



Smithsonian Institution

National Museum of African American History and Culture

Delegate Magazine 1971

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Managerial and Executive Jobs for Black Americans

Problems and Possibilities thru NAMD

Long before I was asked to serve as Chairman of our Job Opportunities Committee of NAMD, I knew that there were few blacks in managerial and executive jobs. Many times in the past, blacks have sought an answer to this problem. The classic response given by many white businessmen is that blacks lack the necessary experience and education.

However, all one has to do is take a random sample of the men who have the high-paying, semi-skilled and skilled jobs in New York City and elsewhere to realize that education and experience, while helpful, are not the answer for blacks or other non-white minorities. The chief reason there are few black carpenters, brick layers, and even few black street sweepers is the same reason there are few blacks in the executive and managerial positions. That reason is discrimination. In other words, if all non-whites were white, I believe the problem would not exist.

We (as non-whites) have been the victims of at least two kinds of discrimination. One is the unintentional, but cultural-induced, discrimination over which no one has control. The other is discrimination emanating from direct and intentional racism. Let's examine them both . . . and then see what we can do.

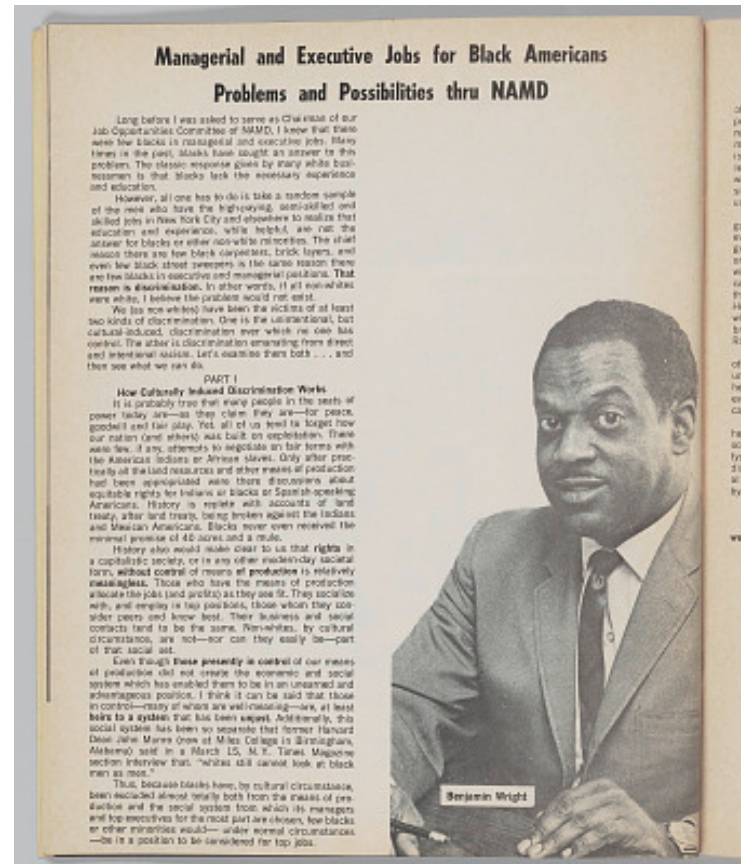
PART I

How Culturally Induced Discrimination Works

It is probably true that many people in the seats of power today are - as they claim they are - for peace, goodwill and fair play. Yet, all of us tend to forget how our nation (and others) was built on exploitation. There were few, if any, attempts to negotiate on fair terms with the American Indians or African slaves. Only after practically all the land resources and other means of production had been appropriated were there discussions about equitable rights for Indians or blacks or Spanish-speaking Americans. History is replete with accounts of land treaty, after land treaty, being broken against the Indians and Mexican Americans. Blacks never even received the minimal promise of 40 acres and a mule.

History also would make clear to us that rights in a capitalistic society, or in any other modern-day societal form, without control of means of production is relatively meaningless. Those who have the means of production allocate the jobs (and profits) as they see fit. They socialize with, and employ in top positions, those whom they consider peers and know best. Their business and social contacts tend to be the same. Non-whites, by cultural circumstance, are not - nor can they easily be - part of that social set.

Even though those presently in control of our means of production did not create the economic and social system which has enabled them to be in an unearned and advantageous position, I think it can be said that those in control - many of whom are well-meaning - are, at least heirs to a system that has been unjust. Additionally, this social system has been so separate that former Harvard Dean John Munro (now at Miles



College in Birmingham, Alabama) said in a March 15, N.Y. Times Magazine section interview that, "whites still cannot look at black men as men."

Thus, because blacks have, by cultural circumstance, been excluded almost totally both from the means of production and the social system from which its managers and top executives for the most part are chosen, few blacks or other minorities would - under normal circumstances - be in a position to be considered for top jobs.

[[image - black & white photograph of Benjamin Wright]]
[[caption]] Benjamin Wright [[/caption]]

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