

Face Value: The Silent Diversity Challenge

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ABSTRACT: After lamenting the fact that achievements by those who are not in the majority often go unrecorded by society, the author surveys reports by journalists and researchers on how the double standards that underlie patterns of discrimination operate. The insidious power of cultural stereotypes is assailed, with examples given of how labeling often substitutes for thinking. Attention is also given to the complexities of communication and to the way in which cultural and ethnic groups differ from one another in their styles of communication. The author emphasizes that those whose backgrounds and education did not prepare them for a diverse world will find themselves at a disadvantage. Finally, the important role to be played by ASCE in addressing diversity is outlined.



Just think about the meanings of the word itself, diversity. The word “diversity,” according to *Roget’s International Thesaurus* (HarperCollins Publishers, 1992), actually is defined as the state of unlikeness, the point of difference. Other meanings provided include separateness, incompatibility, nonconformity, dissimilarity, dissent,

and disagreement. And the glaringly missing pieces of interpretative information are

- Compared with what?
- Relative to whom?
- On what basis?

After all, why would interpretative information be stated? Everyone knows it means “me.” And most of the time, the “me” turns out to be those in power, any type of power. Power within the academic arena, power within the organization, power within the community. Power within ASCE itself, a power that has its base in the historical experiences of the majority. Power drives authority in the environment referenced to determine who the “ins” and “outs” are. Interestingly, we learn that this power does not rest only with the initial authority. Very quickly the “ins” and “outs” tend to

adopt and reinforce these roles; that is, the “ins” maintain their status by joining the authority to exclude the “outs.”

Well, perhaps you think, Why not? Why, as many would argue, it’s just plain old-fashioned common sense.

LIES, DAMN LIES, AND COMMON SENSE

Albert Einstein was quoted as noting that what passes for common sense is the sum of all of the biases and prejudices we absorbed as we grew up to the age of 18. It is perfectly human. It is equally humanly disastrous if allowed to continue unchecked without education, open dialogue, and metrics. What can’t be measured is impossible to manage. Just look at the generation-based “common sense” wisdom on display in the following:

- Given that men have historically been the providers for families, why shouldn’t they be recognized, rewarded, and retained at rates far greater than women?
- Why shouldn’t men be mentored and promoted at numbers far exceeding women, given that women eventually get married and pregnant?
- Why should women and people of color appear in significant numbers in the upper reaches of education, industry, and government given that these areas have traditionally been the preserve of white males?

- Given our mainly Judeo-Christian heritage over the past 2,000 years, why should our workplaces today accommodate the practices of Muslims?
- While some may point to the ambiguity and complexity of human systems, why can't we approach such matters as if they could be solved in logical, stepwise fashion by any good civil engineer?

THE INVISIBLE HISTORY OF AMERICANS

The Wild West. Imagine my surprise! After a misspent childhood in the Bronx in the 1950s watching Saturday afternoon matinee westerns, it came home to me that I had never seen a black cowboy. A black cowboy—even the expression seems strange to me given the culture at that time. Then I accidentally ran into the Buffalo Soldiers.

During a visit in May 2001 to the Fredrick Remington Art Museum, in Ogdensburg, New York, I noticed a paperback entitled *The Buffalo Soldiers, A Narrative of the Negro Cavalry in the West*, by William H. Leckie (University of Oklahoma Press, 1967).

I noted there was an accompanying exhibit, *The Buffalo Soldier: The African American Soldier in the U.S. Army, 1866–1912*. A brief overview of the book, based on information from a brochure for the exhibit prepared by Anthony L. Powell, follows:

The Negro soldiers who wanted to remain in the U.S. Army after the Civil War were organized into two cavalry regiments, the 9th and the 10th. Their service in controlling hostile Indians (more on this in a subsequent article) on the Great Plains during the next 20 years was as invaluable as it was unrecognized.



