



Who Gets the Good Jobs?: Combating Race and Gender Disparities

Robert Cherry

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Racial and gender employment inequalities are alive and well today. In 2000, the U.S. government offered \$508 million to settle more than one thousand lawsuits brought against the federally funded Voice of America by female workers. At the same time, African American employees of Coca-Cola sued their employer, citing the large number of minorities in low-paying jobs, with just a handful at top levels. Even Alan Greenspan has urged firms to eliminate the “distortions that arise as a result of discrimination.”

The political agenda regarding this issue is polarized. Many conservative economists claim that financial considerations have led businesses to hire minorities because such practices increase profits. In opposition, many liberal economists believe businesses will hire minorities only if forced to do so by equal employment opportunity policies. Robert Cherry bridges these two positions, arguing that there is some truth to the positive effect of the profit motive, but that market forces alone are not enough to eliminate employment and earnings disparities.

Cherry surveys the political and economic forces that influenced labor market practices in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, focusing on the employment barriers African Americans, women, and immigrants encounter. He then assesses the effects of 1960s civil rights legislation and finds that improvements have been substantial, primarily for college-educated African Americans and women; therefore, he recommends that equal employment opportunity policies be strengthened. Cherry demonstrates how the promotion of full employment can further the advancement of working-class African Americans and women.

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