

SPECIAL REPORT

No. 283 | MAY 30, 2024

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BORDER SECURITY AND IMMIGRATION CENTER

About the Author

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This paper, in its entirety, can be found at <https://report.heritage.org/sr283>

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How the State Department's Discriminatory DEI Programs Undermine U.S. Diplomacy and Betray American Values

Simon Hankinson

The entrenchment of the radical leftwing diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) agenda and its growing promulgation and enforcement bureaucracy at the State Department has been to the detriment of recruitment, efficiency, and morale. Instead of continuing its obsession with artificially engineered diversity and ever-growing staff and budgets, the State Department needs to eliminate its wasteful and discriminatory DEI bureaucracy; refocus existing resources on core values and priority goals; and depoliticize the hiring and promotion process to return to merit-based principles. To ensure that these reforms are lasting, Congress must legislate them into a new governing statute to update the Foreign Service Act of 1980.

Out of the crooked timber that is humanity, no straight thing was ever made.

—Immanuel Kant

The United States is not a perfect union; it is the *quest* for a *more perfect* union. In that quest, two visions now confront each other. The civil rights era ended legal segregation and inequality, and the country is ready to move further toward the promise inherent in the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution: that human beings are all created equal and have equal rights.

On the one hand, there is the dream of Martin Luther King, Jr. In his famous speech at the Lincoln Memorial in August 1963, King expressed a desire that his children might be judged by the content of their character, not by the color of their skin.¹

On the other hand, there is the revanchism of “anti-racist” professor Ibram X. Kendi and his followers, who believe that the only remedy to discrimination in the past is discrimination in the present.

The perspectives of these two Americans, born a half century apart, are not compatible; they are mutually exclusive.

Over the past few years, Kendi-ism has captured American academia, public education, and government. The results have been disastrous for the two principles most necessary in recruiting civil servants to represent a heterogenous nation—meritocracy and diverse opinions.

Part 1. Criticism of the State Department: Five Myths and Reality

Both the Left and the Right in American foreign policy circles agree that the State Department needs reform. Conservative critics perceive State as a repository of leftist-liberal, recalcitrant bureaucrats who stubbornly oppose the policies of Republican Administrations. Critics from the Left consider the department to be an elitist bastion of white, male privilege that is highly resistant to change. When in power, each party attempts to correct these perceptions through the strategic placement of political appointees as senior officials and heads of offices.

A 2021 study from the National Bureau of Economic Research (NBER) found that while “the lower levels of the federal government...appear to be largely protected from political interference, Democrats make up the plurality of civil servants,” and that “[o]verrepresentation of Democrats increases with seniority.”² The study’s authors estimated there were twice as many Democrats as Republicans in the senior ranks of the federal bureaucracy (50 percent versus 26 percent), and that the State Department was one of the three federal agencies with the highest share of Democrats.³ The NBER study concluded that this “[p]olitical misalignment carries a sizeable performance penalty” in terms of resistance to the political program of an incumbent President of the opposite party.

Two lengthy critiques from the center-left, both from November 2020, argue that the State Department needs more diversity, more people, and more money.⁴

The Council on Foreign Relations Report. The first report, written by former career diplomats under the auspices of the Council on Foreign Relations (CFR), recommends “action to make the State Department a diverse, equitable, and inclusive institution.”⁵ Echoing the language of State’s Equity Action Plan, the report implausibly designates “the State Department’s diversity deficit as a national security risk.”⁶ The authors demand an immediate increase in diversity, partly through mid-level and senior-level hiring programs, and also by “replacing or offering alternative entry paths” to the written exam.⁷ The CFR report recommends adding 10

percent more staff to the Foreign Service as a “Diplomatic Reserve Corps” to be called on in times of crisis.

More ambitiously, the CFR report recommends that more than half of the domestic positions above the rank of Assistant Secretary, and more than 75 percent of Ambassadors, should be career professionals—though State should “prioritize diverse candidates and commit to gender parity.” Rather self-servingly—since one of the authors, Uzra Zeya, resigned due to conflicts with State’s leadership under the Trump Administration—the document calls for “a public apology for career employees subject to political retaliation” and a “right of return” for officers who left within the past decade to be accepted back with no loss of rank.⁸ As it happens, Zeya returned as Under Secretary of State for Civilian Security, Democracy, and Human Rights after President Joe Biden took office.

The Belfer Center Report. A second report with similar conclusions and recommendations came from former Ambassadors Nicholas Burns, Marc Grossman, and Marcie Ries, writing collectively as the “American Diplomacy Project” for the Belfer Center at Harvard’s Kennedy School of Government.⁹ The Belfer report advocates “a relentless focus on diversity as a first-order strategic priority.” The authors also want to enlarge the Foreign Service by 15 percent (2,000 positions) over three years to create a training float, and then to create an additional 1,400 to 1,800 positions. The Belfer authors also want a Diplomatic Reserve Corps, but they aim even higher than the CFR by calling for career professionals to be allotted 75 percent of Assistant Secretary positions and 90 percent of ambassadorial jobs.¹⁰ The Belfer authors would like to rename the Foreign Service the “United States Diplomatic Service.”

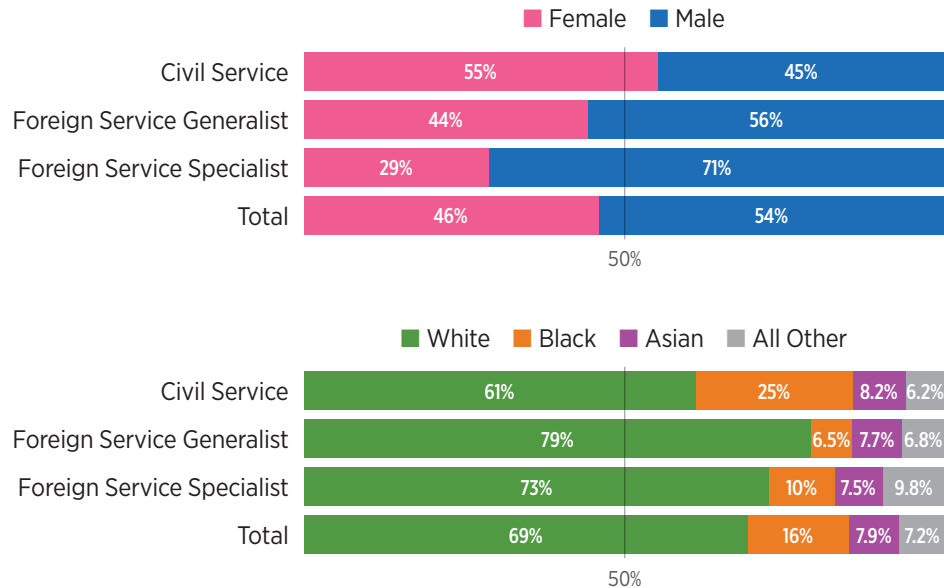
In summary, the CFR and Belfer Center reports share three major themes. The first is diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI): The State Department’s perceived lack of diversity must be remedied urgently. To accomplish this goal, the authors of both reports seem willing to discard objectively neutral criteria in hiring, promotion, and job assignments. Second, both reports want to expand the Foreign Service by at least 15 percent. (This should come as no surprise to anyone who has worked in the U.S. government, where no official ever wants fewer staff or a smaller budget.) Third, the authors of both reports implausibly believe that the way to minimize politicization at State is to replace political appointees, loyal to the sitting President, with career officers, even though, as noted, progressives and liberals greatly outnumber conservatives among senior career staff.

Like the CFR and the Belfer Center, the American Foreign Service Association (AFSA) also supports DEI; increasing the size of the Foreign Service; and reforms to the bidding, evaluation, and assignments processes.¹¹ The

CHART 1

Demographics at the State Department

FOR FULL-TIME PERMANENT WORKFORCE AS OF SEPTEMBER 30, 2023



NOTE: Figures may not sum to 100 due to rounding.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of State, "Department of State Fulltime Permanent Workforce Diversity," September 30, 2023, https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/NewDiv2_0923p.pdf (accessed January 31, 2024).

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recommendations by all three entities rely on several contentions that are not supported by facts.

Myth One: The State Department Lacks and Resists Racial and Gender Diversity. In 2023, the State Department's overall staff¹² (see Chart 1) is largely reflective of American demographics and labor market realities.

Of 26,000 total Civil Service and Foreign Service employees, 64.8 percent are identified as "non-minority" and 35 percent as "minority."¹³ About 46 percent are female, and 54 percent male.¹⁴ They are 15.7 percent black, which is higher than the black share of the national population,¹⁵ and 69.2 percent "white" including Hispanics. The Civil Service has a greater percentage of women and more minorities than the national population.

The Foreign Service has somewhat more men than women, and the racial percentages are within 10 percent of the national levels. It is true that the State Department's senior ranks in both the civil and Foreign Service are

currently more white and more male than the national population. For that reason, critics concentrate their fire on the senior ranks, including the appointment of Ambassadors. However, as senior officers have been in for a quarter century or more, their demographics reflect hiring of a generation ago, not of today. According to State's former director of recruitment, Woody Staeben (speaking eight years ago), "among new hires in the past five years, the number of white officers is down to about 70 percent. But it will take much longer for the overall figure to change, because the average Foreign Service career spans 27 years.... The trend line is in the right direction."¹⁶ (Note: By "the right direction," Staeben means admitting ever fewer white applicants.)

Those who criticize the lack of diversity within the Foreign Service do not attempt to prove bad faith on the part of the State Department or individual employees, nor do they cite any discernible (and thus remediable) opposition to diversity among current staff. Instead, they simply posit the existence of "systemic racism," "structural bias," or other invisible process working to minimize employment of certain (but not all) minorities. According to critical race theory, any disparity in hiring or representation at any level would be proof of bias, this mystical force of oppression that is "woven into the fabric" of America and its institutions and favors "white supremacy" and the status quo.¹⁷ To test this theory, or at least eliminate other factors that could explain differences in group outcome, one would need to know the inputs and control for variables, such as age, education, and experience. A lack of useful data, apart from racial percentages of staff, makes this kind of criticism difficult to refute with empirical means.