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The regiments were commanded by white officers and operated under intense disadvantages, among them difficulty in obtaining officers; prejudicial treatment by higher army officials concerning equipment, assignments, and camp policy; and prejudice in frontier towns. Nevertheless they developed into remarkable fighting units during their extensive engagements on the Great Plains.

These were the first Afro-Americans in our nation's history to serve in the regular army in peacetime. After the Civil War, while one in five soldiers in the U.S. Army was black, these black soldiers fought in 85 percent of the engagements with the Native Americans. The name "Buffalo Soldiers" was given to them by the Native Americans because their fighting spirit reminded the Indians of the buffalo. The soldiers accepted the name as a term of respect and honor. Between 1866 and 1912, 23 black soldiers won the nation's highest military honor, the Medal of Honor.

Amazing. Not their persistence and success but the invisibility of it all—as a part of the tapestry of American culture. It is not hard to imagine now that, despite the movie versions of the Wild West with John Wayne riding hard to defend a small western town with the cavalry right behind him, the faces of those soldiers were probably black.

What other experiences of diverse groups of people—women, older persons, the physically challenged, ethnic minorities—from our rich history have been obscured from our view and, if we're not careful, from the future view of our children and grandchildren? The following news item appeared on January 14, 2001, in the *Buffalo News*: "The President unveiled a statue of President Franklin D. Roosevelt in a wheelchair today."

In all of his travels and appearances, FDR masked his physically challenged state because he was convinced that the public would equate his physical state with his mental state. What ever happened to the human race that we developed a "face value" approach to those who do not look like us? Here, the mind works fast and simple; that is, it immediately assumes that the unlikeness of a minority is less than likeness of the majority.

By the way, at the unveiling of FDR's statue, Deborah McFadden was on hand with her disabled daughter and had this to say: "In other countries, people die from their disabilities—they're put in a closet and told they won't live. But here in America, we don't hide. The president comes out to honor disabled people."

SILENT THOUGHTS FROM A FELLOW PILGRIM

In no particular order, the following information gave the author pause, and it is presented here for your consideration:

- One committee, meeting on January 7, 2001, in New Orleans during ASCE's national committee week to consider topics bearing on the practice of civil engineering,

