Abstract

Racing to the top of the corporate hierarchy is difficult, no matter how qualified or capable the candidate. Producing more widgets than one’s competitors is not enough. Negotiating the political landscape of the institution is also required. More specifically, individual corporate officers have to be appeased, powerful interest groups have to be co-opted and made allies, and competitors have to be undermined or eliminated. The more bureaucratic the organization and the more opaque the promotion process, the more important this institutional game to climbing the corporate ladder. This Article identifies the kind of racial minorities or racial types who are likely to play this game well and, consequently, race to the top of the corporation.

Identifying these racial types is crucial to making corporations more welcoming to and comfortable for racial minorities. This is because the racial minorities at the top of the corporation (“successful racial types”) are in an institutional position to perform discrimination-ameliorative tasks for those on the bottom. Thus, many corporate governance and employment discrimination scholars rest some of their hope for the establishment of colorblind corporate cultures on the assumption that successful racial types actively will seek out and perform antidiscriminatory institutional work.

However, there is reason to believe that the racial minorities at the top of the corporate hierarchy will neither racially reform the corporation, nor engage in door-opening activities, for the minorities on the bottom. Indeed, strong incentives exist for minorities to race to the top of the corporation and lift the ladder up behind them when they get there. This Article sets forth the nature of these incentives, reveals how they help to produce particular racial types, and explains why these racial types might not have the racial commitment, or feel institutionally empowered, to lift as they climb.