presumed to create a hostile, debilitating climate for them.

Griggs tells us that "everyone has ethnocentrism, racism and sexism," especially white males. Therefore, none of us is more than a "recovering" racist or sexist, as he likes to label himself. That some people honestly believe they do not harbor such racist and sexist attitudes only confirms for multiculturalists their claim that we greatly resist recognizing our ingrained racism and sexism. "The hardest attitude to change is the one you don't know you have." Thus does *Training and Development* sum up the views of a leading exponent of this thesis, Colgate psychology professor John Dovidio.

Multiculturalists like Thomas take the subtle racism argument further and claim that racism and sexism are built not only into all our psyches but also into all our organizational procedures, policies, and informal norms. According to Thomas, companies today tend to be "monocultural" and disadvantage women and minorities because they "reflect the preferences and nature of the dominant group." Seemingly race- or gender-neutral standards and procedures therefore actually stack the deck in favor of white

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males. In the multicultural view, then, our whole social system is fundamentally and thoroughly racist and sexist.

By greatly simplifying matters of guilt and innocence, the "subtle racism and sexism" premise gives the diversity movement far more leverage for change than affirmative action ever had. First, while overt discrimination must be demonstrated in order to justify preferences under affirmative action, the modern racism premise allows diversity advocates to *assume* that nearly invisible racism and sexism exist virtually *everywhere*, no matter how much we might deny it. By that premise, all they need to prove before taking corrective action is that women and minorities do not yet have equal jobs, salaries, respect, or influence as white men.

This simplification also allows the diversity movement to sidestep another sticking point with regard to affirmative action remedies. In particular, affirmative action has provoked endless debates over how many innocent white men it penalizes and how many unvictimized women and minorities it unfairly benefits. Not so for managing diversity. Its "subtle racism" premise treats all individuals as members of groups, and it classifies all groups as either oppressors (white men) or their victims (everyone else). By this reckoning, there are no innocent white men and no unvictimized women or nonwhites.

In fact, the "subtle racism and sexism" premise demonizes white men in a way that affirmative action seldom did. When it equates white male "culture" with modern racism and sexism, it convicts every white man as a racist and sexist. It posts a white male mug shot for the "system" and further reduces lingering reluctance to

curtail their so-called privileges. And because modern racism and sexism are supposedly unconscious and nearly invisible, the condemned have no way to disprove the charge. The premise thus strips white men of all moral authority in debates over race and gender, neutralizing the diversity movement's most likely critics. Their complaints and concerns are dismissed as "backlash"—mere resentment at the loss of privilege and power. "Backlash is the price of progress," as Corning's director of education, training, and recruiting told the *New York Times*.

The "subtle racism and sexism" premise also increases leverage for change by positing a new plague of racism that is so rampant and insidious that it requires more aggressive and intrusive remedies than tried before. Fighting the plague requires changing "mind-sets" and often a corporation's entire "culture" or "way of life." Affirmative action changed procedures for getting women and minorities in the company door. By contrast, diversity consultants aim to overhaul *all* (presumably racist and sexist) policies, practices, attitudes, and beliefs within organizations that fail to facilitate (constitute "barriers" to) equal success and satisfaction across all groups.

According to Thomas, organizations should be transformed until they begin to "work naturally," in a "more mature" and less "artificial" way than affirmative action, to fulfill affirmative action's egalitarian goal. Managing diversity is therefore a forward-looking process for organizations (affirmative action is "backward-looking") that Thomas says is "equivalent to changing an individual's personality" and that Geber reports

requires "wrenching personal changes from the top on down."

Diversity advocates seek to fundamentally change workers' attitudes and organizational climates, something they regret affirmative action never attempted to do. The ubiquitous cultural audits and diversity awareness workshops illustrate how fundamental the change is that they seek. Take Thomas' plan, for instance. It begins with an audit of what he calls "corporate roots" (behaviors and attitudes that reflect attitudes toward diversity). He then targets destructive ones for elimination. In his view, for example, the company must not promote belief in the melting pot (because it suggests having to "fit in"), in color blindness (it implies that diversity is unacceptable), "Cream rises to the top (it denies the importance of mentors)," "The company is like a family (too paternalistic)," and, "We are all a common team (it implies rough-and-tumble rather than nurturing)."

