

A shortage of engineers versus shortage of black engineers

By Lev Tsitrin

Eating – being a fulfillment of a biological necessity – is good for you. Eating with your radio on, is not necessarily so.

My radio was on as I had a late lunch – and it was filling the kitchen with the sound of [New Yorker Radio Hour's](#) David Remnick's conversation with Jelany Cobb, the dean of Columbia Journalism School. They were discussing DEI (i.e. diversity, etc) – bashing the perverseness of Trump's attacks on it.

Since to me, rejection of DEI is self-evidently natural, I payed no attention, and kept chewing. But then (at 17:35), my ear picked something that almost choked me – Mr. Cobb, giving as a hypothetical instance of the proper working of DEI, pictured a situation in which there are not enough black engineers. Mind you, he was not talking about there being not enough



engineers, necessitating encouragement of groups which do not traditionally go into the field to do so, so as to build up the numbers – but about there not being enough blacks among the otherwise adequate number of engineers.

Mr. Remnick did not ask an obvious follow-up question of – what effect does the lack of black engineers have on the profession? Do we have worse machinery, or shabbier housing? What exactly is the harm? No, the conversation just merrily went along.

Perhaps I was particularly startled because I just finished reading Brandon Brown's superbly-written biography of German physicist Max Planck (whose pivotal 1900 mathematical formula for objects' natural emission of electromagnetic waves – or, as it was called at the time, "black-body radiation," started quantum physics) and learned how Planck, in his capacity as administrative head of the German science, dealt with the Nazi "Law for the Restoration of the Professional Civil Service" that obligated all state employees to prove their Aryan origins. (Planck was convinced at the time that Nazism was a passing abnormality, and tried to encourage his Jewish colleagues to stay in the country – a patriotic, but naive move which didn't do anybody – Planck including – any good.)

Planck's incomprehension of the mindset of Germany's new bosses boiled down to this: what does being (or not being) Aryan have to do with science – which after all, merely requires aptitude and talent, and nothing else? Planck's colleague, chemist Fritz Haber (who was Jewish, but like so many German Jews of the time, an ardent German patriot who even baptized in the show of patriotism, and was given an exemption from the new law) left Germany in disgust at having to select students based on their heritage rather than talent.

Taken in that context, what exactly does a "black engineer" mean? What lack does the blackness of skin in an engineer fill? Or to put the question more generally – is it the benefit of science and engineering that is being pursued here – or a fulfillment of a race theory?

The mindfulness of race that animates DEI reminded me of a story I read somewhere – and this apparently is not just a

joke of the kind Russians call an “anecdote” (a pithy story with unexpected, hilarious punchline), but had actually happened. I don’t remember the exact number quoted, but it ran approximately as follows: during a US tour by a Soviet orchestra, its conductor was asked about Soviet antisemitism. “What are you talking about?” he replied. “In my orchestra, 10% of musicians are Jewish!” Turning to his American colleague who was standing next to him, he asked, “and how many Jews are there in your orchestra?” “I don’t know” was the reply.

Which illustrates brilliantly the difference in mindset between those who, in addition to music, think of race, and those who think of music only.

When Mr. Cobb – ably assisted by Mr. Remnick – counts black engineers, I suspect his concern has nothing whatsoever to do with engineering – unless it is social engineering that he has in mind. Well, as to that kind of “engineering,” Communists and Nazis amply showed us where it leads – and it is the road which this country better not take.

If Trump cracked down on DEI, good for Trump. Even better, it is good for America – bad as it may sound to the likes of Mr. Remnick and Mr. Cobb.