- consisted of 16 white males, only 2 under the age of 40.
- Eva Mueller, a professor emeritus at the University of Michigan, was awarded the Carolyn Shaw Bell Award in January 2001 in New Orleans for her contributions in furthering the status of women in economics. Few women of her generation were successful as academic economists. The nominating letter for the award noted how she was told upon completing her doctorate at Harvard that if they had thought she could make it through the program at Harvard they would never have admitted her.
 - Olympic swimmers who are deaf are no longer bound to the traditional starting gun; they now use a flashing light in its place.
 - The professional golfer Casey Martin says the recent U.S. Supreme Court ruling for athletes with disabilities “opens doors” (*Los Angeles Times*, May 30, 2001). Following his win against the Professional Golfers Association, Martin will now be allowed to use a golf cart.
 - In his review of *The American Misadventure of Race*, by Scott L. Malcomson, Orlando Patterson, writing in the *New York Times Book Review*, had this to say: “Are you really white? Are you really black? Would it offend you if I asked? In all likelihood, yes, even if you would add that it really shouldn’t matter, given that race has no scientific basis. So why the unease and why the haste to change the subject?”
 - The first winners of ASCE’s OPAL awards were announced in the April 2000 issue of *ASCE News*. They were each of proven superior ability, were respected worldwide, and were men over 50. The author’s first reaction was, “Wow, did we miss an opportunity to model what we have been working toward, a public reflection of our nation’s face within ASCE’s face.” Admittedly, a few years back, the author would have not seen it that way. At that time, my response would simply have been, “Great, I know three of these guys.”
 - In the words of Professor Marable of Columbia University, “We have to move from managing diversity, celebrating diversity, and studying the language of diversity to dealing head-on with its gross inequalities: interrogate it, analyze it, bring the debate center stage in our social institutions.” Let us not forget that ASCE is a social institution.
 - Tomoyo Miki, a third grader at the Willow Ridge Elementary School, in Snyder, New York, won first place in the school’s 2001 Disabilities Awareness Creativity Writing Contest. The award included a check for \$150. The contest asked participants to write about what they had learned from a person with a disability. Miki’s work will be prominently displayed at the capitol building in Albany, New York. She chose to write about a classmate.
 - According to the article “The U.S. Census Cultivates the Fiction of Race,” published in the March 26, 2000 issue of the *Buffalo News*, the recorded phone message on the census help line was as follows: “As to questions about the meaning of race, the meaning is a self-identification choice; it does not indicate any clear-cut scientific definition which is biological or genetic in reference. The data for race represents self-classification by people according to the race or races with which they most closely identify.” The article goes on to state, “A 1992 poll by the Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies found that most Americans have virtually the same concerns, hopes, and dreams . . . support our families, send our children to good schools, and have adequate health care.”
 - According to an article in the April 23, 2000, issue of the *New York Times*, “Forecasts through 2040 show that the population of Dutch seniors is on the rise while the 20–64 workforce is not, allowing many retirees to return to work. . . . companies describe the older workers as unusually motivated, experienced, and loyal.”
 - Patricia D. Galloway, writing the March 2000 issue of *The Engineered World*, had this to say: “In an effort to overcome barriers, women have had to work harder. Despite children at home or other family commitments, women employees do whatever it takes to get the job done, and often take work home to meet a deadline. . . . Since women have not been prominent in the field or in leadership positions, it may be in part due to the lack of understanding about the barriers that have been faced by women and the lack of understanding of the benefits that women can bring to the profession.”
 - According to the April 16, 2000, issue of the *Democrat and Chronicle*, “Students at St. John Fischer College, Rochester, New York, are not only exposed to an array of cultural experiences, they are taught about the importance of diversity in the workforce. . . . The college is not trying to be politically correct. It’s trying to best prepare its students for a world in which global markets and increased competition for talented workers have business more committed than ever to developing a diverse workforce.”
 - A workshop on diversity held in Rochester, New York, in May 2000 had sessions with the following titles: “I Didn’t Mean It That Way,” “Being White in Multicultural America,” and “O.K. Doesn’t Always Mean Yes.”
 - The following statement appeared in an article in the November 3, 2000 issue of *Business First* (Buffalo, New York): “When you go into homes, even the women sometimes aren’t comfortable because they’ve always had men plumbers.”
 - In the October 22, 2000 issue of the *New York Times Magazine*, Bill Proudman wrote as follows: “It was incredibly powerful because it contradicted the myth that white men need to continue to have women and people of color exclusively be our teachers about diversity. We can do this

