

The Pursuit of Social Equity in the Federal Government: A Road Less Traveled?

Senior–Junior Exchange: The Concept of Social Equity Reconsidered

This descriptive study examines the extent to which the federal government has achieved social equity in its workforce. In particular, the author addresses the degree to which white women and people of color have been successful in reaching the upper, higher-paying levels of nonpostal federal government jobs. The study shows that, with few exceptions, these groups, despite continued calls for greater equity, remain in lower-level, lower-paying, less prestigious jobs.

In response to a television reporter who stated that “racial progress takes time,” James Baldwin offered this telling response: “It has taken my mother’s time, my father’s time, my brothers and my sisters’ time, my nieces and my nephews’ time. How much time do you want for your progress?”

—Dwight A. McBride, *James Baldwin Now*, 1999

The progress that women and people of color have made in this nation in terms of jobs and education can reasonably lead one to conclude that the glass is either half full or half empty. Policy analysts, demographers, and other social scientists have through the years tracked fluctuations in household income, employment, and education to report on developments in socioeconomic status across the country. More often than not, the outcomes of their studies show that people of color continue to lag behind whites, and that women continue to lag behind men. Recommendations for improving the overall condition of those groups who are perpetually left behind are offered, but the inequities and inequalities perdure. So, is the glass half empty?

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In some corners, however, tangible progress has been reported. For example, depending on the measures, there has been some improvement in the employment status of white women and people of color in public

sector jobs. The plethora of representative bureaucracy studies, especially those beginning with Krislov’s (1974) and Rosenbloom’s (1977), which provided significant baseline analyses, illustrate that white women and people of color hold government jobs at the federal, state, and local levels in equal and sometimes greater proportions compared to their concentration in the general population (see, e.g., Guy 1992, 1993; Meier 1993; Meier and Smith 1994; Naff 2001; Rice 2005; Wise 1990). However, conceptualizing representativeness quite differently shows that white women and people of color are segregated in the lower-paying, lower-status jobs in government (see Naff 2001; Wise 1990). So, then, is the glass half empty or half full? Perhaps the progress that women and people of color have made in the federal service can be best characterized by the title of Mary Guy’s cogent 1993 study on the integration of women into federal jobs: “Three Steps Forward, Two Steps Backward.”

The present article examines patterns of social equity in federal employment.¹ It constructs social equity in terms of justice, fairness, and equality in the distribution of federal jobs across racial, ethnic, and gender lines. In particular, it examines the degree to which the federal government fills jobs in its upper levels equally and fairly in terms of race, gender, and ethnicity. It looks at employment patterns by grade and

salary between 1984 and 2004 in order to determine the extent to which women and people of color have made progress in gaining entry into the more powerful, higher-paying, prestigious ranks of the federal government. An examination of the types of agencies in which each of these demographic groups is employed also reveals the degree

to which occupational segregation persists in federal bureaus. While previous studies have tended to lump people of color into one category, this study breaks the data down by each group.

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The Construct of Social Equity in Public Administration

Growing out of the New Public Administration movement of the late 1960s, social equity has been an enduring and significant theme in public administration. H. George Frederickson, one of the most prominent social equity scholars—indeed, perhaps its architect in the field—referred to social equity as the “third” pillar of public administration. Asking at the Minnowbrook I conference, “What is public administration and what are its objectives and its rationale?” Frederickson argued that “[t]he rationale for Public Administration is almost always better (more efficient or economical) management. New Public Administration adds *social equity* to the classic objectives and rationale” (1971, 311, emphasis in original). Frederickson thus advanced the seminal theoretical justifications for social equity as a critical value in public administration (see also Frederickson 1974, 1980, 1990; McGregor 1974).

