

Officials say no discrimination, stats say no blacks

Of 619 American professionals at the World Bank, three—one official thinks there may be four—are black Americans.

Of total professional staff of 2,484, only 69—less than 3 percent—are from Sub-Saharan Africa. Blacks from the United States, Africa and the Caribbean constitute less than 4 percent of the bank's professional staff.

Racial discrimination?

Manifestly, say many of the blacks who work there. Not a bit of it, say the whites who run the place. The disagreement has nothing to do with facts, on which the two sides are virtually agreed. It has to do with the perceptions of what those facts indicate. It has to do with attitudes.

Little interest

For instance, several African employees told me that World Bank President Robert McNamara, despite his generally progressive reputation, has shown little interest in increasing the number of blacks on the bank staff. Said one:

william raspberry

"Women hold some 12 percent of the professional positions (actually, 11.2 percent), while blacks hold less than 4 percent. Yet McNamara is screaming for more women."

Now hear McNamara in a subsequent interview: "There's no problem with (discrimination against) blacks, either from Africa or from the United States. The place where we are ghastly is on women."

"Of course we still have a long way to go, but I can tell you that there is absolutely no racial animosity in the bank. I do sense some insensitivity toward women."

No encouragement

Another African told me that the bank's attitude is that Africans shouldn't be encouraged to seek careers in the bank.

"First they say they can't find Africans who are qualified for the top positions," he said. "Then, when they do find some, they tell us we ought to go back home and serve our own people."

Said McNamara: "Let me give you an example of the problem. In 1964, when Zambia became independent, there were only 100 college graduates and some 1,000 high-school graduates in the whole country. Imagine trying to recruit professionals against those odds."

"Besides, I can't really say it's in Africa's interest to have more of their professionals here. I'm not sure we have a right to steal their people."

Poor recruiting

"My impression," an African staffer told me, "is that they don't even try to recruit black Americans. If they did, they would certainly have found more than three. And when it comes to Africans, their recruitment isn't effective. No wonder. You cannot go and recruit say, the Nigerian minister of finance and ask him to come here to a middle-level job."

Said McNamara: "Certainly we are trying. There are four senior Africans I'm personally acquainted with that we have tried to recruit. We recently made an offer to one black African minister—a senior-level job."

The offer reportedly was for a director's post, the third

tier down the bank's organization chart, beneath McNamara himself and 14 vice presidents, none of them black.

Parachuted in

According to Bernard Chadenet, vice president for administration, organization and personnel, there is one black among the 51 directors and another black operating at a comparable level. Directors are roughly equivalent to assistant secretaries in the U.S. government.

There is no black among the 160 division chiefs, (roughly comparable to GS-16 or 17), the lowest management ranks.

The two director-level Africans were, in Chadenet's phrase, "parachuted in," as opposed to the usual process of being promoted from within the organization.

"Parachuting," one gathers, is the moral equivalent of lateral entry—affirmative action, if you will.

Chadenet and his personnel director, R.A. Clarke, said they decided not to parachute at the division chief level because three Africans now abroad have a legitimate chance of promotions to that tier.

As for improving opportunities for black Americans, Chadenet said the bank has no policy. "We are not equipped to see which Belgian is from Flanders and speaks Flemish and which is from the south and speaks Walloon."

He suggested that it is up to the individual countries to resolve their own problems of internal discrimination. Rather than taking a position of working to eliminate a country's discriminatory policies, he said, the bank is "downstream of the culture."

World Bank managers say they are aware of a "feeling of persecution" on the part of black staff members. But they see it as on a par with similar feelings among, say, Moslems and Hindus, or Corsicans and French mainlanders.

Blacks, on the other hand, see themselves as victims of a discrimination that transcends religious, geographical and cultural boundaries. For them, the one relevant factor in their plight is: They are black.

Being black, they insist, is different. And they've got the statistics to back it up.

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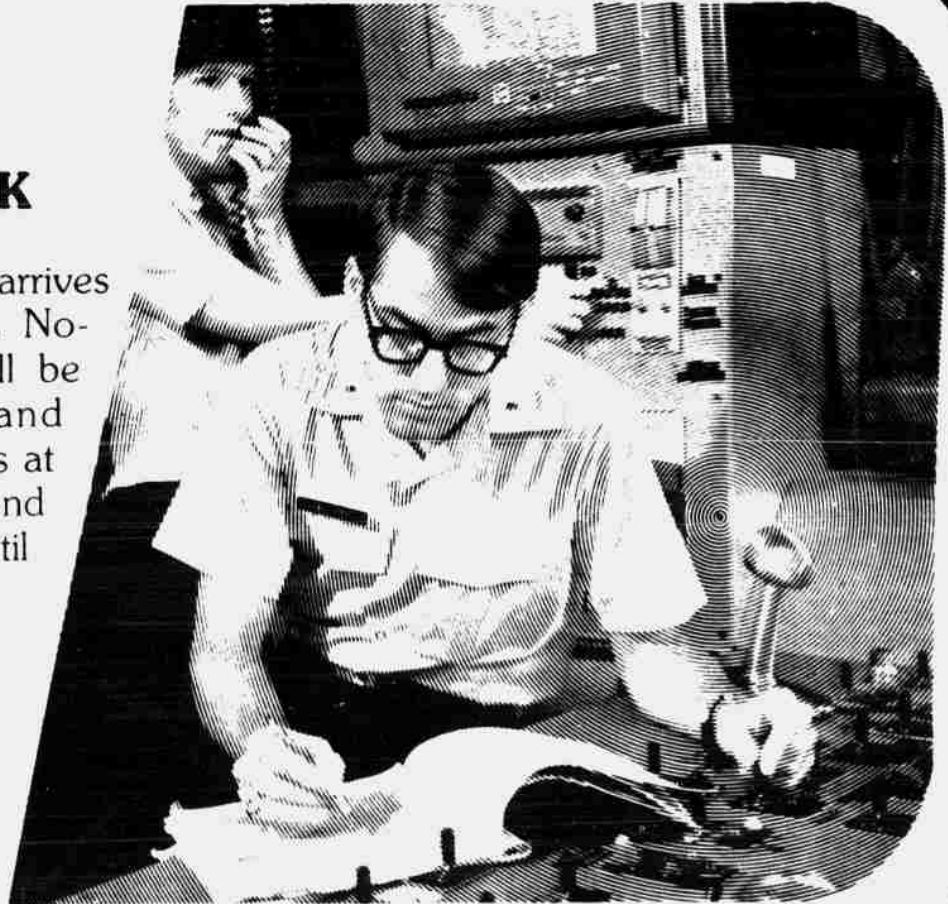
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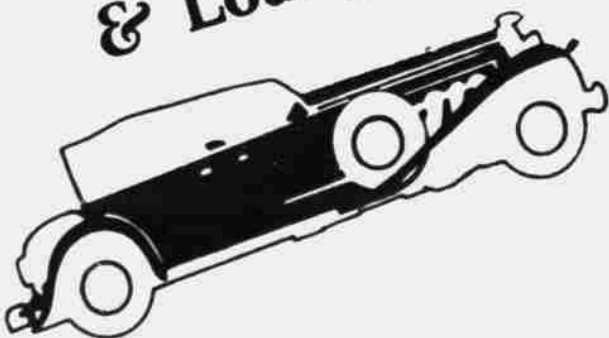
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