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## **Diversity Hiring: Famine in the Midst of Hiring**

Don't get me wrong.

The work to ensure the civil rights of significant groups of American citizens is never done. There will always be issues that must be addressed and addressed aggressively. Most often through neglect but not infrequently as the result of prejudice and malevolence, the rights of minorities to the full range of benefits assumed by the majority are nearly always at risk.

And yet, I can say that in my lifetime enormous progress has been made.

I was a college student and young faculty member in the 1960s and early 1970s when the right to eat in any restaurant, the right to drink from any fountain, the right to sit somewhere other than at the back of the bus, the right to live in any neighborhood you could afford, the right to enter through any door was being denied to African-Americans. People of color were forced to fight — sometimes in the streets — for their basic civil rights.

By then, the U.S. Supreme Court had declared that public elementary and secondary education must be open to all. By then, Jackie Robinson — a hero of mine as a youngster growing up in Brooklyn — had already broken the color barrier in professional baseball. And by then, young men of color were beginning to impact college sports on a few campuses.

Indeed, the integration of intercollegiate sports was not insignificant to the integration of the entire campus. The doors to higher education throughout the nation were opening to students of color in part because there were already open to student-athletes of color.

Over the last three and a half decades, we have seen the numbers of African-American student-athletes swell to more than half in football and men's basketball. We have seen the number of African-American head coaches in men's basketball increase to 35 percent.

We have seen great progress. There is increased opportunity.

Ironically, what we have not seen is any progress in the hiring of African-American head football coaches in intercollegiate athletics. In fact, we are losing ground. With firings this fall, there are, as of this date, only four black head football coaches among the 119 Football Bowl Subdivision programs in NCAA Division I.

In the entire history of Division I football, excluding the Historically Black Colleges and Universities, there have only been 23 African-American head coaches, never more than eight at any one time, and now there are only four.

Five years ago, I suggested to the Black Coaches Association (BCA) that the solution was in addressing the hiring process. If we could get more coaches of color into the interviewing process, the natural result would be more hires. The BCS instituted its Hiring Report Card, and it was a success. The interviews for African-American candidates increased dramatically to more than 30 percent of the total. But the number of hires remains embarrassingly low. There are lots of openings for head coaches, but there is famine in the midst of plenty when it comes to African-Americans.

There are those who continue to believe the answer is more interviews and call for a collegiate version of the NFL's Rooney Rule that mandates at least one minority interview in every search. Given the success already of the BCS report card to increase such interviews, instituting the Rooney Rule for college sports would be tantamount to calling for more deck chairs while the ship is sinking.

What we need are more *hires*, not more disingenuous interviews. In fact, focusing on the interviews at this point tends to hide the real problem.

I am frustrated that impassioned calls for change are not working. I am frustrated that pleas to recognize the necessity for fairness are not heeded. I am frustrated that in the midst of progress in so many other areas, higher education and intercollegiate athletics continue to exercise a hiring practice in college football that is embarrassing and simply would not be tolerated elsewhere on campus.

What is going on? What about college football keeps coaches of color out of the top leadership positions? If African-American coaches can take NFL teams to the Super Bowl and win, why are there not the same opportunities in college football?

We cannot ignore the lessons of history forever. Eventually, those who are being denied access will fight for the benefits that are simply assumed by others.

Blame will be laid bare.