In defining social equity, Frederickson stated that “the procedures of representative democracy presently operate in a way that either fails or only very gradually attempts to reverse systematic discrimination against disadvantaged minorities. Social equity, then, includes activities designed to enhance the political power and economic well-being of these minorities” (1971, 311). The concept of social equity has since assumed a host of different, sometimes conflicting meanings,² but it continues to center on the tenets set forth by Frederickson—fair and just treatment and the equal and equitable distribution of benefits to the society at large. David H. Rosenbloom’s *Federal Equal Employment Opportunity* (1977) was one of the earliest, most comprehensive books that reported on the federal government’s experiences with equal employment opportunity, which also shapes the contours of the concept of social equity.³

Viewed collectively, social equity can thus be construed as the democratic constitutional values of fairness, justice, equal opportunity, and equality (see, e.g., Brunet 2006; Jennings 2005; Rosenbloom 1977). It embodies a host of concepts, legal tools, and public policies, including, from the perspective of employment, equal employment opportunity, affirmative action, and diversity initiatives.

For the purposes of this study, social equity refers to fairness, equality, and justice in the integration of white women and people of color in upper-level, higher-paying jobs throughout the federal bureaucracy (see, e.g., Naff 2001). The significance, as Wise states, is as follows:⁴

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A key question in assessing equity within government is the extent to which leadership positions are equally distributed among members of different groups. When the lower ranks of the civil service are made up of members of one sex or race and the upper levels of the bureaucracy are dominated by another, equal opportunity to influence the outcomes of government is undermined. Public servants in elite positions have a greater chance to influence policies and program outputs. (1990, 568)

Most recently, Scott E. Page, in his book *The Difference: How the Power of Diversity Creates Better Groups, Firms, Schools, and Societies*, argues that progress and innovation depend on diversity in groups as opposed to lone thinkers with high IQs. Through mathematical modeling and case studies, Scott finds that better outcomes are produced by diversity. He finds that “*diversity trumps homogeneity*: collections of people who rely on homogeneous perspectives and heuristics outperform collections who rely on homogeneous perspectives and heuristics” (2007, 10, emphasis in original).

The value, worth, and effectiveness of modern democratic governance, particularly in a pluralistic society, is inextricably linked to a diverse corps of civil servants in the upper reaches of government bureaucracy. In this sense, two of the pillars of public administration—efficiency and effectiveness—are contingent on the strength of the third—social equity.

The Employment Landscape of the Federal Bureaucracy

The government traditionally has played an important role in the employment of women and people of color in this nation (see, e.g., Rice 2005; Wise 1990). African Americans in particular have viewed the public sector as a significant source of jobs. Table 1 shows that within a span of 20 years (1984–2004), the federal government provided a greater share of jobs to certain demographic groups than did the private sector. The data show that, except for Latinos, the percentages of people of color in the nonpostal federal civilian workforce exceeded those of the private civilian labor force for both years. In 2004, Latinos, especially men, held jobs in the private sector at much higher rates. The important point to be made here, however, is that as a chief source of employ-

ment for different groups, the government has an obligation beyond a legal one to pursue policies that promote equity (Wise 1990).

Table 2 provides data on the degree to which white women and people of color achieved equity overall in federal government

Table 1 Federal Civilian and Private Sector Civilian Employment by Race, Ethnicity and Gender, 1984 and 2004

		Percent 1984		Percent 2004	
Total Executive Branch					
	Women	40.2	43.7	44.4	44.7
	Men	59.7	56.3	55.6	55.3
African American	Women	8.5	4.5	10.4	5.2
	Men	6.7	4.9	6.5	4.8
Latino	Women	1.7	2.3	3.1	5.1
	Men	3.1	3.5	4.2	8.5
Asian or Pacific Islander	Women	1.0	n/a ³	2.3	2.0
	Men	1.8	n/a ³	2.7	2.4
American Indian or Alaskan Native	Women	0.8	n/a ³	1.2	0.4 ⁴
	Men	0.9	n/a ³	1.0	0.4 ⁴
White	Women	27.7	38.0	27.5	36.6
	Men	46.9	50.0	41.1	46.8

¹ FCW = Federal Civilian Workforce in non-Postal Executive Branch.

² PCLF = Private Sector Civilian Labor Force.

³ No data collected. See, e.g., [ftp://ftp.bls.gov/pub/special.requests/ep/labor.force/emplab01.txt](http://ftp.bls.gov/pub/special.requests/ep/labor.force/emplab01.txt), date accessed, March 17, 2008.