- work with one another. We can also redefine the partnership we have in the workplace with women and people of color.”
- The article “Can Only White Men Run a Model Company?” which appeared in the September 3, 2000 issue of the *New York Times*, asks, “Where are the women? The blacks? The Latinos? The Asians? Together these groups make up about 40 percent of G.E.’s workforce domestically but they are not easy to find in the top executive corps of G.E. . . . of the 20 businesses that provided 90 percent of G.E.’s earnings in 1999, only one is headed by someone who is not white.”
 - “Women work three shifts,” wrote Michelle Kremen Bolton in an article appearing in 2000 in *Design Firm Management & Administration Report*. “They work one shift at the office . . . and a second shift at home taking care of their families. Then they work a third shift in their minds, conducting a continuous inner dialogue of second-guessing whatever actions and decisions have filled their days.”
 - “We think we know people just by looking at them,” stated an article in the November 26, 2000 issue of the *Buffalo News*. “The choices never come as a surprise: The young Asian woman is viewed as a bright college student; the guy wearing his cap backwards always lands in the police lineup; and the overweight women are expected to play bingo and to bowl.”
 - The May 11, 2001 issue of the *Wall Street Journal* pointed out that “when Lincoln Almond, the Republican governor of Rhode Island, took five weeks off following February surgery for prostate cancer, no clamor was heard for an interim replacement—not even from the Democratic lieutenant governor, who would have taken over. . . . Governor Jane Swift, in a Boston hospital awaiting the birth of twins, is under increasing pressure from some Democrats to step down until she can resume her duties full-time.”
 - An article in the May 26, 2001 issue of the *Globe and Mail* reported the following: “Last week, a scientist at Oxford University released details of a project that claims almost everyone living in Europe can trace an unbroken genetic link to one of only seven prehistoric mothers. The ‘seven daughters of Eve’ are said to be the direct maternal ancestors of virtually all modern Europeans. . . . So far the tests have suggested that all mtDNA mutations in modern populations trace back to a common ancestor, or ‘Mitochondrial Eve,’ who lived roughly 140,000 years ago in Africa. . . . *Homo sapiens* spread through Asia, Europe, and other parts of the world. . . . The results aren’t always welcome—there are reports that some black Americans have been traumatized on discovering that they have European as well as African ancestry. . . . Clearly, the genetic evidence of a world in constant flux has far-reaching implications for issues such as the conflict over land rights, the legality of immigration policy, the notion of racial purity, and the very concept of the nation-state.”
 - In a review of *The Story of Blacks in the Military from the Revolution to Desert Storm*, Catherine S. Manegold, writing in the May 20, 2001 issue of the *New York Times Book Review*, noted the following: “In a 1786 painting of the Battle of Bunker Hill, a black soldier stands with a group of white rebels. Copies of the painting made two decades later erase him from the scene. . . . in countless works of military history, the black contribution to America’s armed forces has been ignored, diminished, or denied. . . . at West Point today, cadets who show unusual leadership and perseverance are given the Henry O. Flipper Award. It is an honor named after the first black graduate of West Point, an Atlanta native, 1877. Four years later he was kicked out of the army on false charges of embezzlement. He fought to clear his name until he died. He failed. Victory would come only posthumously, in 1999, with a presidential pardon and a solemn reburial with full military honors.”
 - As noted in an article in the June 2001 issue of *Engineering Times*, “Keith Williamson, a mechanical engineering professor at Old Dominion, says that he thinks isolation is a major problem for female engineering students. It’s not so much the coursework as feeling so isolated and not having faculty mentoring or peer support. . . . gender stereotypes also make it more of a challenge than it should be. The coursework is tough enough already but these added pressures create some of these barriers.”
 - In *Race, Gender, & Rhetoric* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1999), John P. Fernandez writes as follows: “People openly disavow racist attitudes, but still act with covert bias. Such bias can take the form of, say, a white male senior manager who is convinced that he has no prejudices, rejecting a black, Hispanic, or Asian job applicant, ostensibly not because of her race but because her education and experience are “not quite right” for the job—then hiring a white applicant with the same credentials.”
 - As stated in an article in the June 2001 issue of *Engineering Times*, “More than half of design firm principals don’t believe there’s a problem with diversity in the industry, a recent survey says. . . . 96 percent of the respondents to the survey are Caucasian, 91 percent are male, and more than 75 percent are between the ages of 40 and 59. . . . 51 percent of the respondents don’t believe there’s a problem with a lack of diversity across age, race, and gender among principals in the industry.”

INSIDIOUS POWER OF CULTURAL STEREOTYPES

The battle of the sexes—it’s as old as time, some say. Individuals who still allow their “old tapes” to play out in today’s workplace will continue to result in failure. What are your opinions about men and women in the workplace? How do

their skills match up? Try this gender-based test, devised by Mel Silberman in his work *20 Active Training Programs* (San Diego: Pfeiffer & Company, 1992), and then discuss the results with your colleagues.

