This case was prepared for inclusion in SAGE Business Cases primarily as a basis for classroom discussion or self-study, and is not meant to illustrate either effective or ineffective management styles. Nothing herein shall be deemed to be an endorsement of any kind. This case is for scholarly, educational, or personal use only within your university, and cannot be forwarded outside the university or used for other commercial purposes. 2020 SAGE Publications Ltd. All Rights Reserved.

This content may only be distributed for use within CQ PRESS.
http://dx.doi.org/10.4135/9781526462121
Teaching Notes

Case Summary

This case provides students with an explanation of how certain religious attitudes can lead to racist business practices. The text gives students a synopsis of how religion can impact organizational practices, followed by a historical review of Christianity, racism and the antebellum economy. Next, modern evangelical attitudes about racism are reviewed. The content then describes the strategies that AT&T uses to foster a climate of diversity and inclusion in the organization.

Teaching Objectives

Through reading and discussing this case, students should:

- Develop an understanding of how specific religious attitudes can contribute to racism, which can affect organizational decisions.
- Understand how historical Southern Christian attitudes about slavery have morphed into modern attitudes that limit approaches to defeating racism.
- Comprehend structural approaches to creating better opportunities for minority groups.
- Advance their knowledge about organizational policies and practices that can foster an inclusive environment.

Target Audience

This case is appropriate for undergraduate and graduate students studying diversity, inclusion, racism, and organizational leadership. The types of courses this case might be suitable for include leadership, communication, organizational design, management, government or business policy, ethics, and diversity-related courses. Within these courses, the case could help students understand why some people in organizations may resist diversity and inclusion (DI) programs, and give readers concrete examples of DI strategies that work. This case offers a unique contribution to the fields of human resources, organizational leadership, and management by making connections between religious attitudes, racism, and business practices.

Suggested Teaching Strategy

This case is suitable for use as an in-class discussion or as an individual writing assignment.

In-Class Discussion

First, give students 15–20 minutes to read the case and make notes about their initial impressions. Next, divide the students into diverse groups of not more than six students. Instructors should consider race, ethnicity, and gender when establishing the groups. Each group should talk about their answers to the discussion questions. Instructors should monitor the teams to ensure that each person has a chance to participate, and that the group maintains respect for all views. After 20 minutes, the class should come together and discuss their feelings and perceptions related to the course content and group answers.

Rather than dividing the class into groups, the instructor could also facilitate discussion with the entire class.
Depending on the class size, there is a possibility that students who are especially offended by the content may be silent or attempt to dominate the group. Instructors should watch for this and take steps to include silent members or prevent dominance by any one person.

A third way that an instructor could prompt students for further discussion is to set up organizational councils, such as those described in this case, and have some students play the role of executives and managers and other students play the role of employees. Prompt the students with a diversity problem and have them discuss the problem in a council meeting.

Whichever method is used, it is important that the instructor facilitate discussion in such a way as to include all of the students and draw out all points of view. The individual writing assignment could be used as homework following the in-class discussion.

**Individual Writing Assignment**

This case could also be used as an individual writing assignment. The discussion questions could be used for the writing assignment; or if the discussion questions are used in class, then the instructor could use some of the points made in class as prompts for written essays.

**Suggested Answers to Discussion Questions**

1. **How did Southern Christians justify their support of slavery in the South?**

   Immediately following the Civil War, how did Whites in the South maintain their economic advantage over Blacks?

   Southern Christians believed that slavery was ordained by God because Blacks were heathens and deserved to be punished for their sin (Stout, 2008). Southern aristocrats benefited greatly from the economic advantages that slavery gave them over the North and Europe. A common Christian narrative was that the North was a godless society that sought to impose its will on the Bible-believing South (Stout, 2008). There was an economic reality that fostered a religious belief that then justified racial business practices.

