

January 1999

## Racioethnic Diversity on the Web: A Lost Opportunity

Angela L. Farrar

*The Pennsylvania State University*, null@psu.edu

Albert Bartlett

*The Pennsylvania State University*

Jonathan Probbler

*The Pennsylvania State University*

Follow this and additional works at: <http://digitalcommons.fiu.edu/hospitalityreview>



Part of the [Hospitality Administration and Management Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Farrar, Angela L.; Bartlett, Albert; and Probbler, Jonathan (1999) "Racioethnic Diversity on the Web: A Lost Opportunity," *Hospitality Review*: Vol. 17 : Iss. 1 , Article 1.

Available at: <http://digitalcommons.fiu.edu/hospitalityreview/vol17/iss1/1>

This work is brought to you for free and open access by FIU Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Hospitality Review by an authorized administrator of FIU Digital Commons. For more information, please contact [dcc@fiu.edu](mailto:dcc@fiu.edu).

---

## Racioethnic Diversity on the Web: A Lost Opportunity

### **Abstract**

The authors report the generally poor results attained when the NAACP assessed the diversity management performance of 16 major hotel companies. Then, as an alternative means of assessing the same hotel companies' commitment to diversity, they report the results of an analysis of the world-wide web pages the companies use to represent themselves in the electronic marketplace. Analysis of the web sites found virtually no evidence of corporate concern for diversity.

# Racioethnic diversity on the web: A lost opportunity

by Angela L. Farrar,  
Albert Bartlett,  
and Jonathan Propper

*The authors report the generally poor results attained when the NAACP assessed the diversity management performance of 16 major hotel companies. Then, as an alternative means of assessing the same hotel companies' commitment to diversity, they report the results of an analysis of the world-wide web pages the companies use to represent themselves in the electronic marketplace. Analysis of the web sites found virtually no evidence of corporate concern for diversity.*

Cox<sup>1</sup> defines managing diversity as "planning and implementing organizational systems and practices to manage people so that the potential advantages of diversity are maximized while its potential disadvantages are minimized." Managing diversity includes proactive managerial behaviors to create a corporate climate in which all guests receive the highest level of service regardless of cultural differences, and all staff can perform their best regardless of cultural differences.

In 1997, the National Associa-

tion for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) began an "Economic Reciprocity Initiative" to encourage minority consumers to patronize organizations that manage diversity effectively. The hotel industry was chosen as the first of several industries to be included in the initiative because African-Americans spent over \$29 million on convention hotels in 1995.<sup>2</sup> Unfortunately, hospitality organizations have a notoriously poor track record in both marketing to<sup>3</sup> and managing<sup>4</sup> an increasingly diverse population.

In its 1997 "Report on the Lodging Industry," the NAACP graded 16 hotel companies in six categories: employment, vendor development, procurement, advertising, investment/franchising opportunities and philanthropy with the African-American community.<sup>5</sup> Table 1 indicates the 16 companies, and the grades earned at three different points in time. As shown in column 1, eight

**Table 1**  
**NAACP report card grades**

	1997 <sup>c</sup>	1997 Revised <sup>d</sup>	1998 <sup>e</sup>
Westin	F	C-	C+
Hyatt	C-	C-	C-
Marriott	C	C+	C+
Best Western	F	F	D+
Holiday Inn (now Bass Hotels and Resorts)	F	C	C
Adam's Mark	C-	C-	D
Promus	D-	D	B-
Doubletree (now part of Promus)	F	C	NG
Omni	F	D	D-
Renaissance	F	C+	
Choice	F	C-	C+
Hilton	C	C-	C
Cendant (Formerly HFS)	D	C-	B
Raddison	F	C-	C
Ritz Carlton (now owned by Marriott)	C-	C-	NG
ITT Sheraton (now part of Starwood)	D-	C-	C-

hotel chains originally failed to provide information and, therefore, received "F"s." Subsequently, all but one of the hotel companies – Best Western – have begun cooperating with the NAACP. Column 2 shows the revised 1997 grades after the eight firms provided additional information. Column 3 shows the results of a 1998 assessment by the NAACP.

Three hotel companies – Doubletree Hotels Corporation, Choice Hotels International and Cendant (formerly HFS, Inc.) – have been lauded for taking steps to improve their grades, including agreeing to submit to periodic

monitoring by the NAACP.<sup>9</sup> Although these results do show improvement, they indicate what remains overall unacceptable performance in terms of relating to the African-American community. The increased scrutiny of the hotel industry with regard to managing diversity should have served as an impetus for hotel companies to make every effort to improve both the way they manage diversity and the way they represent themselves regarding diversity.