- 1) Women are more intelligent than men.
- 2) Males have better visual and spatial ability than females from birth.
- 3) Males are generally more aggressive than females.
- 4) Females are more dependent than males in early childhood.
- 5) Male supervisors are better than female supervisors in making decisions.
- 6) Starting during adolescence, males are superior to females in their ability to analyze problems.
- 7) Men talk more and interrupt more than females.
- 8) Adolescent males generally have better mathematical skills than adolescent females.
- 9) Adolescent females generally have better verbal skills than adolescent males.
- 10) Women are more sensitive to nonverbal clues than men.

In general, men and women are more similar than different. Generally the first five statements above tend to be false and the second five statements tend to be true.

According to James MacGregor Burns, writing in *Leadership*, "Over the centuries femininity has been stereotyped as dependent, submissive, and conforming, and hence women have been seen as lacking in leadership qualities. . . . The male bias is reflected in the false conception of leadership as mere command and control. As leadership comes properly to be seen as a process of leaders engaging and mobilizing the human needs of followers, women will be more recognized as leaders and men will change their leadership styles."

LABELING AND OTHER SUBSTITUTES FOR THINKING

Perhaps one of the most insidious forms of discounting at face value the worth of another person is labeling, that is, using an expression or word to pretend to capture another person's characteristics or opinion. Here, given our heritage, there is no shortage of nonthinking shorthand for how mainly men use a double standard to contrast their opinions with those of female colleagues. A few such gender-discounting examples follow:

- Forceful males are aggressive; forceful females are pushy.
- Forgetful men are absentminded; forgetful women are scatterbrained.
- Obstinate men are strong willed; obstinate women are stubborn.
- Men lose their temper because they are so involved; women lose their temper because they are bitchy.
- Angry men are outraged; angry women are hysterical.

- Men who are interested in everything are curious; women of this type are nosy.
- Men who talk together are conversational; women who talk together are gossips.

Discuss your thoughts about the list above, then create your own list about men from the female perspective. Remember that the intent of this exercise is to ask, for those characteristics that appear problematic, How do the stereotypes affect the working relationship between men and women?

'THAT'S NOT WHAT I MEANT'

Verbal communication skills are challenging enough in dealing with the people with whom you routinely meet. In the event of miscommunication, familiarity with one another's style allows for safe feedback so that the parties can eventually get back on track. Communication styles that you are comfortable with include those for greeting, role playing, discussing matters in an impersonal way, discussing matters in an emotional way, being open, and being frank ("tell it like it is").

The "face value" of communications is taken to be that style of communication common in the cultural environment in which you were raised and educated. It is the style you use today in social interactions. If, however, this environment does not include—and accommodate—significant numbers of people with different social and cultural backgrounds, you are at a strategic disadvantage in today's global markets.

Kara Shultz, in her study "American Deaf Culture: Community through Conflict," which appeared in *Conflict and Diversity* (edited by C.C. Snedeker, B.D. Sykes, and C. Damken Brown [Hampton Press, 1997]), writes as follows: "A person who does not respond to verbal commands or questions unless they are directed to her or his face arouses ill feelings for not playing the communication game as hearing people do. In our society, the question 'What's the matter, are you deaf?!' is an expression of frustration, accusation, and anger—not an inquiry into the processing capability of the person's ears. . . . The burden of the tension created by deafness falls on the deaf person."

For example, when planning to work with project team members from other sociocultural environments, for example, those of Brazil, the Philippines, Singapore, China, and India, how do you adapt to their different expectations regarding certain modes of communication? As pointed out by Jerry Lew in his paper "Effective Cross-Cultural Communication," presented in 1993 in Lafayette, California, at the Workforce Conference, problems may arise in the following areas:

- 1) "Common" courtesy, for example, greeting styles, ways of handling conflict, and role expectations;

- 2) Dialogue phasing, for example, knowing when it is appropriate to engage in personal talk in the workplace;
- 3) Objectivity and specificity, for example, impersonal versus emotional arguments, going from the general to the specific, and short-term versus long-term thinking;
- 4) Assertiveness, for example, openness versus reticence, verbal expressiveness versus reflection;
- 5) Candor, for example, "tell it like it is" versus preserving harmony;
- 6) "Hot buttons," for example, ethnic humor, stereotyping, sexist and racist comments, and personal remarks about culture.

