

EMPLOYMENT OF MINORITY RACES IN I&E POSITIONS

by

Jay Kaffka

Arkansas Game & Fish Commission

The subject of hiring people in I&E positions is certainly not the type of topic that would appear in a magazine or a news release. In fact, it really is only an indirect concern of I&Eers, while the actual responsibility lies with the administrator. But since a decision affecting the I&E Division is of concern to us, then it is my belief we should form an opinion and have a say in the thinking and turning of wheels.

First, when you bring into focus the idea of ever hiring minority races into prominent professional roles in the staffs of some of the Deep South states, there is an automatic response that 'it will happen over our dead body.' This paper is not being presented to, say Mississippi, where the problem—if we can call it that—may not present itself for many years to come.

Yet, 1957 was only yesterday, when at Central High in Little Rock that blacks came into prominence along with the ultimate race problems and civil rights problems. Now, of all places, in the Game and Fish headquarters in Little Rock we have over a half-dozen persons of minority races—mostly blacks—hired in capacities other than janitor or errand boy.

Let's define the minority races: this is primarily composed of blacks, but in our experience we have even encountered Indians, Mexicans, and lately women libbers. At the present time there is a concerted effort on the part of our governor to hire more women—a minority segment nonetheless—into prominent positions formerly held only by men. A position in our Arkansas agency's I&E Division was filled with a female person. Her credentials are good...college degree in journalism, a staff employee who has worked in the Fiscal Division for over 8 years. However, it is my belief she will have a very difficult task of succeeding due to her background and lack of involvement in the overall aspect of Game & Fish operations that really render a handicap. There is no feeling of male chauvinism on any part or by the other men in my department. We have helped her and will continue to do so, asking only that she in turn carry the load and responsibilities assigned to her.

Our position on hiring blacks...and I say this as piece of rationale to certain states...was that it was inevitable. If we are going to hire these types of persons, then it was our intention to announce by the pipeline to employment agencies the credentials that a black must have. Our very first was a secretary, a young black fresh from business college, and absolutely no knowledge of Game & Fish affairs. She worked for a couple of divisions before she was ultimately placed in the I&E Division. I question the logic behind placing her in I&E since it was exploitation, but nonetheless we had ourselves the first black person, even if it were only a secretary.

As I began to try to train in her the I&E operations, I noticed the young girl had a burning desire to succeed and did begin noticeable improvement. She even learned to answer the phone in an intelligent manner. Now there's no hiding the fact that black persons have a dialect of their very own and one that is not hard to detect. A few callers refused at first to talk to her and asked for another person. She shrugged it off, and made no comment to me. This was typical as she never once cried "discrimination." As a result of her attitude, she was soon promoted and moved to another division. Today she is a Sec. 3 and is the secretary for the fisheries chief. It might sound odd to some of those of you that have never been in this situation to say that I regretted to lose her simply because she carried her

end of the load, never made her race or color a point of discussion, and the relationship was never strained.

I wish at this point I could continue our happy episodes, but this was not the case.

If there's a moral here, it has to be that persons of minority races can be effective employees. But you say, so can whites. True, but the pressure by minority groups is not new to G&F. Take the fox hunters and a regulation change. They can force you through various methods to take action you really prefer not to. So it is with hiring minority races if the drive ever mounts. Even in Mississippi can it happen.

The immorality of the situation is this: A person should not be barred from employment simply due to the color of his skin or his creed. But then again I don't feel we should have to hire persons just because of the same thing. The qualifications should be this simple: if the person honestly has the skill — and there are ways to circumvent this if you want to remain prejudiced — if he has the skill and pulls his share of the load, whether he's black, yellow or green, I say I can work with him. But I do expect him to forget any of his personal hang-ups about the difference.

If we hire a male, white, Caucasian as a photographer, and he can't cut it, we fire him. Right? If we could use the same approach with minority races, I see no problems. But after initial employment, if the front office is fearful to say "you're not the man for the job," and ducks the issue, we're in trouble.

If we could use this same approach with minority races, I see no problems. But after initial employment, if the front office is fearful to say "you're not the man for the job," and ducks the issue, we're in trouble.

Hire the minority races as tho they were your next door neighbor. But don't give him special treatment; only that due an professional G&F person.

The SE is not the only place in the US where there are few if any minority races in I&E positions. I have yet to see one here. Missouri, which chides me for my still remaining biases in a few areas, does not have one on their staff. So many states champion the cause for civil rights, but when it comes to I&E where are they?

After having worked with the minority races, I can honestly say that it was indeed an experience everyone should encounter. You might find a few facts out about yourself.