⁴ These data represent combined public and private sectors. The BLS does not breakdown this group by class of worker due to concerns about the reliability of the estimates for such a small population.

Source: U.S. Office of Personnel Management (OPM), Central Personnel Data File (CPDF), provided by OPM, and data files provided by U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, and Economagic.com: Economic Time Series, http://www.economagic.com/em-cgi/find.exe/blsln+Civilian_Labor_Force, date accessed, March 13, 2008.

employment between 1984 and 2004.⁵ As the data show, for every grade level, there were increases, albeit small, in government jobs for most groups. Women overall increased their employment levels by 4.2 percent. A breakdown by race and ethnicity shows that African American, Latina, and Asian/Pacific Islander women made relatively small gains, while white women decreased their employment levels by 0.2 percent. Latino, Asian/Pacific Islander, and American Indian/Alaskan Native men also made small gains, but the employment of African American men decreased by 0.2 percent and white men by 5.8 percent.

Although the changes have been relatively small in most cases, one way, albeit crude, to assess progress would be to compare the representation of each group in overall federal employment to that group's concentration in the general population, as seen in Table 3.⁶ As the data show, for 2004, there were three groups for which overall federal employment levels⁷ were lower than their counterparts in the general population: Latino men and women and white women. Thus, even taking into account increased employment between 1984 and 2004 for some groups, as seen in

Table 2—here Latino men and women—those groups did not achieve proportional representation in federal jobs. It may be that Latinos compared to other demographic groups are less likely to pursue employment in government, as suggested earlier. On the other hand, perhaps barriers to their employment continue to exist in the federal service. In any case, as any human resources specialist would argue, achieving a representative workforce is critical for all demographic groups. And if this is indeed the goal, then targeted recruitment of Latinos to the federal government is necessary.

Also, as seen in Table 3, although white men lost some of their share of federal jobs between 1984 and 2004, they are, in the parlance of representative bureaucracy, “overrepresented” in the federal bureaucracy. White women lost a small share of jobs in federal government and remain underrepresented, as the data show.

Table 2 Federal Civilian Employment by Race, Ethnicity and Gender, All Grades, 1984 and 2004

		Number Percent 1984	Number Percent 2004	Percent Change
Total Executive Branch		2,023,373	1,851,349	
	Women	809,095 40.2	822,345 44.4	+4.2
	Men	1,214,238 59.7	1,029,004 55.6	-4.1
African American	Women	177,718 8.5	192,482 10.4	+1.9
	Men	140,157 6.7	120,617 6.5	-0.2
Latino	Women	33,623 1.7	57,344 3.1	+1.4
	Men	61,957 3.1	78,189 4.2	+1.1
Asian or Pacific Islander	Women	20,052 1.0	41,884 2.3	+1.3
	Men	35,966 1.8	51,328 2.7	+0.9
American Indian or Alaskan Native	Women	16,493 0.8	21,314 1.2	+0.4
	Men	16,922 0.9	17,825 1.0	+0.1
White	Women	561,209 27.7	509,321 27.5	-0.2
	Men	959,236 46.9	761,045 41.1	-5.8

Sources: Calculated from U.S. Office of Personnel Management, Demographic Profile of the Federal Workforce (2004 data), <http://www.opm.gov/feddata/demograp/demograp.asp#RNOData>, date accessed, March 11, 2008. For 1984 data, U.S. Office of Personnel Management (OPM), Central Personnel Data File (CPDF), provided by OPM.

Table 3 Federal Employment and General Population, by Race, Ethnicity and Gender

		Federal Employment 2004	General Population 2000
African American	Women	10.4	6.5
	Men	6.5	5.9
Latino (all races)	Women	3.1	6.1
	Men	4.2	6.5
Asian or Pacific Islander	Women	2.3	2
	Men	2.7	1.8
American Indian or Alaskan Native	Women	1.2	0.4
	Men	1.0	0.4
White	Women	27.5	38.3
	Men	41.1	36.9

Note: Totals may not equal 100 due to rounding errors and overlap in Latino population.

