

Survey shows corporate diversity programs lagging

By Maggie Jackson
Special to Sentinel-Voice

Corporate interest in starting diversity programs was flagging in the two years before the scandal at Texaco Inc. erupted, results of new survey show.

The survey comes as many large companies are taking a

sharp look at their efforts to hire and retain more diverse workers following Texaco's record \$176 million settlement of a racial discrimination suit.

Faced with pressures to hire more white women and minorities, 72 percent of the 50 Fortune 500 companies

surveyed in 1994 had started diversity programs, mostly in the previous few years, said A.T. Kearney Executive Search.

By this year, 74 percent of the 50 companies polled reported having diversity programs - only a two percentage point increase, according to the report.

The telephone survey was conducted before the furor erupted over secret tapes that caught Texaco executives belittling blacks. Part of the ensuing settlement involves an overhaul of diversity programs at the nation's third-largest oil company.

The survey found that 62 percent of companies without diversity programs were developing one. Yet the findings still pointed to a slowing of interest in creating such programs, Kearney executives said.

"Corporate America has lost momentum over the last two to three years in the creation of new diversity programs," said Michaelle Smead, managing director of diversity search practices at A.T. Kearney.

She said that one possible reason for the slowdown was that top executives felt comfortable merely hiring a few

women and minorities.

"Chief executive officers started to feel comfortable that they didn't need to do anything more," she said. "They had women and minorities to point to."

Groups other than white males in the workforce have increased 63 percent during the last decade due to affirmative action and demographics, said the Society of Human Resource Management. It added that the real challenge remains the retention and equitable promotion of white women and minorities.

This also brings into question

the real commitment of corporations to the fundamental concept of diversity. The survey found that even at corporations with diversity programs, training sessions usually lasted less than a day. And few corporations hold their executives accountable for making sure that all workers are valued.

However, the survey found that companies in high-tech, service and consumer product industries had the most innovative diversity programs, while heavy manufacturers had programs that strayed little beyond the minimum affirmative action initiative.

Redistricting

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districts.

The premise — whites won't vote for blacks — seemed easy enough to accept. And while it may still be true, the recent election does not prove it.

All five African-American members of Congress whose African-American districts were erased by the courts, won. They won in districts where the majority of voters were not African-American. Further, only one African-American member of Congress lost his seat, Gary Franks, a Republican from Connecticut.

There are now 37 African-Americans in the new Congress compared with 38 in the last session; this is despite the radical change in the make-up of some of the districts.

There is only one new African-American member of Congress. She is Indiana Democrat Julia Carson. Congresswoman Carson was elected from a white majority district in the Indianapolis area.

What does this mean? In some respects, it could be viewed as a victory for race relations in America. African-American incumbents were able to hold their seats, even in districts where the racial make-up changed substantially.

On the other hand, only one African-American in the country won a "new" seat. This shows that there is some reluctance to electing African-American candidates. Moreover, this "new" seat was in the Midwest, and not the South which is the center of the Voting Rights Act litigation. Additionally, there are still only two recent examples of African Americans who have garnered statewide appeal: Douglas Wilder, who was elected governor of Virginia, and Carol Moseley-Braun, who is an United States Senator from Illinois.

The debate over impact and intent will continue to rage on, but the terms of the debate must change after the results of this year's election. No longer will the comparison between a district's elected minorities and its minority population be enough to prove racial discrimination. The intent behind the drawing of a particular district will now get more attention.

The change in personnel in the Clinton Administration will also have an effect. Deval Patrick, assistant attorney general for Civil Rights, an outstanding lawyer and intellectual, is leaving his position. His replacement's approach to African-American representation will determine the types of Voting Rights Act issues which are brought before the Supreme Court.

It is good to know that African-Americans in Congress can maintain their seats. However, for the Voting Rights Act to have real meaning, there must be gains, like that of congresswoman Carson.

