

- Second, people tend to feel powerless in relation to large organizations and institutions. Sentiments such as “You can’t fight City Hall” and “What can one person do?” seem to prevail. The distribution of tasks and power and the perception that decisions come down “from above” contribute further to feelings of powerlessness and alienation.
  - Third, institutions are by nature conservative and oriented toward keeping the status quo. Change requires far more energy and is generally considered only during times of serious crisis and challenge. Specific procedures for effecting change are seldom spelled out, and important practices tend to be subtly yet powerfully protected.
  - Fourth, the practices of an institution that supports institutional racism (i.e., that keeps people of color out) are multiple, complicated, mutually reinforcing, and, therefore, all the more insidious. Even if one were to undertake sincere efforts to change, it is often difficult to know exactly where to begin.
- To provide a better sense of the complexity with which institutional racism asserts itself, I would like to share three very different case studies.

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### CASE STUDY 1

The first case is an excerpt from a cultural evaluation of Agency X focusing on staffing patterns. The purpose of the project was to assess the organization’s ability to provide culturally sensitive services to its clients and to make recommendations as to how it might become more culturally competent. Although the report does not point directly to instances of institutional racism in staffing practices, they become obvious as one reads through the text and its recommendations.

Currently, People of Color are underrepresented on the staff of Agency X. In the units under study, only two workers are of Color: a Latino and an African American male. Neither are supervisors. In the entire office, only seven staff members are of Color: two Latino/as, one African American, and three Asian Americans. Two of the Asian Americans are supervisors. There are no People of Color in higher levels of management. An often-cited problem is the fact that there are few minority candidates on the state list from which hiring is done. To compensate requires special and proactive recruitment efforts to get People of Color on the lists, as well as the creation of special positions and other strategies for circumventing such lists. At a systems level, attention must be given to screening practices that may inadvertently and unfairly reject qualified minority candidates. While parity in numbers of Staff of Color to population demographics should be an important goal, holding to strict quotas misses the point of cultural competence. The idea is to strive for making the entire organization, all management and staff, more culturally competent, that is, able to work effectively with those clients who are culturally different. Nor is it reasonable to assume that all Staff of Color will be culturally competent. While attempting to add more Staff of Color, it is highly useful to fill the vacuum through the use of community resources and professionals hired specifically to provide cultural expertise.

In general, the staff interviewed were found to be in need of cultural competence training. This would include awareness of broader issues of culture and cross-cultural communication, history and cultural patterns of specific minority cultures, and implications of

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