Sources: U.S. Census, "Race and Hispanic or Latino Origin by Age and Sex for the United States: 2000," <http://www.census.gov/population/www/cen2000/phc-t08.html>, date accessed, April 16, 2008. Calculated from U.S. Office of Personnel Management, Demographic Profile of the Federal Workforce (2004 data), <http://www.opm.gov/feddata/demograp/demograp.asp#RNOData>, date accessed, March 11, 2008.

Social Equity in Leadership Posts?

As Guy (1993), Wise (1990), and a number of other scholars have argued (see, e.g., Meier 1993; Meier and Smith 1994; Meier, Wrinkle, and Polinard 1999; Naff 2001; Riccucci 2002; Rice 2005), assessing social equity in government must take into account whether members of different groups are equally distributed among upper-level policy-making positions. Table 4 presents data on the average grade of federal workers by race, ethnicity, and gender for 1984 and 2004. As the data show, although the change in grade was relatively low between the two time periods, in 2004, white men continued to hold the highest average grade of employment in the federal government, followed closely by Asian/Pacific Islander men. Over a 20-year time period, the average grade change for all groups was relatively small, with women's increases higher than men's in every case. Notwithstanding, women in every case continued to hold a lower average grade of employment than men. The evidence suggests that the glass ceiling continues to be a barrier to women's employment (see Bowling et al. 2006; Bullard and Wright 1993).

Table 5 looks at the degree to which white women and people of color have achieved levels of equity in the highest ranks of government, the Senior Executive Service (SES, formerly GS 16–18). The data show that the SES became more diverse during the period examined, particularly in terms of gender. In 1985, the SES was composed of 86.3 percent white men, 6.7 percent white women, and extraordinarily few people of color.

Table 4 Federal Civilian Employment by Grade (GS 1-15), 1984 & 2004

		Average Grade		Grade Change
		1984	2004	
Total Executive Branch		8.3	9.9	1.6
	Women	9.1	9.1	0
	Men	9.9	10.7	0.8
African American	Women	6.1	8.6	2.5
	Men	7.7	9.4	1.7
Latino	Women	5.9	8.5	2.6
	Men	8.5	9.8	1.3
Asian or Pacific Islander	Women	6.8	9.2	2.4
	Men	9.8	10.9	1.1
American Indian or Alaskan Native	Women	5.5	7.7	2.2
	Men	8.2	9.3	1.1
White	Women	6.7	9.4	2.7
	Men	10.3	11.1	0.8

Note: totals may not equal 100 due to rounding errors.

Sources: Calculated from U.S. Office of Personnel Management, Demographic Profile of the Federal Workforce (2004 data), <http://www.opm.gov/feddata/demograp/demograp.asp#RNOData>, date accessed, March 12, 2008. For 1984 data, U.S. Office of Personnel Management (OPM), Central Personnel Data File (CPDF), provided by OPM.

By 2007, the ranks of white women and people of color had grown, but the most senior posts in federal government continued to be dominated by white men (62 percent). Over a 22-year period, men and women of color only slightly increased their ranks in the SES. Men of color, except for Latinos, achieved not even a 1 percent increase by each group; Latino men increased only about 2 percent. In addition, all women of color except African Americans increased their representation in the SES by less than 1 percent in each group. African American women fared only a bit better at 2.7 percent. White women achieved the largest increase in employment in the SES at 16.3 percent. Taken together, white men and women in 2007 made up 85 percent of the SES ranks. Thus, the SES has achieved relatively little racial or ethnic diversity over the last 20 years or so.

A recent report issued by the U.S. Government Accountability Office found racial and ethnic disparities across SES posts. Without making any recommendations, the report pointed to the importance of having a diverse corps of senior-level administrators in the federal government. It stated that "[h]aving a diverse SES corps ... can be an organizational strength that can bring a wider variety of perspectives and approaches to bear on policy development and implementation, strategic planning, problem solving, and decision making (2008, 2).

