“Racing for Innocence”: Whiteness, Corporate Culture, and the Backlash against Affirmative Action

Racing for Innocence, the argument some middle-class white males make when defending against racial accusations. They simply racing to provide an innocent platform knowing they have stepped over the line. Jennifer Pierce’s research provides two viewpoints on race and the actions which ensue in a large firm in California. The accounts from black employees and their co-workers, mostly white, vary quite dramatically. The issue of affirmative action seems to produce tension and uneasiness when raised in a conversation. When asked about certain instances, white co-workers see them as single incidences and fail to “connect the dots” in order to view a larger picture. “What looks ‘individual’ to members of a dominant group is often experienced as systematic bias by non-dominant group members” (Calvert and Ramey 1996, p. 470). The author merely states the facts and correctly points out the differences and questions why such a variance occurs when discussing the same story.

The research is conducted over a ten year period by interviewing and re-interviewing individuals concerning affirmative action and the turnover within the company. It is very interesting how similar the actions within this article follow the forecasted “spiral affect” discussed the article “Race-Specific Workplace stress.” The racial discrimination starts off with small mishaps, all appearing to be innocent. However, through time, the incidents add up causing the individual to react eventually leading to a crisis; in this case the employee finds other employment. Yet again, the article falls in line with many articles providing more evidence that racism continues to exist in our society. There appears to be multiple examples of racism in blue-collar jobs and now examples in white-collar jobs.

Pierce, Jennifer L., “Racing for Innocence” Qualitative Sociology; Spring2003, Vol. 26 Issue 1, p53, 18p, 1 chart.