



- Ending racial discrimination in America's advertising industry -

## MADISON AVENUE TIMELINE OF HISTORICAL DISCRIMINATION IN EMPLOYMENT OF AFRICAN AMERICANS

1963 Urban League of Greater New York releases a report on a three year study of the hiring practices of the ten largest New York based advertising agencies, finding that fewer than 25 African Americans worked in creative or executive positions, with one-third of the top ranking African Americans limited to working in the market targeting African American consumers.<sup>1</sup>

American Association of Advertising Agencies (AAAA) responded to the Urban League's report with a survey finding that there were 100 African Americans employed at New York advertising agencies with over 500 employees. The industry employed a total of 20,000 people in New York City.<sup>2</sup>

NAACP, led by Roy Wilkins, lambasted the advertising agencies' discrimination of African Americans and urged the agencies to develop training programs for Blacks and increase recruitment of Blacks.<sup>3</sup>

NAACP officials met with representatives from the AAAA and leading ad agencies and presented a five-point program designed to increase Black employment in the agencies and lead to better representation of Blacks in advertisements.<sup>4</sup>

New York City Commission on Human Rights (NYCCHR) hosted a discussion titled "What are agencies doing about equal job opportunity, and can they do more?" Thirty-one of the ninety-nine invited agencies attended.<sup>5</sup>

NAACP's Roy Wilkins, the keynote speaker at the AAAA's Eastern Conference, warned the agencies that "The NAACP and other civil rights organizations are prepared to mobilize the Negro's considerable purchasing power in the fight for jobs and freedom." In response, the AAAA placed a full-page ad in the *New York Times* inviting "All Bright Young Men and Women to Consider Advertising as a Career." The only requirements for an advertising career, it stated, are "intelligence...enthusiasm...common sense...and persuasiveness."<sup>6</sup>

1967 NYCCHR initiated an investigation of the Madison Avenue advertising agencies' employment discrimination on the basis of race in hiring and promotions. In

1967, only 5% of employees in New York City's advertising industry were African American or Hispanic, compared to 25% of the city's total labor force.<sup>7</sup>

- 1968 The New York State Commission on Human Rights charged ten agencies with employment discrimination.<sup>8</sup>

John Elliot Jr., Chairman of Ogilvy & Mather, speaking at the 51st annual meeting of the AAAA called the failure of the industry to hire a greater number of Blacks, "the great moral issue of our time." He noted that in comparing advertising agencies to banks or insurance companies "our record is not even average. We bring up the rear." Correcting that, he said, "is a job for top agency management."<sup>9</sup>

- 1973 NYCCHR initiated complaints of employment discrimination against several advertising agencies.<sup>10</sup>

- 1978 NYCCHR published a report titled "Minority Employment and the Advertising Industry in New York City," finding that the advertising agencies on Madison Avenue consistently failed to employ African Americans, especially in professional and executive positions. The Commission further concluded that the agencies' record showed an unwillingness and inability to police itself, requiring government intervention.<sup>11</sup>

- 1991 Jock Elliott Jr., in an address to the American Advertising Federation, stated: "One of my great regrets is that over the past 20 years advertising has not made more progress employing minorities, and that today we are not trying hard enough."<sup>12</sup>

- 1993 "John O'Toole, president of the AAAA, calls the industry's hiring record deplorable. 'I attribute this to two things,' he says. 'Number one, a failure on our part to raise awareness of this problem, and number two, the lack of applicants we have, particularly from the black community. There is not much interest on the part of young black people in this business, and we haven't done much to encourage that interest.'"<sup>13</sup>

- 1999 Members of the Congressional Black Caucus send a letter to General Barry McCaffrey, then Director of the Office of National Drug Control Policy, regarding the lack of diversity at Ogilvy & Mather: "Although we recognize that the topic of the lack of diversity within general market agencies is a sensitive one, we believe it should be carefully and comprehensively addressed. Lack of diversity at advertising agencies was cited as one of the root causes of inappropriate behavior and questionable business and marketing practices across the industry in a recent study issued by the U.S. Federal Communications Commission. We recommend that discussions be held concerning the lack of diversity at Ogilvy & Mather and particularly the lack of diversity in the

professional ranks, upper levels of management and with media planners and buyers.”<sup>14</sup>

- 2006 Sixteen Advertising Agencies entered into Memoranda of Understanding with the NYCCHR acknowledging the importance of racial diversity in their workforces and pledging to meet hiring goals to increase the representation of minorities in professional and management positions.<sup>15</sup>

“Patricia Gatling, chairwoman of the [NYCCHR], said at the [annual legislative meeting of the Congressional Black Caucus in Washington on September 7, 2006], ‘Approximately 2% of the individuals who create in us a desire to buy at the 16 agencies we examined are black,’ adding, ‘Here we are in 2006 – also half a century after the civil-rights movement began – and we have still been unable to break and excel in this industry.’”<sup>16</sup>

- 2009 The NAACP and Mehri & Skalet launch Madison Avenue Project where economists Marc Bendick and Mary Lou Egan release a new report regarding discrimination of African Americans in employment by the advertising industry: “Research Perspectives on Race and Employment in the Advertising Industry.”

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<sup>1</sup> Jason Chambers, *Madison Avenue and the Color Line 128* (University Of Pennsylvania Press 2008).

<sup>2</sup> *Id.* at 128-29.

<sup>3</sup> *Id.* at 142.

<sup>4</sup> *Id.* at 142-43.

<sup>5</sup> *Id.* at 164.

<sup>6</sup> *Id.* at 145-46.

<sup>7</sup> New York City Commission on Human Rights, *Minority Employment and the Advertising Industry: A Commission on Human Rights Analysis of Compulsory Versus Voluntary Affirmative Action 2* (1978).

<sup>8</sup> Chambers, *supra* note 1, at 180.

<sup>9</sup> Philip H. Dougherty, *Negroes' Job Lag in Ad World Hit*, *Advertising Age*, Jan. 22, 1968.

<sup>10</sup> New York City Commission on Human Rights, *supra* note 5, at 7-8.

<sup>11</sup> *Id.* at 3.

<sup>12</sup> Brian Wright O'Connor, *Are Advertising Agencies Serious About Hiring African-Americans?*, *Black Enterprise*, Mar. 1993.

<sup>13</sup> *Id.*

<sup>14</sup> Letter from James E. Clyburn and Carolyn C. Kilpatrick to Hon. Barry R. McCaffrey, May 6, 1999.

<sup>15</sup> Memorandum of Understanding, entered into between The New York City Commission on Human Rights and BBDO, *et al.* on September 19, 2006.

<sup>16</sup> Matthew Creamer & Lisa Sanders, *Omnicom Flies Solo on Diversity Hiring Issue*, *Advertising Age*, Sept. 10, 2006.