Table 5 SES Employment by Race, Ethnicity and Gender, 1985 and 2007

		Number Percent 1985	Number Percent 2007	Percent Change
Total SES		6,710	7,473	
	Women	514 7.6	2,141 30.0	+22.4
	Men	6,196 92.3	5,332 70.0	-22.3
African American	Women	49 0.73	251 3.4	+2.7
	Men	253 3.7	342 4.6	+0.9
Latino	Women	10 0.15	72 1.0	+0.9
	Men	59 0.88	206 2.8	+1.9
Asian or Pacific Islander	Women	5 0.07	67 0.9	+0.8
	Men	54 0.8	111 1.5	+0.7
American Indian or Alaskan Native	Women	0	30 0.4	+0.4
	Men	29 0.43	60 0.8	+0.4
White	Women	447 6.7	1,713 23.0	+16.3
	Men	5,788 86.3	4,597 62.0	-24.3
Unspecified or More than 1 Race	Women	3 0.04	8 0.1	+0.06
	Men	13 0.19	16 0.2	+0.01

Note: Totals may not equal 100 due to rounding errors.

Source: Calculated from data provided by the U.S. Office of Personnel Management (OPM).

Similarly, a recent congressional study found that the U.S. Department of Homeland Security has done little to diversify its career SES ranks (Committee on Homeland Security 2008). Recognizing the importance of diversity in the department's leadership posts, the report notes that "SES employees are one of the keys to the stability and continuity of the Federal government. The diversity of the modern career SES is an important asset for successful governance in a modern democratic state" (2008, 1).

Indeed, numerous empirical studies have found that bureaucratic behaviors are linked to social origins; this suggests, for example, that African Americans and Latinos in government do actively represent the interests of their counterparts in the general citizenry (Hindera 1993; Meier and Stewart 1992; Meier, Stewart, and

Table 6. Federal Civilian Employment by Pay, Race, Ethnicity and Gender, 1984, 1991 & 2004.

		Senior Pay Level ¹ (percents)		Average Pay (White Collar ²)	
		1991	2004	1984	2004
Total Executive Branch		14,419	18,991	\$25,261	\$61,843
	Women	12.4	25.8	\$19,347	\$55,264
	Men	87.6	74.2	\$30,654	\$68,077
African American	Women	1.0	2.7	\$18,190	\$51,493
	Men	3.5	3.8	\$23,379	\$56,841
Latino	Women	0.4	1.0	\$17,479	\$49,440
	Men	1.4	2.5	\$25,272	\$57,078
Asian or Pacific Islander	Women	0.2	0.9	\$20,586	\$57,968
	Men	0.9	2.3	\$30,257	\$69,297
American Indian or Alaskan Native	Women	0.0	0.2	\$17,059	\$44,269
	Men	0.5	0.6	\$24,654	\$56,735
White	Women	10.7	21.0	\$19,841	\$57,548
	Men	81.2	65.0	\$31,868	\$70,914

¹Senior Pay Levels include, for example, the following pay plans: Senior Executive Service, Executive Level, Senior Foreign Service, Administrative Law Judges, Board of Contract Appeals, and Foreign Service Chiefs of Mission, and Scientific and Professional. The Senior-Level pay indicator was created in 1991. Senior pay ranges from about \$100,000 upwards to approximately \$200,000.

²White-collar occupations are classified according to five major occupational categories referred to as PATCO (Professional, Administrative, Technical, Clerical, and Other). White-Collar pay plans do not fall into the General Schedule, GS and Related or Senior Pay Level pay categories.

Note: totals may not equal 100 due to rounding errors.

Sources: Calculated from U.S. Office of Personnel Management, Demographic Profile of the Federal Workforce (2004 data), <http://www.opm.gov/feddata/demograp/demograp.asp#RNOData>, date accessed, March 12, 2008. For 1984 and 1991 data, U.S. Office of Personnel Management (OPM), Central Personnel Data File (CPDF), provided by OPM.

England 1989; Meier, Wrinkle and Polinard 1999). They do so within the organization as well. As Naff (1998) reports, for example, Latino supervisors are more apt to promote Latinos in the workplace than other groups; likewise, African American supervisors are more inclined to promote African Americans (see also Clayton and Crosby 1992).

Social Equity in Pay?