In early 2024, the State Department released a "DEIA baseline" (State adds an "A" for "accessibility") that breaks personnel down "by race, ethnicity, sex, disability, grade/rank, and job series/skill codes," which supposedly "allows the Department to assess whether it reflects the rich diversity of our nation."¹⁸ By separating the department's 25,000 American employees into their various "intersectional" components, the DEIA baseline seems intended to serve efforts by the department to achieve "equity" through race and sex-based preferences.

Myth Two: "Structural Barriers" Prevent Minorities from Entering the Foreign Service. To test the theory that structural barriers are impeding the hiring of officers who belong to certain identity groups, one would have to know:

- The breakdown by race of those who take the Foreign Service Officer Test (FSOT);

- Whether there is any difference in the pass/fail percentage by race; and
- Whether those disparate results, if they exist, can be explained by factors other than bias.

The answers to these questions would allow testing of the hypothesis of structural barriers and control for other explanatory factors. For example:

- If fewer members of a particular identity group take the FSOT than their percentage in the national population, but the percentage of those who pass or fail the test does not differ widely between identity groups, then that identity group's lower participation in the test alone is presumably not an indication of structural bias.
- If the percentage of those, by identity group, who take the FSOT varies from the percentage that passes, and yet the identity group of the test taker is not known to the automated grading system or the person grading the paper, then this factor alone is presumably not an indication of structural bias.

The State Department at present either does not produce, or does not publish, research and analysis on racial disparities in FSOT taking and performance.

Myth Three: Promotions Are Biased Against Minorities and Women.

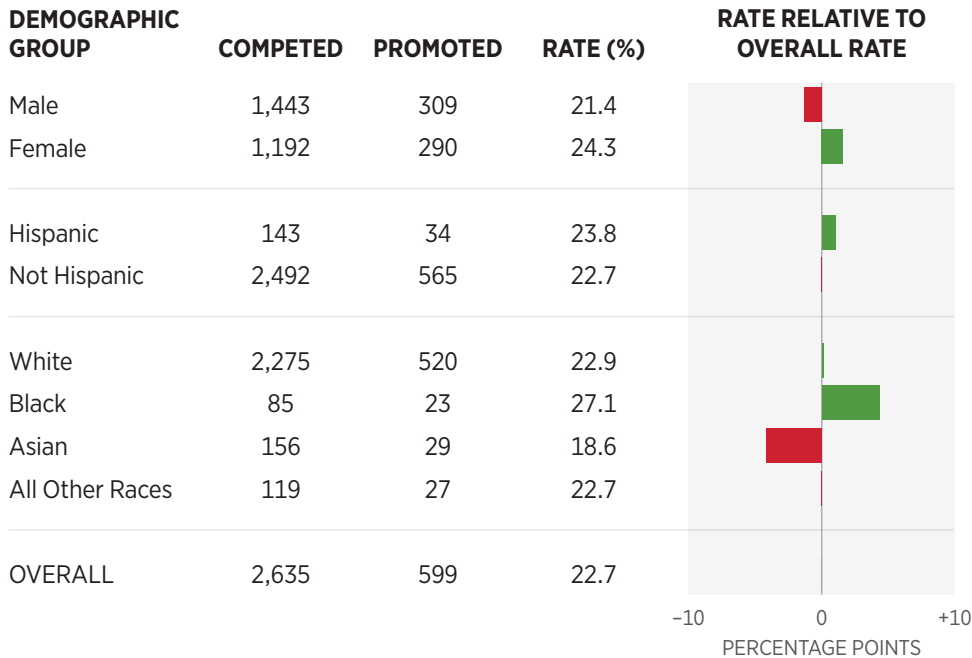
In December 2020, then-U.S. Representative Karen Bass (D-CA), who was on the House Committee on Foreign Affairs, and is now mayor of Los Angeles, argued in an article in *Foreign Policy* that the Biden Administration “must make diversity a priority across the board, and especially within the State Department and foreign service.”¹⁹ Bass cited a 172-page Government Accountability Office (GAO) report from 2020, which claimed that “[r]acial or ethnic minorities in State’s Civil Service were 4% to 29% less likely to be promoted than their white coworkers.”²⁰ However, the GAO report explicitly includes the caveat that “our analyses do not completely explain the reasons for differences in promotion outcomes, which may result from various unobservable factors. Thus, our analyses do not establish a causal relationship between demographic characteristics and promotion outcomes.”²¹

At least within the Foreign Service, claims that women and racial minorities are promoted less often than white men are not supported by the data, as Charts 2-6 reveal. The Foreign Service splits into generalists and specialists.

CHART 2

State Department Promotion Rates: Consular

Figures are for 2020–2022.



SOURCES:

- U.S. Department of State, Bureau of Global Talent Management, Office of Organization and Talent Analytics, “Fiscal Year 2020 Foreign Service Promotion Statistics by Cone, Ethnicity, Race, and Gender,” <https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/2020-FS-Promotion-Statistics-by-Diversity-and-Cone.pdf> (accessed February 1, 2024).
- U.S. Department of State Bureau of Global Talent Management, Office of Organization and Talent Analytics, “Fiscal Year 2021 Foreign Service Promotion Statistics by Cone, Ethnicity, Race and Gender,” <https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/FS-Promotion-Statistics-by-Grade-Cone-and-ERG-2021.pdf> (accessed February 1, 2024).
- U.S. Department of State Bureau of Global Talent Management, Office of Organization and Talent Analytics, “Fiscal Year 2022 Foreign Service Promotion Statistics by Cone, Ethnicity, Race and Gender,” <https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/2022-FS-Promotion-Statistics-by-Diversity-and-Cone.pdf> (accessed February 1, 2024).

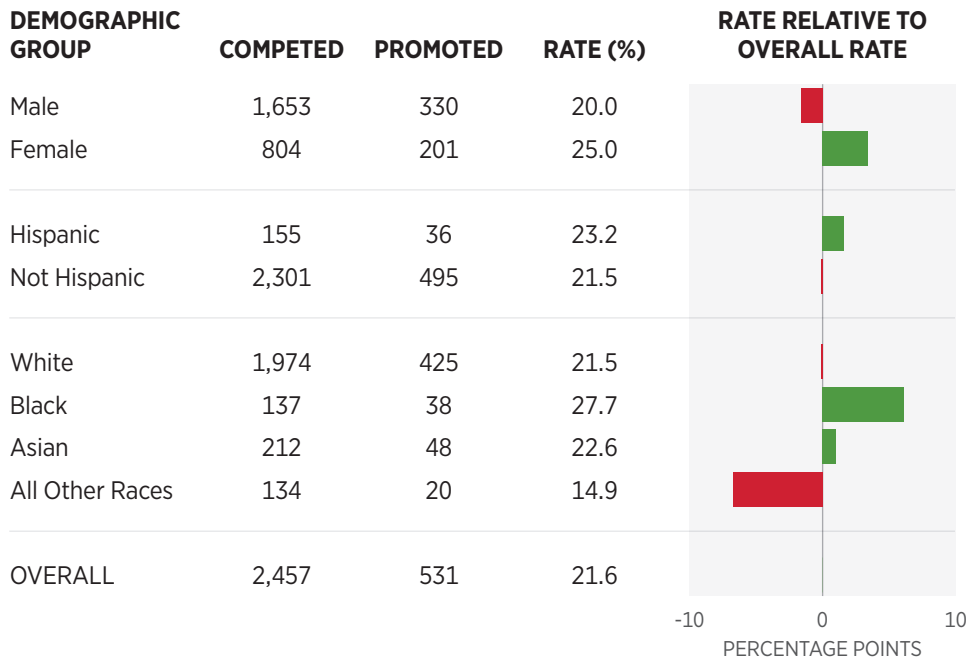
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Specialists are hired for specific skill sets in a separate system, and some specialist categories have too few employees up for promotion every year to make for a credible statistical analysis. Generalist officers come in through the FSOT and fellowship programs (discussed later) and are divided into five occupational concentrations called “cones”: Administrative, Consular, Economic, Political, and Public Diplomacy. The State Department publishes promotion tables every year separated by cone, sex, and race.

CHART 3

State Department Promotion Rates: Economic

Figures are for 2020–2022.

**SOURCES:**

- U.S. Department of State, Bureau of Global Talent Management, Office of Organization and Talent Analytics, “Fiscal Year 2020 Foreign Service Promotion Statistics by Cone, Ethnicity, Race, and Gender,” <https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/2020-FS-Promotion-Statistics-by-Diversity-and-Cone.pdf> (accessed February 1, 2024).
- U.S. Department of State Bureau of Global Talent Management, Office of Organization and Talent Analytics, “Fiscal Year 2021 Foreign Service Promotion Statistics by Cone, Ethnicity, Race and Gender,” <https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/FS-Promotion-Statistics-by-Grade-Cone-and-ERG-2021.pdf> (accessed February 1, 2024).
- U.S. Department of State Bureau of Global Talent Management, Office of Organization and Talent Analytics, “Fiscal Year 2022 Foreign Service Promotion Statistics by Cone, Ethnicity, Race and Gender,” <https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/2022-FS-Promotion-Statistics-by-Diversity-and-Cone.pdf> (accessed February 1, 2024).