   Religious attitudes, political narratives, and economic pressures led the South to secede from the North (Stout, 2008). Further reading in Stout (2008) will show that the South’s first victories in the war emboldened Southern preachers to claim that God was supporting their righteous cause. Sermons gave women on the home front and men in battle courage to continue through the many terrible years of the war (Stout, 2008).

   Slavery morphed into discrimination in the form of Jim Crow laws and managerial mechanisms that prevented Blacks from gaining access to anything but low paying jobs, such as janitorial work (Freedom Riders, 2017). These laws kept Blacks segregated in every part of society and maintained the racial divide both economically and emotionally. While there were plenty of poor Whites in the South, they were able to claim racial superiority through religious narratives that denigrated Blacks (Stout, 2008).

2. **How do evangelical attitudes about economic success influence evangelical leaders’ approaches to combating racism in their communities and organi-**
izations? What critical changes can these leaders make?

The most common evangelical answer to why Blacks do not succeed is that they lack motivation (Emerson & Smith, 2000). This attitude comes from the religious belief that God gives people free will to choose and obey Him (Emerson & Smith, 2000). By extension, if a person is in a low-income state, it is because that person is not right with God. Current U.S. evangelicalism is closely aligned with the U.S. values of independence and free will (Emerson & Smith, 2000).

Elite evangelicals often continue to propagate views that limit legislative and organizational approaches to leveling the playing field. Influential members of the evangelical community consolidate their power through network building, business practices, philanthropy, and educational initiatives (Lindsay, 2008). Controlling the public narrative around racial issues is an important part of the influencing process (Lindsay, 2008).

Evangelical leaders can dig into current research in which scholars highlight how White privilege and structural racism are perpetuated in society (Sinitiere, 2013). By examining this critical literature, evangelicals can see new perspectives and be open to more solutions. Evangelical universities should include discussions and coursework on race relations and invite guest speakers who are front runners in race scholarship. Evangelicals who are leaders in business can look to DI initiatives that have worked at corporations such as AT&T to find models for working within business to combat attitudes of racism.

3. What are AT&T’s strategies for increasing minority opportunities and economic standing? What results has the company seen based on these strategies?

AT&T’s power sharing takes many forms. Employee engagement programs, labor unions, and councils are just a few of the means that give employees an opportunity to take part in the decision process. Engagement programs help workers increase their skills and reach career objectives (AT&T, 2018). Through collective bargaining, labor unions can address grievances, seek greater benefits, and negotiate with management (AT&T, 2018). Councils occur at all levels of the organization and help management execute DI strategies (AT&T, 2018).

The DI efforts at AT&T do not stop with employees. The company’s supplier diversity program also promotes DI. AT&T works with prime contractors to help them widen their subcontractor base (AT&T, 2018). Educational programs are also part of the supplier diversity strategy (AT&T, 2018).

4. What are the risks and benefits for AT&T investing in communities and educational initiatives outside of its corporation?

By investing in poor communities, AT&T helps itself in at least four ways. First, it gives employees a chance to exercise their initiative and mentorship skills (AT&T, 2018). Second, philanthropy generates employee loyalty because they can see that the company really cares about the underserved. Third, the company builds a base for potential future employees and customers in the communities it serves. Finally, the firm generates goodwill among its current customers, suppliers, and investors.

There are risks to investing in communities and educational initiatives outside of AT&T’s corporation. The money spent in such programs may not achieve the desired results, wasting money that could be used for more profitable investments. Stock investors and advisors might not see the value in social program spend-
ing and devalue the stock. Students who benefit from community and educational programs might ultimately work for AT&T’s competitors.

Further Resource
AT&T Issue Brief Library: [http://about.att.com/content/csr/home/issue-brief-builder/people/workforce-diversity.html](http://about.att.com/content/csr/home/issue-brief-builder/people/workforce-diversity.html)

References
Emerson, M. O., & Smith, C. (2000). Divided by faith: Evangelical religion and the problem of race in America [Kindle version]. Retrieved from Amazon.com
[http://dx.doi.org/10.4135/9781526462121](http://dx.doi.org/10.4135/9781526462121)