Tables 6 presents data on senior pay levels and average pay for white-collar positions in the federal government for different time periods (1984–2004 and 1991–2004). As the data show, whites were highly concentrated in positions earning senior pay, ranging from \$100,000 to about \$200,000. Whites accounted for 86 percent of the senior pay levels in 2004, down

only about 6 percent from 1991. For both time periods, extraordinarily few people of color were represented in senior pay levels. Only small gains were achieved for people of color from 1991 to 2004.⁸

Table 6 also shows that white males earned the highest average pay in white-collar jobs for both time periods, followed very closely by Asian/Pacific Islander men. American Indian/ Alaskan Native women earned the lowest average salary at \$44,269, followed by Latina women at \$49,440 and African American women at \$51,463. Asian/Pacific Islander women earned the highest average salary of all women, \$57,968, exceeding the average pay for all men of color except Asian/Pacific Islander.

Social Equity across Agencies?

A good deal of research has shown that women and people of color tend to be segregated in certain departments or agencies (Guy and Newman 2004; Naff 2001; Sneed 2007). With respect to women, Sneed points out that

The “glass walls” metaphor is used to describe the existence of obstacles that deter women’s access to particular types of departments and the concentration of women in certain types of jobs or departments.... These invisible barriers keep women in certain types of agencies or occupational categories within agencies, and this is important because they tend to be the less desirable departments and jobs. (2007, 883)

Table 7 indicates that women as well as people of color have been victims of glass walls within federal government agencies. In 2004, women were concentrated in agencies within the Departments of Education,

Health and Human Services, Housing and Urban Development, and Treasury, whereas men held posts in such agencies as the Departments of Transportation, Defense, and Homeland Security. Other patterns will seem familiar. For example, African American women tended to be concentrated in agencies in the Education, Housing and Urban Development, Labor, and Treasury departments. African American men were relatively concentrated in the Departments of Education, Housing and Urban Development, and Veterans Affairs. American Indian/Alaskan Native women and men were highly concentrated in the Department of the Interior, in particular the Bureau of Indian Affairs, and also in Health and Human Services. Asian women were concentrated in Health and Human Services and Veterans Affairs; for Asian men, the agencies were Labor and Commerce.

Interestingly, although white males held the highest percentage of posts in the Department of Homeland Security (43.8 percent), Latino men represented 11.9 percent of the jobs in the department, the next highest concentration to white women (19.9 percent). However, the congressional study on diversity in the Department of Homeland Security indicates that women, Latinos, and African Americans tend to be confronted by glass walls in that they are segregated into less prominent units or positions within the department, such as the Transportation Security Administration, U.S. Customs and Border Protection, and U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services. These jobs tend to pay lower salaries as well. On the other hand, white men tend to hold positions in more prestigious units, such as the Domestic Nuclear Detection Office within the Directorate for Science and Technology, which is the primary unit for research and development in the

Table 7 Federal Civilian Employment by Agency, Race, Ethnicity, and Gender, 2004, percentages

Agency	Total		African American		Latino		Asian or Pacific Islander		American Indian or Alaskan Native		White	
	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men
Total	44.4	55.6	10.4	6.5	3.1	4.2	2.3	2.7	1.2	1.0	27.5	41.1
Agriculture	42.8	57.2	6.9	3.6	2.4	3.8	1.1	1.6	0.9	1.4	31.6	46.8
Commerce	46.4	53.6	11.6	5.2	1.9	1.8	2.8	4.9	0.3	0.3	29.7	41.6
Defense	36.6	63.4	7.4	6.9	2.2	3.9	2.3	3.6	0.3	0.6	24.4	48.4
Education	61.9	38.1	27.3	8.5	2.7	1.7	2.2	1.4	0.7	0.4	28.9	26.1
Energy	37.4	62.6	7.6	3.4	2.7	3.2	1.4	3.0	0.6	0.9	25.2	52.0
HHS	60.8	38.2	12.4	4.4	2.0	1.6	3.7	3.5	12.5	4.1	30.2	25.6
DHS	33.8	66.2	7.4	7.1	4.7	11.9	1.5	2.9	0.3	0.5	19.9	43.8
HUD	60.4	39.6	27.4	9.7	4.3	2.9	2.4	1.8	0.7	0.4	25.5	24.9
Interior	40.1	59.9	2.7	2.5	2.0	2.7	1.0	1.0	7.7	7.3	26.7	46.4
Justice	40.4	59.6	10.3	7.4	3.3	5.3	1.2	0.6	0.3	0.5	25.3	44.7
Labor	50.4	49.6	17.5	6.1	3.7	3.3	2.4	3.8	0.4	0.3	26.5	38.0
State	48.8	51.2	10.4	4.7	2.8	2.5	3.0	2.2	0.2	0.2	32.5	41.5
Transportation	26.9	73.1	5.8	5.3	1.5	4.2	0.9	2.6	0.4	1.1	18.2	60.0
Treasury	62.5	37.5	18.7	5.5	5.2	2.6	2.2	1.7	0.6	0.2	35.8	27.4
Veterans	58.3	41.7	14.6	9.2	3.5	3.3	4.1	2.6	0.5	0.4	35.6	26.2