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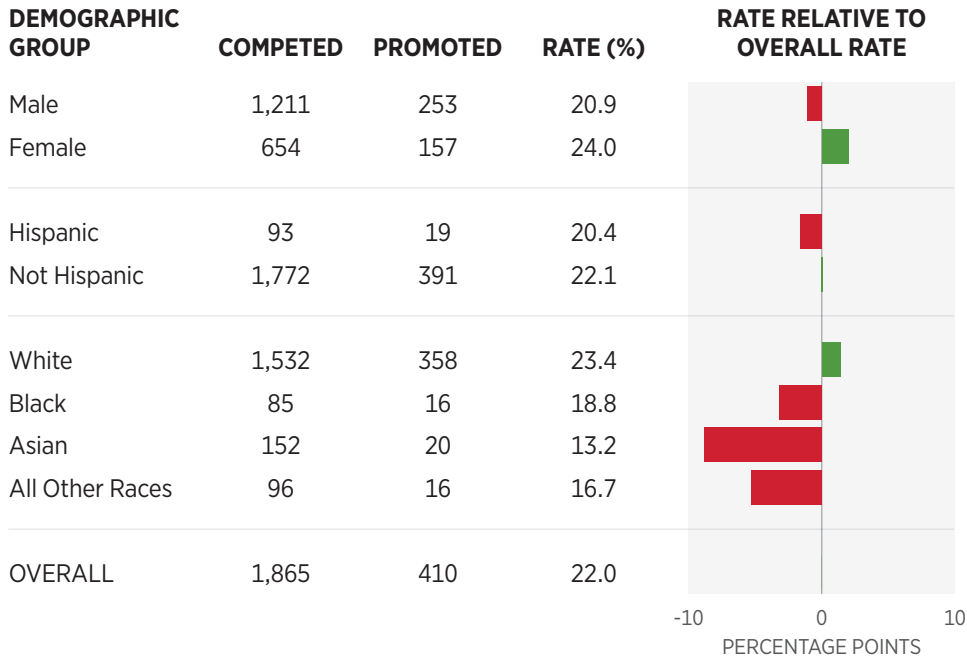
As Charts 2-6 show, there is no discernible disadvantage, in fact quite the opposite, in promotions within the Foreign Service for female or non-white officers.

For the Foreign Service, cumulative promotion results from fiscal years 2020,²² 2021,²³ and 2022²⁴ showed that women were generally promoted at a higher rate than men. In the 2020–2022 Foreign Service promotion data set, Hispanic officers had the highest, and Asians the lowest, rate of

CHART 4

State Department Promotion Rates: Management

Figures are for 2020–2022.



SOURCES:

- U.S. Department of State, Bureau of Global Talent Management, Office of Organization and Talent Analytics, “Fiscal Year 2020 Foreign Service Promotion Statistics by Cone, Ethnicity, Race, and Gender,” <https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/2020-FS-Promotion-Statistics-by-Diversity-and-Cone.pdf> (accessed February 1, 2024).
- U.S. Department of State Bureau of Global Talent Management, Office of Organization and Talent Analytics, “Fiscal Year 2021 Foreign Service Promotion Statistics by Cone, Ethnicity, Race and Gender,” <https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/FS-Promotion-Statistics-by-Grade-Cone-and-ERG-2021.pdf> (accessed February 1, 2024).
- U.S. Department of State Bureau of Global Talent Management, Office of Organization and Talent Analytics, “Fiscal Year 2022 Foreign Service Promotion Statistics by Cone, Ethnicity, Race and Gender,” <https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/2022-FS-Promotion-Statistics-by-Diversity-and-Cone.pdf> (accessed February 1, 2024).

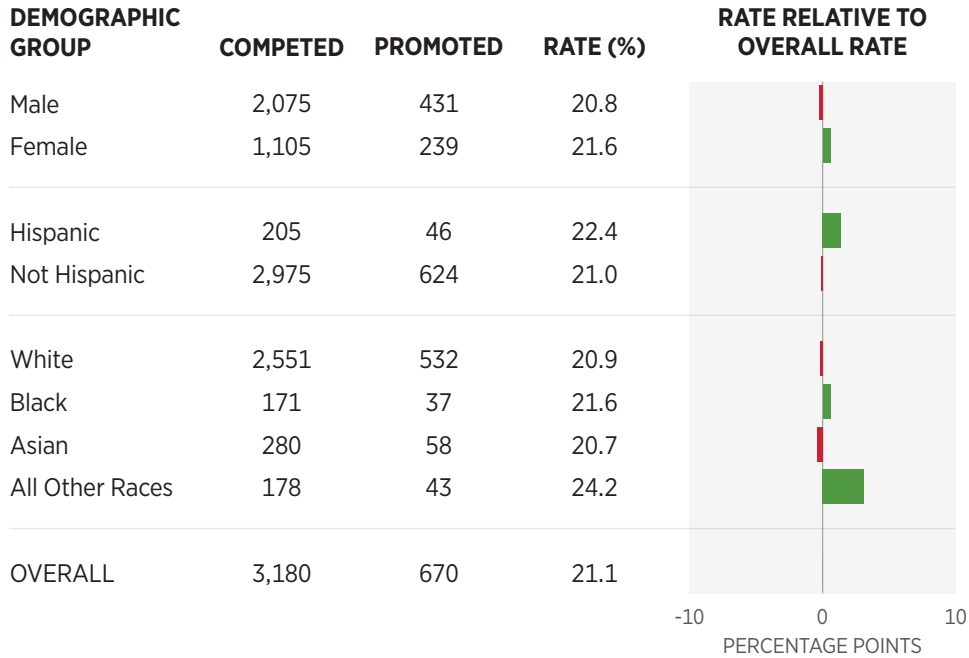
promotion overall. Over the three years, the difference in promotion rates between black and white officers was negligible. Chart 7 captures these general trends.

Furthermore, other State Department data on promotions have shown a marked bias toward promoting women for some positions. In 2020 in the Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs, for example, fewer than half of the applicants for Deputy Chief of Mission positions—which are among

CHART 5

State Department Promotion Rates: Political

Figures are for 2020–2022.



SOURCES:

- U.S. Department of State, Bureau of Global Talent Management, Office of Organization and Talent Analytics, “Fiscal Year 2020 Foreign Service Promotion Statistics by Cone, Ethnicity, Race, and Gender,” <https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/2020-FS-Promotion-Statistics-by-Diversity-and-Cone.pdf> (accessed February 1, 2024).
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- U.S. Department of State Bureau of Global Talent Management, Office of Organization and Talent Analytics, “Fiscal Year 2022 Foreign Service Promotion Statistics by Cone, Ethnicity, Race and Gender,” <https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/2022-FS-Promotion-Statistics-by-Diversity-and-Cone.pdf> (accessed February 1, 2024).

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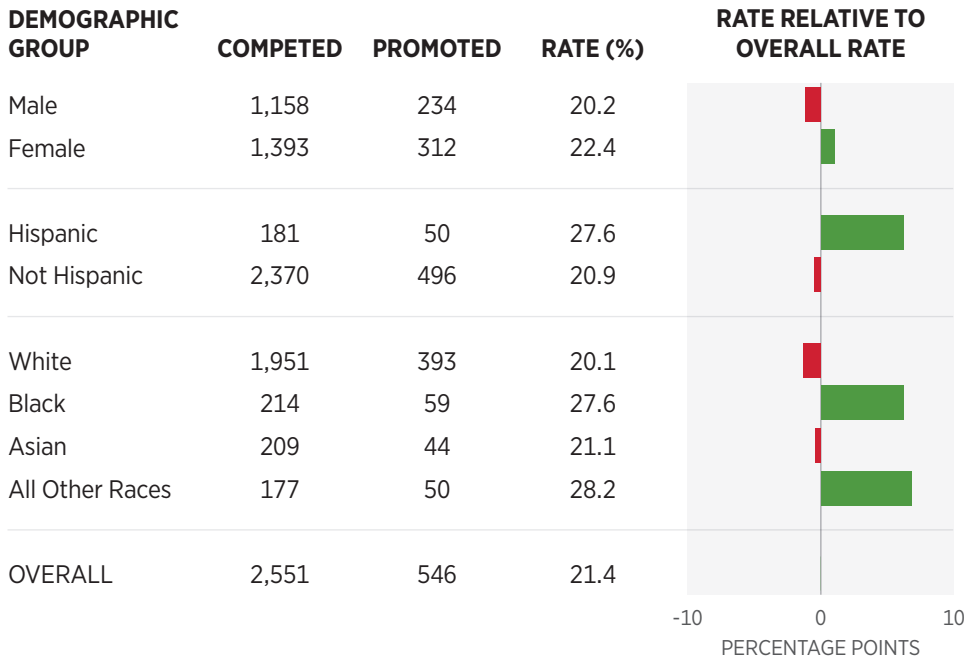
the most prestigious in the service—were women, but they were hired for nearly two-thirds of those jobs.²⁵

Myth Four: The State Department Has a “Hostile Climate” for Minorities. In her June 2023 testimony before Congress,²⁶ State Department Chief Diversity and Inclusion Officer (CDIO) Gina Abercrombie-Winstanley referred to a staff survey to which about one-third of State Department employees had responded, which said that “their top concern

CHART 6

State Department Promotion Rates: Public Diplomacy

Figures are for 2020–2022.



SOURCES:

- U.S. Department of State, Bureau of Global Talent Management, Office of Organization and Talent Analytics, “Fiscal Year 2020 Foreign Service Promotion Statistics by Cone, Ethnicity, Race, and Gender,” <https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/2020-FS-Promotion-Statistics-by-Diversity-and-Cone.pdf> (accessed February 1, 2024).
- U.S. Department of State Bureau of Global Talent Management, Office of Organization and Talent Analytics, “Fiscal Year 2021 Foreign Service Promotion Statistics by Cone, Ethnicity, Race and Gender,” <https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/FS-Promotion-Statistics-by-Grade-Cone-and-ERG-2021.pdf> (accessed February 1, 2024).
- U.S. Department of State Bureau of Global Talent Management, Office of Organization and Talent Analytics, “Fiscal Year 2022 Foreign Service Promotion Statistics by Cone, Ethnicity, Race and Gender,” <https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/2022-FS-Promotion-Statistics-by-Diversity-and-Cone.pdf> (accessed February 1, 2024).