A relatively recent way that companies represent themselves in the marketplace is via the company web page, which allows the

firm exposure not just to potential customers but to an unlimited number of people who will in some way make a judgment about the firm based on what they see on the page. Unlike print material, the web page has the advantage of being very quickly and easily modified to reflect new products and services, new marketing strategies, or a new commitment to managing diversity.

Approximately one year after the NAACP final report cards were issued, this study assessed the web pages of the 16 hotel firms. Through analysis of text and photographs posted on the web sites of the 16 hospitality corporations included in the 1997 NAACP Hotel Industry Report Card, the authors first assess how these 16 hotel companies represent racioethnic diversity on their web sites, then discuss what these representations mean in terms of the firms' commitment to diversity.

All 16 hotel firms in the NAACP's initial survey were included in the study sample. Universal resource locators (URLs) for the sites were obtained from the Yahoo search engine's hotel directory<sup>10</sup> on December 18, 1997. Color copies of each hotel's homepage were downloaded, printed, and analyzed following the four-step content analysis process outlined by Bentele:<sup>11</sup> observation, development of coding scheme, coding, evaluation and interpretation. Given the non-linear, labyrinthine organization of web sites, the authors followed the four-click rule used by Jones:<sup>12</sup> text

or photographs that were more than four levels or mouse-clicks away from the hotel's homepage were not included in the analysis. Additionally, due to their sheer number, individual hotel properties at each site were not viewed, but all other links up to four clicks were followed on every site.

After reviewing the sites, the authors developed a coding scheme based on the categories of interest. To analyze the text, the authors looked for, first, a section in the site devoted to diversity and multiculturalism. "Inclusive language" (race, ethnicity, diversity, multiculturalism) referring to guests or employees was also searched for in the site. The entire site up to four levels was analyzed, looking particularly at the mission statement and on-line recruitment page, if available. Within online recruiting, the authors looked specifically for Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) and Affirmative Action (AA) statements. The last area explored was any mention of the NAACP Economic Reciprocity Initiative.

### **Photographs are indicators**

For the visual analysis all photographs of people posted on the hotel web sites were analyzed by calculating the proportion of people of color included in these photographs. The coding categories first distinguished guests from hotel employees/managers. If a person appeared to work at the hotel, the individual was also coded as being pictured in either the front

or back-of-the-house. The second coding category distinguished European-Americans from persons of color. While racioethnicity is certainly not a dichotomous variable, only two categories were employed, as distinguishing physical characteristics in small, sometimes poor-quality on-line photographs was difficult.

Once the coding scheme was developed, each web site was coded by two of the three authors, two of whom are European-American men; the other is an African-American woman. The text in the web sites was analyzed quantitatively by counting the occurrence of inclusive words (and their permutations) on each company's site: race/racial, ethnic/ethnicity, diverse/diversity, multicultural/multiculturalism. In context, these words can serve as indicators of the company's commitment to diversity. The researchers also counted the number of times each site mentioned any of these words in its mission statement. Finally, each site was examined for Equal Employment Opportunity and Affirmative Action statements. For the visual analysis, all people who appeared in photos anywhere in the site up to four links deep were counted and coded.

Nearly two years after the NAACP's Economic Reciprocity Initiative began with the hotel industry, the 16 hotel companies have not used their web sites to represent racioethnic diversity. As indicated in Table 2, none of the firms had a section or page in its site devoted to diversity. None of

the firms mentioned the NAACP Economic Reciprocity Initiative, nor had the sites acknowledged the greater issues that brought it on, despite most of the sites having a press release or "what's new" section. One of the firms' web sites (Promus) included a "vision" statement, but the vision did not include diversity of consumers or employees.

Seven of the 16 hotel companies used some form of online recruiting, but in these recruitment pages only three included even a traditional EEO statement. None included an affirmative action statement. Granted, on-line recruiting is a relatively recent phenomenon, and only 1 percent of employees is hired through the web.<sup>13</sup> However, when a company decides to recruit on-line, there is yet another opportunity to make a statement about what is important to the company. The results of this analysis suggest that diversity is not an important issue in recruiting as presented on the web.