Source: Calculated from U.S. Office of Personnel Management, Demographic Profile of the Federal Workforce (2004 data), <http://www.opm.gov/feddata/demograp/demograp.asp#RNOData>, date accessed, March 12, 2008.

Department of Homeland Security, and the Federal Law Enforcement Training Center (see Committee on Homeland Security 2008).

Discussion and Conclusions

Since the emergence of the New Public Administration, the field has called for greater social equity in government jobs. This message, particularly for equity in upper-level, higher paying positions, has been advanced repeatedly in the research and literature of public administration. But overall, as suggested here, the glass continues to come up half empty. Perhaps the words of Frederickson almost two decades ago still hold true today: “[W]hile social equity has undergone development as a theory—and while public administrators have, following a social equity ethic, ameliorated the effects of inequality—still inequality has increased as a fact” (1990, 236).

White women have made some progress in terms of reaching higher-level positions, but their pay continues to lag behind white as well as Asian men. Despite small changes over the past 20 years, and slight variations between and among the groups,⁹ people of color overall continue to be concentrated in lower-level, lower-paying jobs in the federal government. In addition, white women and people of color continue to be segregated in those agencies that have traditionally employed them (e.g., Health and Human Services). And, even with the appearance of progress within some agencies (e.g., for Latino men in the Department of Homeland Security), lower pay and segmentation in less prestigious units or departments prevail. In effect, white women and people of color continue to be disadvantaged by glass ceilings and glass walls.

Affirmative action policies, civil rights laws, and litigation have no doubt helped to create some equity in terms of entry into government jobs and, in some cases, pay.¹⁰ But affirmative action policies, legislation, and even litigation also must be aimed at the upper, higher-paying levels of government jobs. As noted, social equity in the upper reaches of government is critical for effective democratic governance.

Legislation has been introduced to promote greater diversity in the upper reaches of the federal bureaucracy. In October of 2007, Representative Danny K. Davis (D-IL) and Senator Daniel K. Akaka (D-HI) introduced a bill in Congress to increase the diversity of the Senior Executive Service. Their effort was spurred

in part by the 2008 GAO report, which showed that as of September 2006, the 6,349 career members¹¹ of the SES were overwhelmingly white—61.4 percent were white men, and 22.6 percent were white women (GAO 2008, 10). As reported earlier, this picture of the ranks of the SES remains virtually the same as in 2007. As of this writing, congressional hearings are under way on the bill, and opposition has already been voiced. Statements before Congress by George W. Bush administration officials warned that any efforts that impose race or gender requirements would be seen by the Justice Department as being unconstitutional (Kichak 2008). Perhaps opposition will subside now that the Barack Obama administration has come into office and Democrats control both Houses. Passage of the bill would certainly be a significant milestone. Its implementation as well as ability to withstand judicial scrutiny would be triumphant.