"Root change," he says, "is not for the squeamish." He suggests that organizations keep restating their new roots to keep employee behavior from going "outside acceptable limits." All corporate systems must be consistent with the new roots. The issue for him is "not whether this system is maximally efficient but whether it works for all employees."

A popular tool for changing attitudes is to require managers and workers to attend "valuing diversity" workshops. The old race relations seminars of the 1960s exhorted people to live up to the principles of the early civil rights movement. By contrast, the diversity workshops work to instill new principles—multicultural ones—that often conflict with the old.

Accordingly, some participants complain that they are coerced to "confess" racist and sexist views, renounce views

they may believe, or profess ones they do not. Others report being intimidated, ridiculed, and reduced to tears for being white, male, middle class, or otherwise "privileged." Asking embarrassing questions, as Lynch believes, may be dismissed as "too much white male, linear, critical thinking." Needless to say, not all diversity workshops are guilty of such politically correct reeducation and muzzling of the opposition, as Jackson's collection of case studies shows. But it is all too common, no doubt accounting in part for Lynch's concern about a new corporate coercion.

Such coercion is needless—and counterproductive—if the goal truly is to enhance worker productivity. Pepsi-Cola International, which operates in 150 countries, trains its managers for truly cross-cultural activities without having them "celebrate" each other's cultures or learn how thoroughly racist and sexist the so-called white Western male tradition supposedly is. Rather, it trains employees to recognize, understand, and cope with various impediments to effective communication and teamwork, including the cultural. It unifies its highly culturally diverse work force by developing a task-oriented, culture-neutral organizational climate that stresses excellence in individual and team performance.

In summary, the "modern racism and sexism" premise creates a sense of deep, ongoing injustice that justifies swift and aggressive remedies. It also facilitates that action by clarifying whom to blame (white males) and what to change (any thought or practice that women and minorities themselves might deem to be a barrier). The multiculturalists thereby open the way for diversity enthusiasts to enforce uniformity—specifically, to require right thinking on race and gender and to require race and

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and gender parity in every layer of every organization across the land.

It is not hard to see why corporate America has embraced the diversity movement, particularly its angrier side, so quickly and enthusiastically. One reason, of course, is that many diversity activities address real problems. The best of the diversity movement, as Jackson suggests, represents advances in personnel management that benefit both employers and their workers—all their workers. It avoids the new victimology, it experiments, it listens, it is ambitious but not imperious.

There is another reason, however, that seems just as important. The most radical element in the diversity movement advances its own social agenda by serving another employer need that has little to do with enhancing either productivity or social justice: avoiding discrimination lawsuits and bad publicity. Lynch calls it protection money; others call it an insurance policy.

As already suggested, employers are in a bind. Race and sex disparities in employment easily trigger charges of employment discrimination. However, the affirmative action preferences that employers must often use to avoid those disparities are themselves coming under attack and triggering reverse discrimination lawsuits. Diversity initiatives help employers get out of this bind.

First, they demonstrate to judges that the company, if sued, has been "making a good faith effort" to eliminate disparities. (It can be tricky for the untutored, however. Lucky Stores was sued in 1991 for bias when some of its store managers were accused of having expressed race and sex stereotypes dur-

ing diversity training sessions.)<sup>7</sup>

Second, the managing-diversity movement provides powerful tools for imposing quotas ("demanding results") but camouflages them with a business rationale and multicultural rhetoric. Indeed, the diversity consultants are quick to point out that their wares help "to ease compliance with civil rights laws." The legal and rhetorical advantage of the multicultural premises is that they enable diversity advocates to portray work force diversity as a "business necessity" (to use the legal jargon) and race and sex as essential elements of that diversity. As Lynch points out, this provides a "new path around nondiscrimination laws." In short, however costly the diversity programs may be, they are cheap compared to waging an expensive court battle and having to pay punitive damages.

Big business is relieved to associate itself with this new phoenix, with its majestic posture and dazzling plumage. Big business does not ask, unfortunately, what the future holds if this wonderful new creature is driven by an affirmative action heart and guided by a multicultural soul. We need to ask corporate America what price it really pays—what price we all pay—when it opts for an illusory solution to a real problem. To continue insisting on complete group parity in the workplace may be terribly destructive in the long run if we fail to confront now *Workforce 2000's* sobering reality: "Different" does *not* always mean equal job skills and interests. ■

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7. Amy Stevens, "Anti-Discrimination Training Haunts Employer in Bias Suit," *Wall Street Journal* (31 July 1991), B1, B5.