**DEALS, TRENDS, AND PEOPLE Studies show race, even black-sounding names, causes doors to shut**

It has been sort of a prevalent view of policy makers and the general public that discrimination in the labor market is no longer a barrier to opportunity. In fact, a Gallup poll revealed that when people were asked "Do you feel racial minorities in this country have equal job opportunities as whites or not?" whites responded "yes" 55% of the time although blacks replied "yes" 17% of the time.

But according to recent studies, race remains a key factor in hiring decisions. An experiment conducted by Devah Pager, a sociologist at Northwestern University in Evanston, Illinois, had students with fictitious résumés apply for work with 350 employers, for mainly low-wage, entry-level jobs.

A key part of the study was to discover how employers would respond to white applicants with conviction records, including drug busts, and black applicants who had no criminal background. The findings: White ex-cons were called back for interviews 17% of the time compared to 14% for crime-free black applicants.

Beyond race, a white-sounding name on an application is worth as much as an extra eight years of work experience, notes Marianne Bertrand, an economist at the University of Chicago. Last year, researchers at the UC Graduate School of Business and Massachusetts Institute of Technology sent out 5,000 fake résumés in response to random help-wanted ads in The Boston Globe and the Chicago Tribune.

The study entified "Are Emily and Greg More Employable than Lakisha and Jamal?" showed job seekers with white-sounding names were 50% more apt to get called for interviews. Those stats translate into the need for blacks to mail 15 résumés for every 10 résumés sent by whites in order to land one interview.

BLACK ENTERPRISE Board of Economists member William Spriggs says, "Both studies document the extent of racial discrimination in the labor market. They show that even without changing the skill sets of African Americans, we could drastically reduce unemployment by ending discrimination." However, Spriggs believes that it is a misinterpretation of the findings of the name-based research to suggest it is about names and not about race. Meaning, there is no difference between African Americans who use black names and those who use more assimilated names.

"The MIT study shows that if employers think they can identify race, they will react negatively toward black applicants. Of course, when the applicant actually shows up, the name will not matter as much as the race," explains Spriggs, who serves as executive director of the National Urban League Institute for Opportunity and Equality.

He adds that fighting such discrimination is going to require adequate funding for the enforcement agencies like the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, the Civil Rights Division of the Justice Department, and the Office of Federal Contract Compliance Programs at the Department of Labor. "We must also fight to fix loopholes in the enforcement of the Civil Rights Act caused by recent Circuit and Supreme Court decisions. And, we must back the use of 'employment tests'--like the ones in these studies--as an enforcement tool."

**Workplace Discrimination**

Percentage of job applicants who get called back after

initial interview:

Black

With criminal record 5%

Without criminal record 14%

White

With criminal record 17%

Without criminal record 34%

SOURCE: DEVAH PAGER, NORTHWESTERN UNIVERSITY

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