At a recent seminar on project management, the speaker was discussing cost estimating and negotiations, and doing so quite energetically. At one part he said "And so we went back to the client to negotiate, prepared for him to try and Jew us down." You could have heard a pin drop. A few asked if they had perhaps misunderstood. Later the speaker stated: "I am sincerely sorry, I have to fight my own background and childhood past of what we call today stereotyping. Please forgive me."

What about the same issues within project teams in the United States, which to an increasing extent include blacks, Hispanics, and Asians. If you did not have to deal socially with people who did not look like you when you were growing up, what then is your level of knowledge about their expectations of communication, both verbal and nonverbal? Communication takes place whenever meaning is attached to behavior. Lew cites some examples:

- A preference for direct eye contact indicates . . .
- Emotional public behavior means . . .
- Heated arguments mean . . .
- Interruption during conversation usually means . . .
- Silence means . . .
- Touching between two people when in conversation means . . .
- Physical distance between two speakers means . . .
- Hand-holding by a man and a woman in public is . . .
- Finger beckoning is used to . . .
- Gushing over babies shows . . .

- Asking the same question several times means . . .
- Shaking hands with a person of the opposite gender means . . .
- Getting to the point quickly means . . .
- Avoidance of eye contact means . . .

The items in this list derive mainly from sociocultural values. Such things as age, gender, body language, thought patterns, and sense of time become embedded in the way people deal with others—and expect others to deal with them—unless they have studied and thought about getting beyond "face value" in their relationships.

Lew stresses that effective intercultural communication within the cities and regions of the United States as well as abroad requires focus and rethinking in the following areas:

- 1) Willingness to examine and know oneself;
- 2) Respect for differences;
- 3) Openness for ambiguity;
- 4) Flexibility without judgment;
- 5) Conscious suspension of assumptions;
- 6) Willingness to see the world as others see it;
- 7) Commitment to invest time and patience.

In *Race, Gender, & Rhetoric*, Fernandez notes that "stereotypes relating to the abilities of people of color simply have not changed much over the past 25 years." He goes on to say that "white Latinos get treated more like whites and dark Latinos get treated more like blacks. . . . the implication here is that the skin color of the Hispanic/Latino group members strongly influences their responses, thereby mimicking

the pattern that exists in black society of light-skinned blacks facing less discrimination than dark-skinned blacks."

WHO ARE 'AMERICAN' WITHIN ASCE?

Among many others, this category includes people over 60 years of age, women, the physically challenged, blacks, Hispanics, Asian-Americans, and people of various ethnic groups. So, where's the evidence of this in the organizations that individual members of ASCE work for, that is, educational institutions, government bodies, and private companies? In fact, where's the evidence within the workplace of ASCE itself and in the makeup of ASCE's volunteer groups, task forces, and committees? There are some who argue that numbers don't tell the right story or the complete story. And I agree. But the numbers do provide a framework to guide the crafting of the story.

IF YOU DID NOT HAVE TO DEAL SOCIALY WITH PEOPLE WHO DID NOT LOOK LIKE YOU WHEN YOU WERE GROWING UP, WHAT THEN IS YOUR LEVEL OF KNOWLEDGE ABOUT THEIR EXPECTATIONS OF COMMUNICATION, BOTH VERBAL AND NONVERBAL?

Years ago a bureaucracy could effectively manage change since the pace of change was slow. Today those conditions no longer exist. "Tear down the bureaucracy," advises Fernandez, who calls attention to three important areas:

- 1) Change relies on and is entwined with the personalities of executives.
- 2) To change patterns of behavior, bureaucracies must first restructure.
- 3) The segmented, structured nature of bureaucracy promotes inertia.

