



Review

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Stories Employers Tell: Race, Skill, and Hiring in America.

Philip Moss and Chris Tilly. New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 2001. 317 pp. \$29.95.

A vast amount of research has examined the causes of persistent racial inequality in access to employment and other labor market outcomes (see Tomaskovic-Devey, 1993, for a review). Much of this research has used the limited information available in large-scale labor market surveys to assess whether this inequality is due primarily to interracial differences in human and social capital or to racial stereotyping and other sources of statistical discrimination (Aigner and Cain, 1977). Researchers have argued that the answer to this question is particularly important because these sources of racial inequality require different public policy interventions; skill deficits can be remedied through training programs for potential employees, while combating statistical discrimination requires active monitoring of employers through mechanisms such as equal employment opportunity initiatives. Existing research on inequality has been used to fuel political debate about whether government resources should be focused on providing educational opportunities for potential employees or on monitoring employers.

Stories Employers Tell argues that this approach to understanding inequality is fundamentally flawed. Moss and Tilly combine traditional survey data with over 400 in-depth employer interviews and conclude that the distinction between skill differences and statistical discrimination is illusory. They argue instead that employers' perceptions of human and social capital are so fundamentally interconnected with their ideas about race, class, and geography that skill deficits and statistical discrimination are not and cannot be treated as separate and distinct causes of racial inequality. Therefore, government interventions that enhance individual skills cannot be successful unless they are combined with programs that change how employers think about and evaluate those skills.

After discussing how indicators of applicant skills and racial stereotypes are "tangled together in employer perceptions," the book considers how organizational employment practices and patterns of racial residential segregation can reduce or amplify perceived differences between white workers and workers of color. Thus, this book artfully blends issues that have historically been treated in separate literatures by researchers with very different disciplinary orientations. The book combines psychologists' concerns about stereotyping and cognitive bias with sociologists' insights about how organizational employment practices shape labor market outcomes (Baron and Bielby, 1980) and then adds public policy researchers' ideas about sources of economic disadvantage in the inner city. The authors describe how these powerful forces interact to generate and sustain racial inequality.

The book addresses four questions: (1) What skills do employers seek for entry-level jobs requiring no more than a high school education?; (2) How do employers perceive workers of color as prospective employees for these jobs?; (3) How do employers' beliefs about the inner city, where workers of

color are disproportionately concentrated, affect their perceptions of these workers as prospective employees for entry-level jobs?; and (4) How do employers' recruiting and screening practices for entry-level jobs affect workers of color? To answer these questions, the book draws on three sets of data about employers in Atlanta, Boston, Detroit, and Los Angeles. The book reports new results from a telephone survey of 800 firms conducted by Harry Holzer of Michigan State University that asked about the characteristics of the firm and of the last person hired. The book also relies heavily on two sets of face-to-face interviews with hiring managers and human resource professionals conducted by the authors and other members of their research team: (1) interviews with 75 managers working in auto-parts manufacturing, insurance, department stores, or local government in Detroit and Los Angeles; and (2) interviews with 365 managers previously interviewed as part of the telephone survey. Interviewees discussed the firm's hiring practices for entry-level jobs and each manager's perceptions of worker skills. Overall, the quantitative data provide some general support for the authors' conclusions; however, the qualitative data are far more powerful and compelling. Throughout the book, the authors quote liberally from various employers, and it is through these "stories employers tell," that the reader gets a sense of the fundamental inseparability of the causes of racial segregation.

The book is organized into seven chapters. The first two chapters explain the book's purpose and describe the data sources. Chapters 3 through 6 are organized around the four questions that guided the research; each chapter first addresses a specific question in isolation and then integrates findings from previous chapters to develop a more complete answer to the question. The final chapter discusses the public policy implications of the authors' findings.

Chapter 3 explores the kinds of skills that employers require for entry-level jobs and briefly discusses how these skill requirements affect the employment prospects of blacks and Latinos. This chapter's major contribution is documenting how the trend toward fewer levels of management and increasing responsibility for front-line workers may have the unintended effect of increasing racial inequality in employment. The authors present evidence showing that while employers screen entry-level applicants for traditional types of human capital such as literacy and numeracy, they place greater emphasis on "soft skills," such as the ability to communicate effectively, a "good attitude," and a high level of motivation. The authors provide some evidence from the telephone survey that screening for soft skills disadvantages blacks and Latinos as much or more than screening for traditional types of human capital. Perhaps the most interesting feature of this chapter is that the stories employers tell about the need for appropriate "attitude" echo current thinking among many academics and practitioners that screening job applicants for person-organization fit is vital and may even be more important than screening for trainable skills (Chatman, 1989; Pfeffer, 1998). But the evidence in this chapter also

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raises troubling questions about the potential effects of this type of screening on workplace diversity and social inequality.