Going beyond the simple indicator of whether an EEO statement is included, firms can also indicate values that inform hiring practices. For example, not only did Westin's web site include an EEO statement, the company also expanded on the concept of equal employment opportunity: "We are an equal opportunity employer *committed to workforce diversity*" (italics added). At the other end of the continuum, however, not only did Adam's Mark not include an EEO statement, but they solicited

**Table 2**  
**Diversity text in hotel web sites**

	URL http://www.	Section in web site relating to diversity?	Mention of economic reci- Procity initiative?	Mission statement? If yes, does it include diversity?	Online recruitment? If yes, EEO statement?	"Inclusive language" anywhere on web site?
Westin	Westin.com/	no	no	no	yes/yes	yes*
Hyatt	Hyatt.com/	no	no	no	yes/yes	no
Marriott	Marriott.com	no	no	no	yes/yes	no
Best Western	Bestwestern.com/	no	no	no	yes/no	no
Holiday Inn	Holiday-inn.com/ holiday-inn/jobs.	no	no	no	yes/no	no
(now Bass Hotels and Resorts)						
Adam's Mark	Travelx.com/adamsmark.html & adamsmark.com	no	no	no	yes/no	no
Promus	Promus-hotel.com/	no	no	yes/no	yes/no	no
Doubletree	Doubletreehotels.com/	no	no	no	No	no
Omni	Omnihotels.com/index.htm	no	no	no	no	no
Renaissance	Renaissancehotels.com/	no	no	no	no	no
Choice	Hotelchoice.com/	no	no	no	no	no
Hilton	Hilton.com/	no	no	no	no	no
Cendant	Home.cuc.com/hfs.html (formerly HFS)	no	no	no	no	no
Raddison	Raddison.com/	no	no	no	no	no
Ritz Carlton	Ritzcarlton.com/ (now owned by Marriott)	no	no	no	no	no
ITT Sheraton	itt.com/ (now part of Starwood)	no	no	no	no	no

\* In EEO Statement

applications from "recent college graduates" (*italics added*) implying that, based on the Age Discrimination in Employment Act, they may not be an equal opportunity employer.

### Diversity is absent

Other than Westin's one phrase, not one of the companies made any mention, anywhere in the 16 sites, of anything related to diversity or multiculturalism, or anything that could be interpreted as inclusive language. One keyword search on "diversity" returned two "hits," both having to

do with eclectic restaurant menus. Most site-internal search engines allowed only searches for hotel properties. The nearly absolute lack of text reflecting or even acknowledging diversity made analysis an exercise in interpreting omission. When given a chance to communicate to the world the things that they feel are most important about their firms, with one exception, they did not include commitment to diversity.

In their use of photographs, firms again have an opportunity to make a statement, albeit indirectly, about corporate attitudes toward

**Table 3**  
**Photographic analysis of hotel web sites**

	Proportion employees/managers people of color		Proportion guests People of color
	Front-of-house	Back-of-house	
Best Western	0 of 2		5 of 66
Adam's Mark travelx.com/adamsmark.html	1 of 1		0 of 2
adamsmark.com	0 of 2	1 of 1	0 of 1
Promus	0 of 1	3 of 3	1 of 24
Marriott	4 of 8	1 of 1	0 of 6
Hilton	2 of 7		2 of 30
Westin	1 of 8		0 of 1
Ritz Carlton	0 of 3		0 of 4
ITT Sheraton	No staff photos		0 of 3
Renaissance	No staff photos		4 of 7
Holiday Inn	No staff photos		2 of 9
HFS			
Howard Johnson	No staff photos		0 of 4
Knight' Inn, Day's Inn,, Ramada, Travelodge, Super 8	No photos		
Choice	No photos		
Hyatt	No people photos		
Omni	No people photos		
Doubletree	No people photos		
Raddison	No people photos		
Totals	8 of 32 (25%) 13 of 37 (35.1%)	5 of 5 (100%)	14 of 157 (8.9%) 27 of 194 (13.9%)

diversity and multiculturalism. Table 3 indicates that few have chosen to do so. It can be argued that a photograph, the same as text, must serve primarily as a sales tool, showing the interior of a guest room or a dining room, for instance. But if lodging companies choose to

include people in photographs, this provides another opportunity to demonstrate the firm's attention to and the importance of both customer and employee diversity.

Two trends emerge in the analysis of the photographs. First, compared to the U.S. workforce

which includes 33.1 percent people of color,<sup>14</sup> the proportion of hotel employees depicted on the web sites who are people of color (35.1 percent) is very similar. Compared to the U.S. population, which includes 27.4 percent people of color,<sup>15</sup> just 8.9 percent of hotel guests are depicted as people of color. These proportions may accurately reflect the relatively high representation of persons of color in hospitality jobs, but they almost certainly do not reflect an accurate mix of hospitality guests. Further, they perpetuate Sadker, Sadker, & Long's<sup>16</sup> invisibility bias and stereotypes in which persons of color are not part of the mainstream. Further evidence of invisibility is shown in a supplemental analysis; although pages for individual properties at all 16 sites were not analyzed, the photos of all 53 domestic Westin hotels were examined. Fifteen photos included a total of 29 people; 28 were European-Americans, while one was a person of color.