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was in [sic] removing barriers to merit-based advancement.”²⁷ However, the only two “barriers” she specified were (a) the lack of paid internships and (b) a default font in department documents that made them harder to read for visually impaired staff. Both “barriers” were easy to fix and encountered little opposition. Yet without much evidence, both the CDIO and a consensus of critics on the Left believe that the State Department maintains barriers that impede the hiring and successful careers of certain minorities.

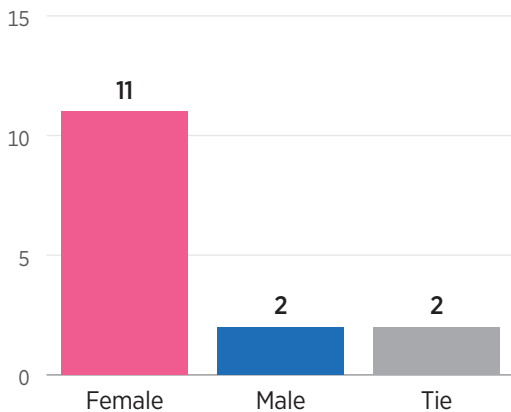
CHART 7

Female and Black Top Recent Promotions at the State Department

State Department Foreign Service Officers (generalists) are categorized into five professional concentrations called “cones.” State breaks down annual data on staff promotions by cone, gender, ethnicity, and race. Three years of data (2020–2022) provide 15 total cones that can be analyzed to see how different demographic groups fared in staff promotions.

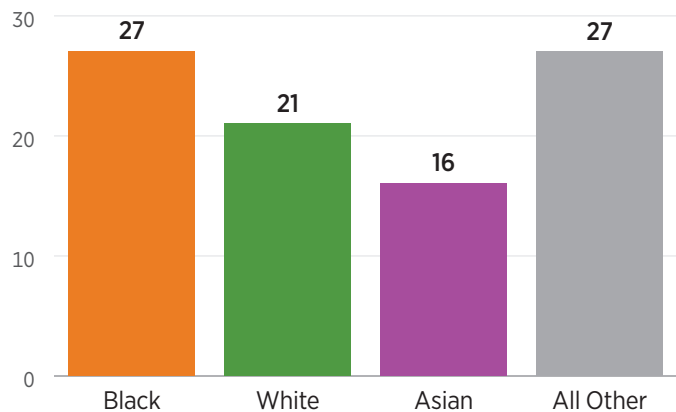
BY GENDER

Scoring: 1 point for each cone with higher promotion rate




BY RACE

Scoring: 3 points for each cone with highest promotion rate, 2 points for second-highest rate, 1 point for third-highest rate, and 0 points for lowest rate



SOURCES:

- U.S. Department of State, Bureau of Global Talent Management, Office of Organization and Talent Analytics, “Fiscal Year 2020 Foreign Service Promotion Statistics by Cone, Ethnicity, Race, and Gender,” <https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/2020-FS-Promotion-Statistics-by-Diversity-and-Cone.pdf> (accessed February 1, 2024).
- U.S. Department of State Bureau of Global Talent Management, Office of Organization and Talent Analytics, “Fiscal Year 2021 Foreign Service Promotion Statistics by Cone, Ethnicity, Race and Gender,” <https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/FS-Promotion-Statistics-by-Grade-Cone-and-ERG-2021.pdf> (accessed February 1, 2024).
- U.S. Department of State Bureau of Global Talent Management, Office of Organization and Talent Analytics, “Fiscal Year 2022 Foreign Service Promotion Statistics by Cone, Ethnicity, Race and Gender,” <https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/2022-FS-Promotion-Statistics-by-Diversity-and-Cone.pdf> (accessed February 1, 2024).

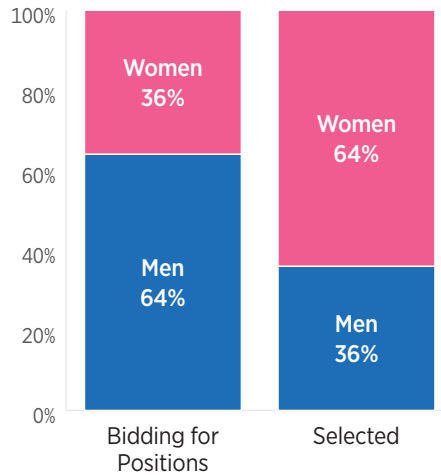
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Former Foreign Service Officer Chris Richardson has charged in *The New York Times* that “a pervasive and entrenched system of white supremacy [is] controlling the levers of advancement and promotion at the State Department,” but without defining what the “system” is, or describing its “levers” and how they function.²⁸ Richardson cited a few anecdotes as evidence, without mentioning if the allegations were reported to State’s Office of Civil Rights (OCR) for investigation, and if so, what actions were taken in

CHART 8

Women Disproportionately Selected for Coveted Positions within the State Department

FOR DEPUTY CHIEF OF MISSION (DCM) AND PRINCIPAL OFFICER (PO) POSITIONS AT THE LATIN AMERICA OFFICE



SOURCE: U.S. Department of State, cable to all diplomatic and consular posts, April 27, 2022.

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response. Without reliable information about whether the putative victim in every case reported the alleged offense, and about whether the State Department’s Bureau of Global Talent Management²⁹ or OCR dealt with it satisfactorily, such anecdotal claims of grievance are of little evidentiary value and impossible to address.

One of Richardson’s many unlikely proposals to remedy the situation is that the department “should ask Congress to immediately double its number of admissions” to the Foreign Service.³⁰ He also demanded that “the Department should contact every single black officer who has recently left, hear their stories, and if necessary, begin investigations into possible misconduct by white officers.” However, it would be of little value to interview every outgoing black officer if the conclusions are foregone.

Also writing in *The New York Times*, journalist Lara Jakes cited “current and former officials” describing “a State Department culture of endemic slights and disparaging treatment of employees who are people of color and women.”³¹ However, like Richardson, Jakes supported this alarming accusation with only unverified anecdotes of individual experiences, and she gave no indication if the cases were referred to the OCR or if other disciplinary action was taken.

In an article for CNN, a journalist claimed that “microaggressions, quiet bigotries and structural hurdles” are “systemic” impediments to success for ethnic minorities at State; yet like the others, she offered only a few, anonymous anecdotes as evidence.³²

Besides anecdotal evidence, there is some data to consider. In 2020, the AFSA published the results of a survey to which 1,630 members had responded.³³ According to the survey, “[intentional] microaggressions was the most common category of complaint.” Furthermore, “27 percent of respondents reported experiencing what they perceived as intentional microaggressions,” with those individuals comprising “0 percent of white males...14 percent of women, 63 percent of black males and 72 percent of black female respondents.”³⁴ According to its website, the AFSA boasts “close to 16,800 members”—meaning that not quite 10 percent of its membership felt strongly enough to respond to the survey, and only 2.7 percent reported “what they perceived as intentional microaggressions.”³⁵

The State Department’s OCR is responsible for investigating and punishing employee misconduct. According to the OCR, in fiscal year 2022 there were 169 discrimination complaints (“a slight increase...from the previous two years”) at the department, which employs approximately 25,000 U.S. staff in the civil and foreign services.³⁶ The highest number of complaints were for reprisal (against employees using the Equal Employment Opportunity system to complain). Race-based complaints came fourth after reprisal, sex, and disability. Of the 169 complaints, there were only two findings of actual discrimination, that is roughly one case per 12,500 employees. One was for a complaint based on disability, and the other for a complaint based on reprisal. Each finding was accompanied by measures to rectify the problem and place the disadvantaged employee in the position he or she would have been in but for the disputed action.

Devising a perfect system of recruitment, retention, promotion, and assignment will remain a perpetual challenge for the State Department. However, statistics on promotion and internal complaints do not demonstrate bias against, or a hostile climate for, minorities at State.

Myth Five: Minorities Leave Because of a Hostile Climate. During a U.S. Senate hearing in July 2022, Senator Corey Booker (D–NJ) asked why black officers leave the Foreign Service at a (very slightly) higher rate than their peers. Ambassador Abercrombie-Winstanley responded that she had “set up a retention unit” in her office to look into it. Despite years of the same question being asked, there is no reliable data from which to determine an answer. In any case, a GAO report from 2020 shows little difference in the rates at which white vs. non-white employees “left for reasons other than retirement or death.”³⁷ State leadership relies on internal surveys to be informed of the current state of morale and reasons as to

why people stay or leave the agency. However, such internal polls always get low response rates. People are too busy, or perhaps they do not wish to supply information they suspect will later be used to discriminate against them. Any conclusions reached from such reports, made by a self-selected minority of the workforce, have little evidentiary value.

Nonetheless, such reports are regularly used to justify claims of bias and discrimination. Writing in *The Wall Street Journal*, a researcher inferred from a 2022 internal employee survey that “nearly half of all employees at the U.S. State Department report experiencing discrimination, bullying, and harassment in the workplace.”³⁸ However, the cited survey “gathered responses from...about 32% of the workforce.” Therefore, the percentage of employees at State who reported what they perceived as discrimination, bullying, and harassment was closer to 15 percent.

Many critics of the State Department, as well as its own Office of Diversity and Inclusion, imply that any black officer who leaves must do so because of racism, bias, or other negative factors. But one obvious reason for attrition is that State is competing with the private sector for talented college graduates. Large companies are scrambling to go beyond mere virtue signaling and actively hire minorities. Like State, they want the best—and the private sector pays better than the government.³⁹ In 2021, companies in the Standard and Poor’s top 100 hired more than 300,000 people, and according to Bloomberg, 94 percent were “people of color.”⁴⁰ State’s DEI approach ignores this trend and focuses instead on “microaggressions” and other anecdotal, subjective metrics of an allegedly hostile climate to explain why officers leave mid-career.