It also should be noted that the current study did not control for factors such as education. Unquestionably, the failure of Latinos and African Americans to make more progress is partly attributable to the degree to which they lag behind whites in education. Until we accomplish social equity goals in education, it will be difficult to surmount them in the federal workforce.¹²

Future Directions

This descriptive study suggests that the federal government has some progress to make in achieving social equity in pay levels and within its upper ranks. Scholars, analysts, and human resource specialists have repeatedly called for changes in the way government addresses social equity matters (see, e.g., Naff and Kellough 2001; Riccucci 2002; Rice 2005). Key measures offered have included integrating social equity into the overall strategic goals of the organization; then, it would be afforded the same weight as other important organizational or agency goals. Increased training has also been advised, including programs aimed at the upward mobility of people of color. But training needs go beyond this. Educating the public workforce more broadly on issues surrounding race and gender is paramount. When the lexicon of workers and even policy makers continues to be dominated by such spurious concepts as “reverse discrimination” and “quotas,” progress toward social equity will inevitably be impeded. Despite the importance of training programs, they are the first to fall victim to hard economic times. But as noted, if social equity were treated as a critical strategy

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for achieving overall organizational missions, training programs would be viewed as an essential business tool for improved governance.

Perhaps most importantly, as Stivers (2002) has argued, much more deep-seated, systemic measures are needed if meaningful and genuine social change is to be made. Stivers points out that unless the fundamental nature of bureaucratic institutions is radically altered, efforts to advance the interests of white women, as well as people of color, will remain a relentless exercise in futility. She argues that “the structural nature of public administration’s masculine bias means that equal opportunity strategies for advancing women’s careers in public service, important as they are as a matter of sheer justice, cannot be counted on in and of themselves to change public administration affairs” (2002, 12). The dominance of white males in the upper reaches of government bureaucracies is one part of the structural problem. Thus, if the goal of social equity is to be legitimately pursued, then changes to organizational structure and culture remain key.

Unless real social equity gains are made over the next decade, we may continue to ask, as James Baldwin did many years ago, “How long must we wait for progress?”

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Notes

1. This article does not include data on the postal services or the military. Future research might draw comparisons with the federal civilian labor force.
2. See, and compare, for example, Svava and Brunet (2004) and Rosenbloom (2005), and Nalbandian (1989) and Rosenbloom (1989).
3. See also Krislov (1967) and Krislov and Rosenbloom (1981).
4. See also Rosenbloom (1977), who provides an analysis of the role of the federal government in the employment of women and people of color.
5. The year 2004 was selected in order to acquire complete data from the Office of Personnel Management. A 20-year period was determined to be an adequate span of time to track progress in social equity. In the case of some SES data (e.g., see table 4), the office responsible for maintaining SES data was able to provide data for 2007.
6. In addition to the general population, another benchmark would be the presence of white women and people of color in the workforce; women, for instance, tend to be disproportionately represented among the ranks of the elderly because they live longer on average than men.
7. The data are not broken down by region, which may show a different picture.
8. There is a vast literature on the glass ceiling. See, for example, Bullard and Wright (2003), Bowling et al. (2006), Naff (1994), and Newman (1994, 1996).
9. For example, average pay for Asians in white-collar jobs, as seen in table 6.
10. But see Zeigler (2006), who finds that legislation such as the Equal Pay Act has not been successful in curtailing pay discrimination. Also, the U.S. Supreme Court issued a number of rulings in the 1980s that worked against affirmative action. In 2003, however, the U.S. Supreme Court issued a favorable ruling in *Grutter v. Bollinger* (539 U.S. 206), in which the Court majority opined that the racial diversity of a study body can be a sufficiently compelling interest on the part of a state university to warrant the use of a race-conscious admissions program under the equal protection clause of the Fourteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution. In 2007, the Court issued a ruling in *Ledbetter v. Goodyear Tire & Rubber Company* (550 U.S. 618), which has made it more difficult for people to challenge discriminatory practices in employment. *Ledbetter* involved sex-based pay discrimination. As of this writing, a bill is before Congress to reverse the effects of the ruling.
11. There are two types of positions and four types of appointments in the SES: career reserved, general, career, and noncareer.
12. Other factors that could be controlled for include seniority and additional important contextual factors (e.g., the courts and public opinion turning sharply against affirmative action at various points in time). Certainly, additional studies controlling for these factors is warranted.

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