Chapter 4 explores the processes through which screening for soft skills disadvantages workers of color, particularly blacks. Employers provided far more qualitative data about blacks than about other groups. It is not clear whether the abundance of data on black workers indicates that employers have more highly developed beliefs about this group or simply reflects the racial composition of the cities in the sample. This chapter examines employers' perceptions of skill differences between racial groups and the evidence that employers use to support those perceptions. Throughout the chapter, the reader gets a detailed look at how issues that are treated as distinct by many researchers are completely intertwined in the thought processes of hiring managers. Two aspects of this chapter are particularly interesting. First, in tape-recorded face-to-face interviews, nearly half of the employers stated that the skills of black workers were inferior to the skills of white workers; black workers' perceived lack of motivation was a particularly common theme. As the authors point out, because some employers were unwilling to discuss perceived skill differences between racial groups, these findings probably understate the extent to which employers perceive black workers as undesirable.

Second, the quotations reveal that employers did not simply render these judgments without comment; instead the judgments were accompanied by the reasons why employers made these judgments. Employers used a variety of "evidence" to reach their conclusions about the low skill levels of black workers. This evidence included firsthand knowledge or media accounts of lower quality education in predominantly black school districts, prevalence of welfare dependence and single motherhood in the black community, and observed differences in work performance between white and black workers. The numerous quotes from employers in this chapter demonstrate how employers' perceptions of black people and black communities are tightly interwoven with their perceptions of the skills and performance of black workers.

Chapter 5 explores how geography creates additional barriers for workers of color that go beyond perceptions of interracial skill differences. The authors argue that employers engage in statistical discrimination based on the geography of the applicant's residence. The authors provide compelling interview evidence that employers believe that workers from the inner city have a number of undesirable attitudinal and motivational attributes that stem from residing in the inner city. Employers stated that substandard education, crime, welfare dependence, and family breakdown in inner cities were the causes of undesirable worker attributes. Although the authors note that geographic and racial boundaries are related, they argue that workers of color from the inner city are seen less favorably than they would be based on their ethnicity alone.

Chapter 6 turns to the issue of how employers' recruiting and screening mechanisms affect workers of color. The conclusions from this chapter are relatively unsurprising: formal hiring procedures lessen discrimination against workers of

color, the employment interview contains many opportunities for discrimination, and informal recruiting and screening procedures such as relying on employee referrals tend to reinforce the firm's current racial composition. The chapter would have benefited, however, from more extensive links to the large body of literature that has documented many of these processes in detail (see Arvey and Faley, 1992, for a review).

The book's concluding chapter outlines an ambitious policy agenda to address the barriers faced by workers of color in seeking employment. The authors suggest that schools, non-profit organizations, and employer consortia should train employees in soft skills and provide ongoing social support once employees enter the workplace. They also argue for revitalizing and expanding affirmative action to include both funding for audits that demonstrate the prevalence of racial discrimination in employment and incentives for firms that provide opportunities for workers of color. It is unclear, however, to what extent the relatively blunt tools outlined in this chapter can alter the subtle but powerful processes that shape the stories employers tell about race, skill, and employment.

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Emotions in the Workplace: Research, Theory, and Practice.

Neal M. Ashkanasy, Charmine E. J. Härtel, and Wilfred J. Zerbe, eds. Westport, CT: Quorum Books, 2000. 313 pp. \$75.00.

Emotions in the Workplace is a compilation of papers presented at the First Conference on Emotion in Organization Life, held before the 1998 meeting of the Academy of Management. The conference was the first to unite researchers interested in emotions in organizations. The conference was successful; a second conference was held in 2000, and a third is planned for 2002. *Emotions in the Workplace* examines the role of emotions in organizations very broadly. For example, the book covers the role of emotions in creating issue "ownership," the role of shame at work, the effects of the physical appearance of the work environment on emo-

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