As a positive case in point, consider ASCE's decision to have the new Committee on Women and Diversity in Civil Engineering (CWDCE) report directly to the Board of Direction. In contrast to many other ASCE task forces and committees, the CWDCE has unfiltered access to the top executive decision makers within ASCE.

FACT-BASED DECISION MAKING

The author is not aware of any publicly available useful information about the various dimensions of diversity with ASCE or its members' organizations. So, where are the data? It is the author's opinion that until useful data are collected, only rhetoric and self-serving proclamations will ensue on this topic. Just as in the application of assertions about quality assurance for project work, it is suggested we adopt the following motto: "In God we trust; all others bring data."

Auditing the organizational culture of ASCE, and then the organizations of its members, will produce a shared cultural reality that will provide a fact-based approach to learning and then systematic improvement—if not a call for reengineering.

Simply providing training to increase one's awareness of diversity without first understanding the degree to which the organization's executives and others embrace cultural diversity is ill advised. As R.R. Thomas says in his study "From Affirmative Action to Affirming Diversity" (in *Strategic Communication in Business and the Professions*, by D. O'Hair and G. Friedrich [Houghton Mifflin, 1992]), "You can't grow peaches on an oak tree. . . . To grow peaches the roots must be peach friendly."

CLOSURE: EMPHASIZING THE 'SOCIETY CIVIL' IN ASCE

What we need, in the opinion of this author, are some unreasonable people. Nothing happens when reasonable people take charge; after all, that's why they are labeled reasonable.

While asked to help manage change, they really are there to contain the change so that others will continue to feel safe within their traditional place of power.

In the words of S. Caudron (cited by Fernandez in *Race, Gender, & Rhetoric*), "Let's talk about what everyone in corporate America is afraid to talk about: power and power sharing between the sexes. Men, who have held the power positions for years, are feeling more vulnerable than ever. In terms of sheer numbers, more white men have lost their jobs through downsizing and restructuring than any other group of Americans, and those who are left with a paycheck are determined to keep it come hell or high water. . . . These men, to put it mildly, aren't eager to share their power, especially with women they feel may not be qualified for the job, or worse, may abuse that power once they attain it."

What happens when a teacher or a professor describes our society and culture and leaves you and yours out? What will you say if you are white and someone wants to know where you are from, and they don't mean the Bronx?

We need to be accused of "disturbing the peace" with ASCE, and to be rightfully accused, on the subject of diversity. It is the right thing to do and it is time to do it.

The author likens this matter to a structural engineering course he took at the Polytechnic Institute of Brooklyn, in New York, entitled Indeterminate Structural Analysis. The title itself was intimidating! But a lifelong lesson was learned. And I believe it offers guidance to each of us in approaching the "making it happen" part of diversity within ASCE:

- 1) Recognize that the structure is complicated, ambiguous, and complex.
- 2) Break it down into simple pieces that can be solved.
- 3) As you reconnect the segments, make corrective adjustments to the simple solutions because the real problem is not simple.

Those who preceded us placed themselves at personal and professional risk to create a land of opportunity that respected the dignity and rights of all people. Will others look back at this time and say with pride that the generation of early 21st century civil engineers made it happen?

The choice is clear. It is yours, and it is now.

William M. Hayden, Jr., is with Wendel Duchscherer Architects and Engineers, PC, Buffalo, New York. The author wishes to express his gratitude to all the men and women who have paid the price—as well as to those who are still paying the price—to create a level playing field for each of us. E-mail: whayden@wd-ae.com **LIVE**

Ethel Bailey graduated from Michigan State Automobile School in 1918 and completed a special course at George Washington University in 1920. She was an administrator in the biology department at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. In 1920 she became the first woman to be admitted as a member of the Society of Automotive Engineers.