In his *New York Times* article, former Foreign Service Officer Richardson implies that—unlike officers of other races who leave for all kinds of reasons, both professional and personal—no black officer departs the Foreign Service for any reason other than racial harassment.⁴¹ However, former director of Foreign Service recruitment Staeben conceded that: “[State] find[s] it hard to compete with the private sector.”⁴² According to Clayton Bond, a black former employee in the Foreign Service recruitment office, “high-caliber candidates often choose more traditional or better-paying professions like law and medicine.”⁴³ Irvin Hicks, Jr., president of the Thursday Luncheon Group, an advocacy group for black diplomats, admits that State is “doing a better job at recruiting a diverse workforce than we are at keeping it,” because the top minority candidates for whom State is competing “can take that skill set elsewhere, make more money, and be recognized.”⁴⁴

Part 2. How DEI Replaced Equality of Opportunity with “Equity”

Over the past decade, the concept of “equity,” defined as engineered equal outcomes based on race and sex, has rapidly overtaken K–12 education, academia, corporate America, and the federal government.

Political Leanings of State Department Employees. In the 1940s, refugee advocates accused the department of being antisemitic as it opposed accepting Jewish refugees during World War II. Foreign Service Officers in Europe were instructed not to issue visas to foreigners trying to escape Nazi persecution.⁴⁵ In the 1950s, Senator Joseph McCarthy (R–WI) claimed that communists had infiltrated the State Department. Though some communists did work at State, notably Alger Hiss, the agency remained conservative overall, as demonstrated by its willingness to purge itself of suspected Soviet agents.⁴⁶ The department was long hostile to homosexuals, believing them to be subject to blackmail and therefore, national security risks. In 2017, then-Secretary of State John Kerry apologized that “the Department of State was among many public and private employers that discriminated against employees and job applicants on the basis of perceived sexual orientation” in the past.⁴⁷

Since the Vietnam War, the culture at State has crept inexorably leftward, following the universities from which recruits tend to come.⁴⁸ Conservatives have grown increasingly suspicious of the State Department, aware that the majority of career employees lean to the political left and align themselves more often with the Democrats than Republicans on policy.⁴⁹ State’s Civil Service and Foreign Service employees are *supposed to* maintain political neutrality and carry out the policies of the President.

The 2016 U.S. presidential election shook this assumption. A small number of State employees, including some senior Foreign Service Officers, left the department or retired.⁵⁰ Some career staff who remained resisted aspects of the Trump agenda. Many of President Donald Trump’s efforts to control illegal immigration, for example, faced internal opposition at the Department of State from the outset.⁵¹

Like other executive branch agencies, the State Department must adapt to sometimes contradictory mandates from the White House as power changes hands every four to eight years. Political appointees are supposed to facilitate this shift in policies.⁵² Although there are approximately 65 appointees at State⁵³ (not including ambassadors), they are often unable to change policy in line with the vision of the President, due to bureaucratic inertia, ignorance of how things are done, and resistance from entrenched

career officials. This systemic paralysis is a fundamental challenge to the principle that elections should result in policy changes.

Since January 2021, the State Department, under Secretary of State Antony Blinken, has embedded progressive ideology into every facet of the department's work. Soon after taking office, Secretary Blinken established the Office of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion, which then devised an "Equity Action Plan" for the department.⁵⁴ This DEI bureaucracy entrenched an unwritten canon of acceptable views within the department on questions like human rights, sex and gender, immigration, and climate change that it is not "career-enhancing" to challenge. The fount of pernicious DEI ideology throughout the federal government is academia.

DEI in American Academia. Most State Department white collar employees and almost all Foreign Service Officers have at least one college degree.⁵⁵ DEI offices, with dedicated full-time staff and budgets, are almost universal in American higher education. They influence student admissions, faculty hiring, speech and conduct, and even course topics. The ideology of DEI asserts that certain groups are oppressors and others are oppressed or "marginalized," and that the latter must be given preferential treatment to create equal outcomes, or "equity." Sometimes called critical race theory, this ideology underlies the implementation of DEI in academia⁵⁶ and is infused into education from K-12 through law school.⁵⁷ However, in the words of Elon Musk, "what it [DEI] really means is discrimination on the basis of race, sex, sexual orientation, and it's against merit."⁵⁸

As applied in schools, business, and government, DEI encourages, or even mandates, discrimination based on immutable characteristics, although such discrimination can easily violate federal anti-discrimination laws.⁵⁹ Seeing the division that DEI offices have created on campuses, some states are now attempting to limit or de-fund them, sometimes successfully.⁶⁰ However, DEI principles and enforcement bureaucracies are entrenched from the Ivy League down to community colleges, which means that indoctrinated students will be fed into both the private and government workforce for the foreseeable future.⁶¹

DEI's penetration of academia was strikingly evident after the October 7, 2023, Hamas terrorist attacks against Israel. Antisemitism from groups like Students for Justice in Palestine was not only tolerated on various campuses by administrators, but even displayed by some professors and staff.⁶² Media and nonprofit groups have reported a significant increase in antisemitic incidents on college campuses since October 7.⁶³ Students at American University in Washington, DC, complained⁶⁴ of discrimination under Title VI⁶⁵ to the Department of Education, as did students at

Harvard,⁶⁶ the University of Minnesota,⁶⁷ and several other universities.⁶⁸

On December 5, 2023, the presidents of the University of Pennsylvania, MIT, and Harvard testified before Congress,⁶⁹ exposing a double standard applicable in much of academia: Antisemitism is acceptable unless it becomes actual violence, but “mis-gendering” someone can be punishable. Harvard University president Claudine Gay later resigned after her numerous incidents of plagiarism were revealed, and she has become a case study of how DEI can corrupt higher education.⁷⁰

Just as Gay brought the Kendian⁷¹ philosophy of using racial preferences in faculty hiring and student admissions to the Harvard presidency,⁷² a similar approach to recruitment—discriminating in favor of certain identity groups while attempting to avoid blatantly illegal action—has been evident in government agencies for some time.

DEI Federal Mandates Under President Biden. Immediately after taking office on January 20, 2021, President Biden implemented contentious leftwing ideology throughout the federal government. For example, Executive Order 13988, titled “Preventing and Combating Discrimination on the Basis of Gender Identity or Sexual Orientation,” instructed federal agencies to insert gender ideology into the fabric of their work, from personnel matters to foreign grants.⁷³ Executive Order 13985, signed on the same day,⁷⁴ ordered federal agencies to “pursue a comprehensive approach to advancing equity for all” by “[a]ffirmatively advancing equity, civil rights, racial justice, and equal opportunity” throughout the federal government.

President Biden’s mandates fell on fertile ground. Buoyed by these executive orders and White House support, the State Department’s DEI bureaucracy is radically changing the department’s personnel system, which up to now, has ensured the integrity of merit-based hiring, promotion, and assignments for America’s foreign policy professionals.

The department’s champions of “equity” reject the traditional American values of equal opportunity and meritocracy. Rather than concentrating on making the existing tests more accurate in measuring merit and talent, State is creating mechanisms to engineer the “right” percentages of each desired identity group. Once staff are hired, progress to and within the senior ranks increasingly depends on an employee’s “intersectional” identity of victim status points and on demonstrated fealty to, and achievements in, advancing the DEI agenda.

Creation of State’s Chief Diversity and Inclusion Officer (CDIO). The department’s first CDIO was Gina Abercrombie-Winstanley. (She resigned in June 2023 and was replaced by Zakiya Carr Johnson in April 2024.) Abercrombie-Winstanley’s vision was to alter the hiring and

promotion processes to reshape the current makeup of the Foreign Service into one that “looks like America.”⁷⁵ To achieve a diverse workforce, the Biden Administration believes that objective criteria should be subservient to DEI considerations. Representative Brian Mast (R-FL) expressed the opposite view at a June 2023 hearing of the House Foreign Affairs Committee. Mast, Acting Committee Chairman and a U.S. Army veteran, told Abercrombie-Winstanley: “I know that you want good people working for the State Department. But to require that those good people first look a certain way—it’s not what I fought for.”⁷⁶

In addition to DEI being a factor in hiring, adherence to DEI is now a requirement for promotion. State’s departure from objective standards in staff management in favor of “equity” is undermining government merit principles, which took 200 years to establish. It flies in the face of fair competition and equal opportunity, values which the United States preaches to other countries. It is noteworthy that in 2023 only 60.8 percent of State Department employees surveyed reported positive “engagement and satisfaction” with their employer, placing State 14th of 17 federal agencies, according to the annual survey of the Best Places to Work in the Federal Government. This was down from 61.8 percent in 2022, 63 percent in 2021, and 70.8 percent in 2010.⁷⁷

Part 3. How DEI Undermines Objective Criteria in Personnel Management

In government, as in academia and industry, hiring based on objective criteria has been allowed to give way to hiring based on desired “intersectional” characteristics, primarily race and sex.

U.S. Government Hiring: From “Spoils System” to “Merit System Principles.” In the early days of the republic, employment in federal service was obtained through personal and political patronage rather than by competition, merit, or any transparent process. (America inherited this system from the British Empire, where, for example, army officers in the Revolutionary War had to buy their commissions from the King.)⁷⁸ This non-meritocracy is called the “spoils system.”⁷⁹

After two decades of notorious corruption in the wake of the American Civil War, the Pendleton Act of 1883 reformed Civil Service hiring in favor of transparency, merit, and examined qualifications over political patronage.⁸⁰ A Civil Service Commission was established to enforce the new statute, which required “open, competitive examinations for testing the fitness of applicants for the public service” and outlawed bribes or political

interference in hiring decisions.⁸¹ At first, the Pendleton Act applied to only 10 percent of the workforce. This percentage gradually increased until, by 1980, 90 percent of federal employees were hired according to “merit system principles.”⁸² In 1978, President Jimmy Carter re-named the Civil Service Commission the Office of Personnel Management (OPM).

America’s diplomatic service followed a similar pattern. Not only did U.S. diplomats need good political connections to get appointed in the first place, but until 1856, consuls also received no salary. They earned a living by charging fees for consular services like visas, passports, and document notarization, or by running their own private businesses.⁸³ For ambassadorial positions, for which entertaining and living in dignified style were essential both to the credibility of the incumbent and to the reputation of the United States, personal wealth was a requirement.