### **Visuals lack equality**

The second trend emerging from the visual analysis of photographs is that when employees are depicted, people of color are much more frequently shown in traditional back-of-the-house positions. For example, on Promus's page, "All about Promus Hotel Corporation," five people are shown. Four of the five are employees and three of the five employees are people of color, but the one guest is a European-American restaurant patron, being waited on

by a European-American server. The other three employees, all people of color, appear to be two maintenance workers and a keyboard or switchboard operator, all in back-of-the-house, non customer-contact jobs. On Adam's Mark's "Career Opportunities" page, one of four people shown is a person of color, but that one African-American man is shown in chef's whites. A European-American man is shown as a waiter, and a European-American woman is shown behind the front desk checking in a European-American male guest.

Overall, eight of 32 (25 percent) front-of-the-house employees shown in all of the web sites are people of color, but five of five (100 percent) back-of-the-house employees shown are people of color. Martin<sup>17</sup> paints a similar picture in which African-American and Hispanic workers are better represented in food service jobs than in the workforce overall. However, African-American and Hispanic workers are much more likely to be working in the back-of-the-house, while customer contact jobs are held primarily by European-Americans. The web site photographs may represent reality in hotels today; a recent study conducted by the American Hotel Foundation<sup>18</sup> found that racioethnic minorities in the hospitality workforce are largely positioned in labor jobs, while management positions are largely filled by majority employees. Unfortunately, this is not a positive reality for racioethnic minorities.

In reviewing the sites for Sadker, Sadker, and Long's<sup>19</sup> indicators of bias – linguistic, stereotyping, invisibility, imbalance, unreality, and fragmentation — several emerge. Linguistic bias is reflected in the utter lack of inclusive text. While not completely invisible, guests who are people of color are clearly underrepresented in photographs. Imbalance is evident between front and back-of-the-house depictions. Unreality is reflected in ignoring the NAACP's Economic Reciprocity Initiative, but even more so by not addressing the larger causes of the Economic Reciprocity Initiative. A notable example of Kern-Foxworth's<sup>20</sup> "devoted servant" stereotype was the African-American bellman on the Adam's Mark homepage (Figure 1) who perpetuates this stereotype in the same way that "Rastus" – the chef on the Cream of Wheat box – perpetuates the "natural-born cook" stereotype.<sup>21</sup>

### **Companies miss opportunity**

In a keynote address to the 1997 Quality through Diversity Conference, William S. Norman, president and chief executive officer of the Travel Industry Association of America, urged industry leaders to embrace diversity as it is practical, profitable, and proper.<sup>22</sup> On average, African-Americans spent 3.9 nights away from home per trip, while U. S. residents overall averaged 3.8 nights per trip. A greater percentage of these African-American travelers (51 percent) stayed in a hotel or motel, compared to U. S. residents

overall (47 percent).<sup>23</sup>

The Selig Center for Economic Growth projects that the nation's African-American buying power will rise from \$308 billion in 1990 to \$533 billion in 1999, up by 72.9 percent in nine years — a compound annual rate of growth of 6.3 percent. This percentage gain far outstrips the 56.7 percent increase projected for total buying power.<sup>24</sup> Substantially above-average growth in African-American buying power demonstrates the growing importance of black consumers and should create tremendous opportunities for businesses that pay attention to their needs. Representing racioethnic diversity on company web sites is one way for companies to show they are paying attention.

Web site developers are mistaken if they fail to include diverse representations on their web pages because they believe African-Americans and other racioethnic minority groups don't use the web. A 1998 survey of web demographics found that 75 percent of web users are non-Hispanic whites and 19 percent are Hispanic or African-American. These figures are approximately equal to the racioethnic make-up of the general population.<sup>25</sup>

### **Web communicates values**

In the web site development process, the decision to have a site is generally followed by a discussion about what to include. Web site developers will likely believe they should include the most important information about the

firm, things they most want web site viewers to know or find out. As such, hotel web sites are one avenue through which corporate values are communicated. Creating a web site offers the opportunity to make a statement, both figuratively and literally, about commitment to equal opportunity for employees and inclusive service for all guests.

Taken together – language and pictures, qualitatively and quantitatively – the 16 hotel web sites did not show evidence of attention or commitment to diversity. The researchers cannot say that the 16 hotel firms are not committed to diversity, and this analysis is not intended as an indictment of the firms or their efforts in that direction. However, the paucity of textual and photographic evidence on their web sites represents, at present, an opportunity lost.