Eric H. Kearney, a Cincinnati attorney, is president of Sesh Communications, an African-American owned company which publishes NIP (News, Information & Pictures) Magazine, The Cincinnati Herald, The Cincinnati Blackbook, The Black College Career Guide, and The Black Male Crisis. Send your comments to this newspaper or to him at: P.O. Box 1691, Cincinnati, OH, 452011691.

Ebonics finds respect in Calif. schools

By John William Templeton
Special to Sentinel-Voice

The coverage of the Oakland School Board's decision to embrace the Standard English Proficiency program districtwide is an example of "straw-man journalism."

Some reporters have pulled a "gotcha" on high-ranking state and federal officials by asking them if they embrace the district "teaching black English." Betrayed by their ignorance of the linguistic and pedagogy issues involved, those officials have issued truly loony statements.

Since 1991, it has been a policy of the State Board of Education to recognize Ebonics, the syncretization of African and European languages, while designing curriculum strategies. Dr. Ernie Smith, a Southern California linguist, developed the term and the research behind the findings. Dr. Noma Lemoine put the theory to work in Los Angeles with the Language Development Program for African-American Students, which has been in effect in dozens of Los Angeles schools for more than five years.

Like many who hear a snap characterization of "Black English," I was somewhat skeptical of the concept before hearing Dr. Lemoine explain it. Simply, the primary human language acquisition occurs

before age four. Any language learning after that has to occur on the foundation of that original language acquisition. A French person who learns English still thinks in French. The language patterns common to African-American communities across the Western Hemisphere, whether expressed in English, French, Spanish or Dutch, carry a common set of grammar and syntax rules that are traced to the languages of the Niger-Congo region of Africa. Those patterns are not just incorrect English, but an intentional retention of that culture.

Ebonics is far more than non-standard use of "to be" and combining consonants. It is also the magical use of simile and metaphor, the mastery of inflection and tone and the persuasive qualities that have made people like Paul Robeson, Sidney Poitier, Mary McLeod Bethune, W.E.B. DuBois and Martin Luther King Jr. some of the country's greatest orators.

As teachers learn more about Ebonics, they not only gain a better understanding of their students but can show students how to turn those cultural attributes into strengths. The state of California and the federal government have been funding the research that has gleaned these simple truths for two decades. As long as a few academics banded the theories

about, no one cared. But programs like Dr. Lemoine's have discovered that the targeted children do learn standard English better when taught this way. Oakland teachers have piloted the Standard English Proficiency program, often at their own expense for three years, attending conferences, doing their own ad-hoc in-service and sharing their results with whoever would listen. The decision to adopt their strategies on a district-wide basis is an object lesson in school reform — not fodder for talk-show hosts.

People like Delaine Eastin, the superintendent of schools, who automatically attach lower standards with "Black" do not set foot in these schools where parents and teachers and students are tackling textbooks and curriculum that do not meet their needs. Black parents

particularly are fed up with the "soul murder" being committed on their youngsters before they even reach the fourth grade. If school choice and parental input are meaningful concepts, then these programs that are making a difference must be nurtured, refined and duplicated. It is time to stop the systematic demotivation that Carter G. Woodson, father of Negro History Week, wrote about in 1931 in "The Miseducation of the Negro." I would urge any critic of the Oakland program to read that book first before commenting on the program.

San Francisco-based writer John William Templeton manages an independent publishing house that provides social science and pedagogy books to California school districts. He's also editor of Griot, the African-American, African and Caribbean business daily.

Schools

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officials will deliver welcome addresses, an overhead photograph of students and staff will be taken, the band and cheerleaders will perform again, students will release biodegradable balloons and finally, there will be a ribbon cutting. (Staff and PTA at 7 a.m. will begin tying 700 helium balloons, each one representing a student). Fifth graders will conduct school tours throughout

the day. For more information, call 799-1320.

Other schools opening in January are Dean La Mar Allen, Arturo Cambeiro, Elizabeth Wilhelm and Eva Wolfe. All new elementary schools are based on a prototype design that features four quads, each consisting of five classrooms and a great room, and two outside learning centers between the quads. The floor plan is 59,100 square feet.

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