In 1924, the Rogers Act established entry into the Foreign Service by open written and subsequent oral exams. Furthermore, diplomats would be paid a reasonable salary and a pension so that “a real diplomatic career [would be] open to any American citizen who has the necessary qualifications.”⁸⁴

Equality vs. “Equity.” Until recently, “equity” (or, rather, “equality”) was synonymous with “fairness.” In a Senate Foreign Relations Committee Hearing on July 26, 2022, Senator Robert Menendez (D–NJ) read the definition of “equity” from a dictionary as “the quality of being fair and impartial, freedom from bias or favoritism.”⁸⁵ However, proponents of “equity” as defined by race essentialists like Ibram X. Kendi and Robin DiAngelo believe that “disparity in condition can only be the result of systemic discrimination”—and nothing else.⁸⁶ According to this ideology, “equity” denotes equality of *outcomes across identity groups*, not fairness or equality of opportunity; therefore “equity” proponents call for government and the private sector to treat Americans *unequally depending on their race*—the very opposite of equality. As Kendi writes in his book *How to Be an Antiracist*, “[t]he only remedy to past discrimination is present discrimination. The only remedy to present discrimination is future discrimination.”⁸⁷ Or, as Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancik put it in their book *Critical Race Theory: An Introduction*, “only aggressive, color-conscious efforts to change the way things are will do much to ameliorate misery.”⁸⁸

It is Kendi’s conception of “equity” that drives the Biden Administration. In November 2020, shortly before the U.S. presidential election, future Vice President Kamala Harris tweeted that “equitable treatment means we all end up in the same place.”⁸⁹ Her argument rests on two assumptions: First, she believes that “not everybody’s starting out from the same place”; in other words, the economic, educational, and social inequalities among

individuals leave some people at a competitive disadvantage. She argues for “giving people the resources and the support they need, so that everyone can be on equal footing, and then compete on equal footing.” Competing on an equal footing seems a fair approach.

However, the second part of her argument for “equity” is that “everyone has the same capacity,” as she said in a speech on August 12, 2022, in Oakland, California.⁹⁰ This mirrors Kendi’s view: If everyone truly has the same capacity, then any disparities between groups must be the result of racism or discrimination. That human beings differ in intelligence, talent, and industry is not only obvious common knowledge, but well documented.⁹¹ However, if one is committed to an ideology that dictates that there can be no differences among groups of people for any reason other than discrimination, then the aim of “equity” is to correct for “structural” bias and ensure desired outcomes. The “equity” approach is the cornerstone of the Biden Administration’s philosophy.

Merit System Principles Give Way to “Equity,” Starting in Academia. Under the “equity” dogma, if tests produce disparate results among racial groups, the tests must be ignored or eliminated, even if there is no evidence that the tests themselves are biased. Driven by this philosophy, American higher education is moving away from objective measures toward methods that can be manipulated to ensure desired outcomes. For example, in July 2022, the University of Maryland became the latest institution to no longer require students to include Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) or American College Testing (ACT) scores on their applications.⁹² The American Bar Association is considering dropping the requirement that law schools use the Law School Admission Test (LSAT) in admissions, and medical schools are de-emphasizing the MCAT to attract more students who are not white or Asian.⁹³

When Californians voted in 1996 to ban race-based discrimination in state college admissions, administrators added a “comprehensive review”—that is, subjective personality assessments—as a criterion along with test scores and grades. Asians, who as a group perform well on tests and achieve high grades, somehow scored much lower than “applicants of color” on this new, nebulous category, allowing the University of California (UC) to admit whomever it wanted, despite voters’ opposition to racial quotas. As a result, there is a divergence of several hundred points, on average, between the SAT scores of Asian and black applicants who are admitted to the most competitive UC schools.⁹⁴

After discovering that standardized tests are useful in predicting student achievement, some colleges, notably Yale⁹⁵ and Dartmouth,⁹⁶ have even

returned to requiring that students submit them. Nonetheless, many other institutions across the nation have adopted the California model. According to an article for Inside Higher Ed, “[d]iscussions with admission officers indicate that nonacademic factors...will take on increasing importance in the weighting of admission criteria.... [A]dmission officers see that utilizing character in admission will open doors of opportunity for disadvantaged populations.”⁹⁷

The Department of State is following the path of college admissions boards by applying a “comprehensive,” or “holistic” hiring model.⁹⁸ This approach may not only violate the federal government’s merit system principles for hiring as defined in U.S. law.⁹⁹ Taken to its logical conclusion, it could even result in preferential policies like those of the British Royal Air Force (RAF), which, in mid-2022, reportedly “paused” all job offers to white men, who comprise the vast majority of RAF pilots, in order to meet “diversity targets.”¹⁰⁰

De-Emphasizing the Foreign Service Officer Test (FSOT). In the century following the Rogers Act, thanks to the leadership of women such as Mary Olmsted¹⁰¹ and black Americans such as Ralph Bunche,¹⁰² the written FSOT was opened to all Americans, regardless of race, sex, education, or other background factors. Roughly 10,000 people take the FSOT each year, of which the Foreign Service hires a few hundred. The FSOT is a multiple-choice test, given three times a year, online, and includes sections on Job Knowledge, English Expression, Situational Judgment, and an essay. Until the Biden Administration, passing the FSOT was a mandatory entrance requirement for most generalist officers.

In an interview with AFSA after the first year of her office’s existence, CDIO Abercrombie-Winstanley said that “the written [FSOT] test has zero correlation to being a successful diplomat. Zero.” She preferred the subjective oral exam, which she claimed “actually does have a correlation to success as a diplomat—[it] is [a] test for racists, or sexists, or homophobes, or ableists. Those are the things that we need to be screening for.”¹⁰³

As to which group this “screening” is meant to reduce, Abercrombie-Winstanley explained in the interview: “Those who have the vast majority of senior [Foreign Service] positions are primarily European American men... You don’t get to 87 percent of one group that is not 87 percent of the population and feel confident that all of those selections were made on the basis of merit.”¹⁰⁴

In April 2022, the State Department announced changes to the FSOT “to modernize and streamline the Foreign Service hiring process, making it more equitable and accessible for all prospective applicants.” Starting in

June 2022, “a candidate’s...score [was] combined with a preliminary Qualifications Evaluations Panel (QEP) score to determine who moves forward in the process.”¹⁰⁵ Under the new system, performance on the FSOT is “one factor taken into consideration.” In simple terms, instead of advancing only those candidates who passed the FSOT to the oral exam, State’s Board of Examiners can pick others who scored below the passing level, to bring “intersectional” factors into play and ensure the board’s desired distribution of race, sex, and other identity markers.

According to proponents, de-emphasizing the FSOT achieves “a more holistic approach in the selection process” and “a more balanced view of candidates,” with the goal of producing “a more qualified pool of candidates.” By de-emphasizing the FSOT as a neutral entry requirement, the State Department is following in the path of many U.S. colleges, law schools, and medical schools, which are eliminating or discounting objective measurements in order to achieve desired diversity ratios, even as the courts rule against blatant race-based discrimination.¹⁰⁶

Defending meritocracy, legality, and fairness are not the only reasons to protect the FSOT. Passing the test is likely a predictor of later career success. After many universities abandoned the SAT, a test that high school students take for college admission, subsequent “research has demonstrated a clear correlation between SAT scores and a student’s academic and career accomplishments.”¹⁰⁷ Similar studies have demonstrated clear future-accomplishment links to high scores in the medical school MCAT¹⁰⁸ and law school LSAT.¹⁰⁹ By analogy, it stands to reason that accepting applicants with lower FSOT scores will lead to lower performance as those officers move through their careers, both to their own and to the service’s detriment. The State Department’s Board of Examiners reportedly did not conduct¹¹⁰ any empirical research to determine whether higher FSOT scores correlated with career performance before deciding to de-emphasize the test.

Oral Exam No Longer In-Person (or “Oral”). The State Department has re-named the Foreign Service Oral Assessment (colloquially known as the “oral exam”) the Foreign Service Officer Assessment, because, according to Deputy Assistant Secretary for Global Talent Management Lucia Piazza, “we recognized that not everyone communicates orally. We’ve had a number of candidates who communicate using sign language, and we want to make sure that we’re being inclusive.”¹¹¹ Starting in May 2024, the department will depart from more than a century of precedent by taking the oral exam online.¹¹² To “make the hiring process more accessible and inclusive,”¹¹³ the Board of Examiners will no longer assess candidates in person. While touted as another step toward “equity” in that the price of an air ticket and hotel

in Washington will no longer be a barrier to taking the exam, one former examiner called this change to a virtual oral assessment “a low-quality way to assess people for such a sought-after and responsible job” in which, given tenure, a successful applicant would stay for two or more decades.¹¹⁴

“Equity” via the Qualifications Evaluations Panels (QEPs). The QEPs are a selection filter between the written and oral exams. According to the department’s careers page, “All candidates who take the Foreign Service Officer Test (FSOT) and submit Personal Narratives are considered by the QEPs.” Much like the holistic selection model used by universities, discussed above, “the QEPs look at the “total candidate” to rank order all the candidates in a given career track.”¹¹⁵ Via the medium of the QEPs, it is thus possible for candidates to fail the written exam and still be moved forward via the QEPs to the oral exam or to pass the written and yet be blocked by the QEPs from proceeding to the oral exam. According to a former State Department employee with personal knowledge of this process, the Foreign Service oral exam before the QEP had a pass rate of between 6 percent and 10 percent. Examiners did not have any background information on candidates, such as personal narratives, to consider and weigh “equity.” In recent years, the pass rate on the oral exam has risen to 50 percent.¹¹⁶ This means that instead of the real selection being made by the Board of Examiners on objective criteria during the written exam, the QEPs are making this decision based on subjective criteria like the Personal Narrative that can highlight group identity traits, namely race, for which the department wishes to select.