## References

- <sup>1</sup> Taylor Cox, *Cultural Diversity In Organizations: Theory, Research, and Practice*. (San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler, 1993): 11.
- <sup>2</sup> Leon E. Wynter, "Report Cards, Not Placards For NAACP," *The Wall Street Journal*, September 3, 1997, B1.
- <sup>3</sup> Marc Boisclair, "Playing the Market: How Cities Are Vying For Multicultural Groups," *Meetings and Conventions* (April 1997): 53-58.
- <sup>4</sup> Reuben O. Charles and Ken McCleary, "Recruitment And Retention Of African-American Managers," *The Cornell Hotel & Restaurant Administration Quarterly* (February 1997): 24-29.
- <sup>5</sup> National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), *NAACP Consumer Choice Guide: Report On the Lodging Industry* (Washington D.C.: NAACP, 1997).
- <sup>6</sup> Jeff Higley, "NAACP Happy with Industry's Cooperation," *Hotel and Motel Management* (August 11, 1997): 3, 24.
- <sup>7</sup> Yahoo Search Engine (Hotels): Online. Internet (December 18, 1997). Available: [http://www.yahoo.com/Business\\_and\\_Economy/Companies/Travel/Lodging/Hotels](http://www.yahoo.com/Business_and_Economy/Companies/Travel/Lodging/Hotels).
- <sup>8</sup> G. Bentele, "Audio-Visual Analysis and a Grammar of Presentation Forms In News Programs: Some Mediasemiotic Considerations," *Discourse and communication: New approaches to the analysis of mass media discourse and communication*, Teun A. Van Dijk, ed., (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1985): 159-184.
- <sup>9</sup> C. Jones, "Content Analysis of World Wide Web Sites," Online. Internet (December 22, 1997). Available: <http://www5.fullerton.edu/viscom/jones1/html>.
- <sup>10</sup> C. Hayes, "Online recruitment slow," *Black Enterprise* (October 1997): 55.
- <sup>11</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, "Selected Economic Characteristics of Persons and Families by Sex and Race," (May 1996). Online. Internet (January 9, 1998). Available: <http://www.census.gov/population/socdemo/race/black/tabs95/tab02.txt>
- <sup>12</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, "Resident Population of the United States: Estimates by Sex, Race and Hispanic Origin with Median Age," (November 1997). Online. Internet (January 7, 1998). Available: <http://www.census.gov/population/estimates/nation/intfile3-1.txt>
- <sup>13</sup> M. Sadker, D. Sadker, and L. Long, "Gender and Educational Equality," *Multicultural Education: Issues and Perspectives*, James A. Banks, ed. (Boston: Allen and Bacon, 1989): 106-123, 189-207.
- <sup>14</sup> R. Martin, "Foodservice's Changing Face: Still Grappling With Diversity," *Nation's Restaurant News* 1 (1993).
- <sup>15</sup> Caryn Meyers, "Equality for All," *Successful Meetings* (October 1998): 11.
- <sup>16</sup> Sadker, Sadker, and Long.
- <sup>17</sup> M. Kern-Foxworth, *Aunt Jemima, Uncle Ben, And Rastus: Blacks In Advertising, Yesterday, Today, And Tomorrow*, (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood, 1994): 79.
- <sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 45.
- <sup>19</sup> William S. Norman, "Diversity: The Face of Hospitality," Quality Through Diversity Conference, Orlando, Florida. September 8, 1997. Online. Internet (March 4, 1999). Available:

<http://www.tia.org/press/wsn0908speech.stm>

<sup>20</sup> Dianne Williams Hayes, "From Medical School to Hotel Management," *Black Issues in Higher Education* (August 24, 1995): 40-43.

<sup>21</sup> Jeffrey M. Humphreys, "African-American Buying Power by Place of Residence: 1990-1999," Online. Internet (March 4, 1999). Available: <http://www/selig.uga.edu/forecast/totalbuy/afr-amer/Black%201999%20text.html>

<sup>22</sup> David Birdsell, Douglas Muzzio, David Krane, and Amy Cottreau, "Web Users Are Looking More Like America," *Public Perspective* (April 1998): 33.

<sup>23</sup> E. Smith, "Sleeping with the enemy: Hotel industry first target of NAACP payback initiative," *Black Enterprise* (June 1997): 29-30.

<sup>24</sup> M. Whitford and J. Higley, "NAACP's Latest Card Targets Three Giants," *Hotel and Motel Management* (July 20, 1998): 1, 25.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

---

**Angela L. Farrar and Albert Bartlett** are assistant professors and **Jonathan Probbler** is a doctoral candidate in the School of Hotel, Restaurant, and Recreation Management at Pennsylvania State University.