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For Release December 11, 2003
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Study shows temporary employment agencies prefer white job applicants by 3-1 over African Americans in California

Temporary employment agencies in California show significant preference for white applicants by 3-1 over African Americans in undercover tests conducted by the Discrimination Research Center (DRC).

By ratios of 4-1 in Los Angeles and more than 2-1 in San Francisco, agencies favored white job applicants over slightly higher qualified African American applicants. "African Americans seeking temporary work received less consideration in the form of fewer offers and less desirable jobs," said John Trasviña, Director of the DRC.

The results come from 64 tests of San Francisco and Los Angeles temporary employment agencies conducted between May and November, 2003 involving specially matched pairs of white and African American job applicants. They follow similar results from DRC's 1999 study of the same industry. "We found consistent preference—more in Los Angeles than in San Francisco—for white applicants. While it may be subtle or unconscious, this preference blocks the path of equal employment opportunity for African Americans. Despite some improvement in San Francisco's record since our 1999 study, vigorous action must be taken by the industry and by civil rights law enforcement agencies in order to bring African Americans closer to a level playing field in the temporary employment industry," continued Trasviña.

Among the key findings of the DRC investigation:

- White applicants were preferred 42% of the time by San Francisco temporary employment agencies over African American applicants who had greater relevant job experience and comparable education, interview and computer skills. African American job applicants were preferred in only 17% of the paired tests.
- White applicants were preferred 57% of the time by Los Angeles temporary employment agencies over their matched African American test counterparts. African Americans were preferred only 13% of the time.

Examples of preference for white job applicants include:

- The white applicant is offered a temporary or permanent job while the African American partner tester is not.
- The white applicant is granted an interview while the African American is not.
- The white applicant is offered a job with a higher salary or for a longer duration.
- The white applicant is offered a job more quickly than the African American applicant.
- The white applicant is not required to follow the agency's standard application procedure and thus has access to job opportunities that the African American applicant does not.
- The white applicant is offered coaching on how to present herself or improve her resume that is not afforded to the African American applicant.

"The temporary employment industry can and must do better. When 90% of the nation's employers hire temporary workers and there are over two million people working in temporary or contract positions every day, racial preference for white applicants over African Americans has widespread economic impacts," concluded Trasviña.

In the report, which can be found on-line at www.impactfund.org, DRC recommends that temporary employment agencies and staffing personnel:

- Regularly audit their practices to determine whether the services they provide to white job applicants are less available or, in some cases, not made available to African American job applicants.
- Develop model practices that will eliminate the potential for racial bias.
- Train its members on state and federal civil rights protections and
- Work with affected communities to effectively monitor future hiring practices and to shield them from discrimination.

Founded in 1998, the Discrimination Research Center is the non-profit policy and research program of The Impact Fund and has offices in Berkeley and Los Angeles.

Chart 1. Preferential Treatment of White and African American Applicants by Temporary Employment Agencies in San Francisco and Los Angeles, 2003

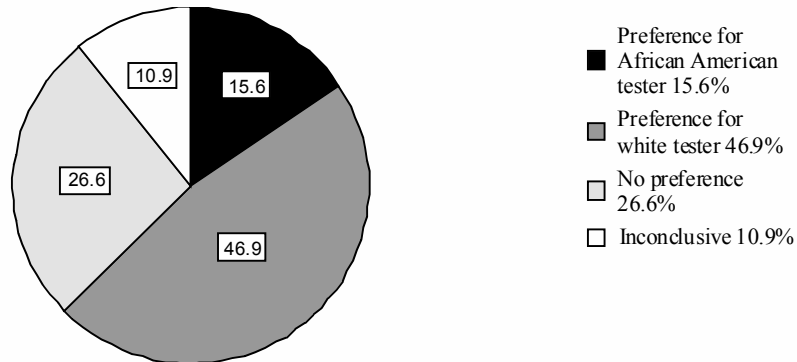


Chart 2. Preferential Treatment of White and African American Applicants by Temporary Employment Agencies in Los Angeles, 2003

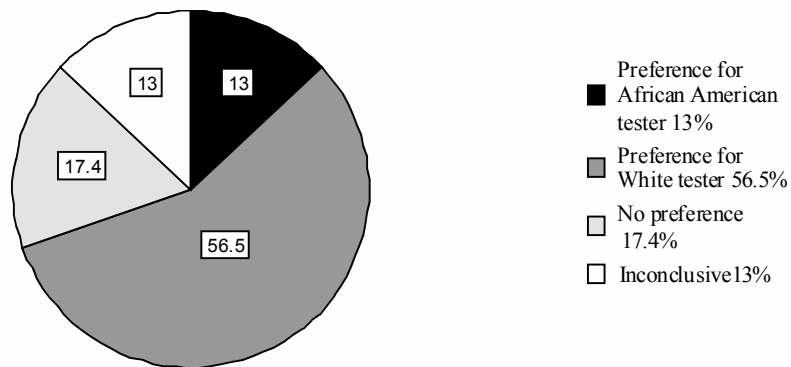


Chart 3. Preferential Treatment of White and African American Applicants by Temporary Employment Agencies in San Francisco, 2003