DEI Statements: The New Loyalty Oaths. As it is now required for existing employees to show adherence to DEI in the promotion and assignments process, it is an easy stretch to see the State Department following the same path as other ideologically captured institutions by demanding a loyalty test in the hiring process. The University of Arizona required applicants for some jobs to state adherence to its conception of DEI and associated tenets of critical race theory, and presumably discriminated in hiring against anyone who did not.¹¹⁷ After the Goldwater Institute publicized this practice, the Arizona Board of Regents said that the public “universities have discontinued any requests for such statements in job applications.”¹¹⁸ In California, the Foundation for Individual Rights and Expression sued the California community college system on behalf of professors to “halt new, systemwide regulations forcing professors to espouse and teach politicized conceptions of ‘diversity, equity, and inclusion.’”¹¹⁹

So far, the State Department has not faced such legal challenges to racially preferential hiring under the DEIA rubric. The Foreign Service

oral exam process, which is a day-long series of live exercises for those who pass the written FSOT, is judged by the Board of Examiners via a standard scoring rubric. The essay in the written FSOT could also be liable to manipulation to screen out applicants with certain political or social opinions.¹²⁰

DEI Linked to Promotion and Assignments. The military and federal government are increasingly rewarding adherence to DEI.¹²¹ Advancing DEI[A] is now obligatory for career progress at the State Department. Under the auspices of Abercrombie-Winstanley,¹²² the promotion precepts for Foreign Service Officers have added a section that requires officers to demonstrate their achievements of DEI goals,¹²³ regardless of the officers' scope for such activity in their particular jobs. This has led to an excess of redundant DEI councils and to full-time officers assigned to DEI-related work in nearly every bureau and foreign post.

Linking promotion to action on DEI holds managers responsible for variables over which they have no control—namely the pool of employees they supervise or who are applying for jobs they oversee. Managers are already required by law to follow Equal Employment Opportunity Commission practices and merit principles to avoid discrimination, but under the new promotion precepts, every hiring manager must strive to recruit the same preferred candidates or risk being penalized during annual evaluations. Desirable candidates (based on race or sex) will have their pick of posts, and few will opt to go to the least attractive countries and least glamorous jobs. Making senior officers accountable for outcomes that they cannot achieve thus pits them against each other in a zero-sum game.

DEI Integrated into Training and Mentoring. The insertion of DEI ideology into the State Department personnel system mirrors what has been happening in the federal and local governments, large corporations, the media, and, most of all, in academia. A history professor at Bakersfield College in California lamented in January 2023: “In the last two years we [the college] have adopted critical race theory, diversity training, implicit bias training, micro aggression trainings. We’ve adopted racial quotas and preferences, affirmative action-type behavior, we’ve adopted racially segregated classes.”¹²⁴ The State Department now implements the same type of mandatory career training, engages in race-based preferences in hiring, and actively encourages employees to form “affinity groups,” which are informal staff clubs mostly based on race or ethnicity.¹²⁵

At State, joining the ranks of the senior Civil Service or Foreign Service is the civilian equivalent of becoming a general or admiral. Skill and experience are important, but reciting the right catechism plays an increasing role. Anyone questioning the existence of “systemic racism” or challenging

assumptions about racial outcomes in hiring, promotion, crime, incarceration, or education, will be sidelined at some stage, no matter how solid the data or convincing the argument. By sharing the same ideology, or at least pretending to, the elite ranks thus replicate themselves over time. “Replacing the officer class of police and military ranks with politicized ideologues who will bend to a transformative dogma is a strategy that has worked in places like the Soviet Union, Cuba, and Venezuela,” says The Heritage Foundation’s Mike Gonzalez.¹²⁶

The Department of State’s new “DEIA Champions Sponsorship Program”¹²⁷ is an example of this closed loop. The program matches “mid-level mentees with senior-level sponsors/mentors” to “form a cohort of change agents who have a strong commitment to and demonstrated track record of advancing DEIA.” The payoff for the 30 officers being mentored is that “sponsors will help them...strengthen their competitiveness to cross the Senior Foreign Service threshold” and to be more competitive for Deputy Chief of Mission and Principal Officer jobs, the most coveted overseas assignments apart from Ambassador. Mentors, meanwhile, “will be able to point to a concrete way that they are advancing the Department’s DEIA goals (a criterion for obtaining senior leadership positions).”

The DEIA Champions Sponsorship Program has sessions in Washington over the year, for which the State Department pays travel costs. While the program is open to “employees of all backgrounds,” the guidance states that “[s]election will be based on applicants’ statement of interest and demonstrated track record of advancing DEIA.”¹²⁸ Therefore, this taxpayer-funded program really is open only to those already committed to this discriminatory ideology. Implausibly, DEIA Champions intends to “create brave spaces for candid and courageous conversations between Department leaders and program participants to discuss and develop solutions for the Department’s DEIA challenges.” Yet, as applicants can only be selected after showing a “demonstrated track record of advancing DEIA,” the only “brave space” created will be a groupthink bubble. Any diversity of viewpoint on the validity of DEI as a guiding principle would be ruled out from the start.

Part 4. Recruitment Realities

There is a fundamental tension between meritocracy and diversity due to a persistent “skills gap” in the hiring pipeline.

The State’s Recruitment Pipeline Reflects Realities in American Education. The pool of applicants for the Foreign Service depends on social and individual factors beyond State’s control. For instance, American public

education is increasingly failing to produce high school graduates who are literate, let alone who can differentiate between Moldova and the Maldives. Basic, substantive knowledge and writing ability must be tested in a formal examination, such as the FSOT, if the agency is to have any ability to predict which candidates are prepared for the complex issues faced by the diplomatic profession.

According to data from the National Association of Education Progress (NAEP), 2022 saw the “largest score declines in NAEP mathematics at grades 4 and 8 since initial assessments in 1990.”¹²⁹ In math, 40 percent of public school eighth-graders nationwide performed below the NAEP Basic level, with a range among school districts from 18 percent scoring below Basic to 94 percent below Basic.¹³⁰ In 2022, scores in reading had also declined from the last NAEP national report. Of eighth-graders nationally, 32 percent scored below Basic in reading in 2022.¹³¹ In 2019, the latest data available as of this writing, the national average reading score for 12th-graders was 285—above the threshold for Basic (265) but below the cutoff score for Proficient (302).¹³² Future representatives of the United States also need a strong knowledge of their country’s past, and yet in 2022, only 13 percent of eighth-graders reached the Proficient level in U.S. history.¹³³

In 2011, the latest NAEP report available as of this writing, only 27 percent of eighth-grade and 12th-grade students were rated Proficient in writing.¹³⁴ These deficiencies are particularly common in large city school districts, which have a high proportion of black and Hispanic students.¹³⁵ For example, only 9 percent of Baltimore public school fourth-graders scored at or above Proficient in reading, while only 5 percent of fourth-graders scored at or above reading proficiency in Detroit.¹³⁶

The racial skills gap continues from K–12 schools into higher education. A 2022 McKinsey report showed that

[despite] ongoing efforts...historically marginalized racial and ethnic populations—Black, Hispanic, and Latino, and Native American and Pacific Islander—are still underrepresented in higher education among undergraduates and faculty and in leadership. Students from these groups also have worse academic outcomes as measured by graduation rates.... For Black and Native American students and for faculty from all underrepresented populations, there was effectively no progress from 2013 to 2020.¹³⁷

The percentage of Americans with higher education also varies considerably by group. For adults ages 25 and above, the percentage of Asians with a bachelor’s degree or above is 61 percent, while for non-Hispanic whites it is

41.9 percent and for blacks it is 28.1 percent.¹³⁸ As the majority of accepted applicants to the Foreign Service and Civil Service have at least one higher education degree, it is logical that variance in academic achievement among groups would be reflected in both applications and subsequent hiring.

As John McWhorter wrote in *The Atlantic* about college admissions, “systemic problems in elementary and secondary education are...beyond the scope of a university” to fix.¹³⁹ Nor can the State Department, or any federal agency, make up for national deficiencies in education. Yet, as *The Wall Street Journal's* Jason Riley put it, “the progressive left’s response” to gaps between racial groups in performance outcomes “has been to wage war on meritocracy rather than focus on improving instruction” in K–12 schools, where lie the roots of group disparities that show up years later.¹⁴⁰

Though critics of the Foreign Service routinely use the tired phrase “pale, male, and Yale,” neither the FSOT nor the hiring process discriminates in favor of any kind of college or university (for instance, Harvard over Haverford) in the normal application process. There is, however, a “positive” discrimination in favor of Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) and Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSIs) via several alternate recruitment routes.

Non-Standard Methods of Entry: Pickering, Rangel, and Other Fellowships. The State Department makes a significant effort to attract diverse applicants. The department has 16 senior diplomats in residence (DIR) posted throughout the country. Since the DIRs are designed to reach populations with lower percentages in the Foreign Service than their share of the general population, many DIRs are based at HBCUs and HSIs. The DIRs in the southern U.S. and Washington, DC, for example, are based at Morehouse College and Howard University, respectively, which are HBCUs. Other DIRs operate out of the University of New Mexico and the University of California, Los Angeles, both of which have high Hispanic enrollment.

Though the DIR outreach has not yet yielded State’s intended representation of the most desired minorities, the problem is not unique to the Foreign Service: “[Many] college campuses, including the country’s most selective schools, continue to struggle with recruiting, admitting and retaining students of color.”¹⁴¹

In 1992, Congress established the Pickering Foreign Affairs Fellowship, followed in 2002 by the Charles B. Rangel International Affairs Fellowship.¹⁴² Both of these programs focus primarily on ethnic minorities, although a few Fellows represent other “underserved” groups, such as those from poor backgrounds or who were the first in their family to attend college. The Rangel program is run by the Ralph J. Bunche International Affairs Center

at Howard University, which has fewer than 2 percent white students (of those who reported their race).¹⁴³ As the Rangel fellowship's website explains, the fellowship offers a full graduate scholarship, an internship at a U.S. embassy, and "[u]pon successful completion of the Rangel Program and State Department entry requirements...an appointment to the Foreign Service."¹⁴⁴

The Pickering and Rangel fellowships are competitive, but they bypass the written FSOT, and once in the program, fellows are given several tries to pass the oral exam.¹⁴⁵ Together, Pickering and Rangel have accounted for around 20 percent of Foreign Service recruitment for at least the past few years, and a majority of the black officer intake according to State Department sources. In fiscal year 2022, State hired 327 Foreign Service Officers, of whom 90 (almost a third) were Pickering and Rangel fellows.¹⁴⁶ The U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) has similar parallel-intake programs.¹⁴⁷ According to one source with personal knowledge, Pickering fellows are given their first choice of specialty, or "cone" (Administrative, Consular, Economic, Political, and Public Diplomacy). Most chose Political or Public Diplomacy, meaning that applicants coming in through the normal, competitive process had significantly reduced chances of getting into these two cones on being hired.¹⁴⁸

The Foreign Service recruitment system is thus two-tiered: one method of entry for all races through the national FSOT and oral exam; and a second, parallel method of entry for primarily black and Hispanic applicants through the Pickering and Rangel programs.

The Belfer Center report (see above under Part 1) advocated a "relentless focus on diversity" in the Foreign Service and recommended that the "Pickering, Rangel, and Payne fellowship programs...should be expanded."¹⁴⁹ At the same time, the report paradoxically argued that "much needs to be done to change the internal State Department and Foreign Service culture to remove the stigma that these Officers often feel is associated with these programs."¹⁵⁰ That stigma might be dispelled by evidence that the quality of Foreign Service entrants via Pickering, Rangel, and other fellowships was equal to that from the normal entry process. However, there is no published data to judge how the candidates selected via alternative entrance programs perform compared to those recruited through the competitive exam process.

Under the Biden Administration, the State Department's pursuit of diversity is indeed "relentless." On August 18, 2022, Secretary Blinken celebrated the anniversaries of the Pickering and Rangel fellowships, the Payne International Development Fellowship (at USAID), and the Foreign Affairs IT Fellowship Program, noting that in the past two years, the number

of fellows in all the programs combined had increased by more than 50 percent. But that is not enough; Blinken said that those in State Department leadership should “dedicate ourselves to doing even more, going even further, digging even deeper... [W]e still have a lot of work to do.”¹⁵¹

Blinken announced the launch of the Colin Powell Leadership Program¹⁵² to recruit college students and graduates for internships, which would lead to jobs in the State Department’s Civil Service, as well as another new program to recruit “underrepresented communities” as Diplomatic Security agents.¹⁵³

In 2001, the department established the Benjamin Gilman Scholarship, under which “more than 36,000 Gilman Scholars from all 50 U.S. states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, and other U.S. territories have studied or interned in more than 155 countries around the globe.” Although “[s]cholars are selected by a merit-based, competitive process,” the department notes that “[a]pproximately 70 percent of Gilman recipients self-identify as racial or ethnic minorities.” Some of the remaining 30 percent supply the supposed diversity because they are from small towns or rural communities or are first-generation college students.¹⁵⁴

All these parallel entry tracks come with substantial benefits in the form of paid graduate school, special training, or dedicated mentoring and contact networks, which are not available to those who apply through the standard competitive process.

Part 5. DEI Pretends to Offer Easy Solutions to Hard Problems

Centrist and leftwing critics of the State Department ignore the real problems and offer only the same “cures”: more DEI, more people, more money.

Mid-Level Entry. Like the Council on Foreign Relations and Belfer Center reports, most critics of State from outside the professional foreign policy sphere emphasize DEI. Then-Representative Bass preferred that Foreign Service officers “actually reflect the diversity of the U.S. population—and look more like the locals than like the cast of *Leave It to Beaver*.”¹⁵⁵ She suggested that the Secretary of State “retool existing entry-level programs—not just the Rangel and Pickering Fellowships—to prioritize diversity and to take more innovative approaches to recruiting candidates for career positions.”¹⁵⁶

To that end, in 2020, Representative Bass proposed the Represent America Abroad Act to: “Carry out countrywide recruitment efforts to attract highly qualified, mid-career professionals from minority groups,” including

“[c]ommunity agencies and organizations,” “[f]aith-based organizations,” and “[c]olleges and universities, including historically Black colleges and universities and other minority-serving institutions.”¹⁵⁷

Bass’s plan, like the mid-career entry programs suggested by the CFR and the Belfer Center, could add value in certain areas where subject matter expertise—such as with arms control, intelligence, or specific international organizations and treaties—is more important than institutional knowledge and experience at the State Department. When applied to generalist positions, however, mid-level entry programs unfairly subject career officers to competition with outsiders who have not made the same sacrifices or acquired the same broad experience. Mid-level entry would be implausible in other, similar contexts. For example, local governments would not allow even the best firemen, after 10 years, to laterally move into the police force at the same rank. The Army would not consider an Air Force captain for a major’s rank in the Army, as an Army captain has the specific experience and training just for that job. It is difficult to see mid-career entry supplying more than a small, steady stream of recruits, and it is not credible as a mechanism for re-balancing the Foreign Service along “equity” lines.

Despite objections from serving officers, the State Department seems to have acquiesced to the demands for more programs to bypass the competitive entry system into the Foreign Service. In January 2024, the department announced a Lateral Entry Pilot Program¹⁵⁸ to bring as many as 35 officers into the Foreign Service at grades which normally take several years to reach for career officers.

Reform the Job “Bidding” and Evaluation Process. Apart from suggestions to radically alter the make-up of the Foreign Service through mid-level and non-merit-based hiring, reformers have proposed improvements to the process by which officers move from job to job. Under the current system, Foreign Service Officers must “bid” on new jobs every two to three years throughout their careers, which puts a premium on reputation, contacts, and networks. By making the assignment process more transparent and randomized, State could level the playing field and improve competition for the coveted jobs which provide the most opportunity to earn a good reputation. One practicable suggestion to achieve this is to change the bidding process to eliminate networking bias and nepotistic promotions. The AFSA advocates “the use of a centralized, algorithmic preference matching system; the standardization of all aspects of the assignments process, from interview questions to position descriptions; [and] a much more transparent and independently reviewed assignment preclusion (restriction) decision-making process.”¹⁵⁹

Other detractors of State have suggested stripping annual Foreign Service evaluations of name, gender, and other identity traits. However, they should be aware that blind competition may not produce the desired “equitable” outcomes: A study of 2,000 candidates for promotion within the Australian civil service showed that blind applications *reduced* the number of women chosen, because “many senior managers, aware that sexist assumptions had once kept women out of upper-level positions, already practiced a mild form of affirmative action.”¹⁶⁰ Once they were prevented from knowing the sex of job applicants, the hiring managers were unable to preferentially select female candidates. In 2021, *New York Times* music critic Anthony Tommasini argued against blind auditions for orchestras, because this process did not produce the desired racial outcome; he instead insisted that “the audition process should take into account race, gender and other factors.”¹⁶¹

Limited lateral entry, reforms to bidding and assignments, and other ideas that do not compromise the principle of competitive, merit-based entry are worth considering. However, there exists no quick way to adjust the representation of all identity groups within State to match their current national percentages without doing injustice to thousands of individual officers whose only sin is to be born the wrong sex or color. On merit, these employees entered a competitive service in which they serve according to its rules, but in State’s “relentless” pursuit of diversity, they are now being held accountable not for their own work and actions, but for perceived “systemic” injustices, the existence of which is not supported by evidence.

The State Department should attempt to attract as diverse a body of applicants as possible to work in advancing the nation’s foreign policy, but it should not be guided by revanchist neo-racism in hiring or any other personnel decisions. Americans have the right to be considered as individuals, on their own merits, and without regard to past injustices or their race or sex. Since 2020, the department has embraced the ideology behind DEIA, which has led it to erroneously pursue concomitant race-based and sex-based discrimination in personnel matters. This is a policy mistake which needs to be corrected to restore integrity and objective excellence to the nation’s oldest Cabinet agency.

Recommendations for Congress and the State Department

Congress should pass a new Foreign Service Act that will:

- **Restore** passing the FSOT as a required entrance requirement for Foreign Service generalist applicants.

- **Limit** to no more than 20 percent of the total annual recruitment into the Foreign Service via fellowships and other channels that avoid the FSOT.
- **Make** the Foreign Service promotion and assignments process blind to race, sex, and all other immutable or irrelevant characteristics.
- **Limit** the department workforce to levels justified by workload metrics, re-allocate existing resources as necessary to meet changing priorities, and remove unvaluable¹⁶² and redundant positions through attrition.
- **Require** a comprehensive annual report from the State Department on the written and oral exams including demographic breakdown, educational attainment, pass rates, language skills, state of origin, and number of attempts of all test-takers.

The Department of State should:

- **Publish** a written explanation by the CDIO of funding allocations annually for all DEI programs (such as recruitment, training, fellowships, and foreign programs) and what has been achieved with those funds.
- **Eliminate**—subject to results of the CDIO report—duplicative and unvaluable positions and move any productive positions from the Office of Diversity and Inclusion to the Office of Civil Rights, thereby dismantling the Office of Diversity and Inclusion (which means eliminating the position of CDIO itself).

Conclusion

The entrenchment of DEI and its growing promulgation and enforcement bureaucracy at the State Department has been to the detriment of recruitment, efficiency, and morale. Instead of continuing its obsession with artificially engineered diversity and ever-growing staff and budgets, State needs to eliminate its wasteful, redundant, and discriminatory DEI bureaucracy; refocus existing resources on core values and priority goals; and depoliticize the hiring and promotion process to return to merit-based principles. To ensure that these reforms are lasting, Congress must legislate them into a new governing statute to update the Foreign Service Act of 1980.¹⁶³

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