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Is the federal work roll skewed against minorities?

Courts will again spend considerable time and expense hearing a case brought on behalf of those who have enjoyed America's bounty for four centuries ["In a bureaucratic bind," Op-Ed, Thursday]. The federal government is being sued for promoting affirmative action. I am not going to address columnist Roger Clegg's ruminations about the role of the Justice Department in defending affirmative employment programs, but a glance at federal work-force statistics raises a fundamental question as to why such a lawsuit would be brought.

According to the Office of Personnel Management, in 2000, two-thirds of all employees in the Senior Executive Service [SES] were white men, though white men made up just 40 percent of the total work force. Minorities held 30 percent of all federal jobs but made up just 13.5 percent of the SES. The ethnic breakdown was no better: Blacks made up 17 percent of the federal work force but only 7.1 percent of the SES; Hispanics made up 6.6 percent of the work force but only 3.3 percent of the SES; Asians accounted for 4.5 percent of total employees but only 2.3 percent of the SES. Twenty-eight percent of all employees were white women, but white women made up 19.5 percent of the SES.

In view of these numbers, it's difficult to understand how white men have suffered systemic discrimination as a result of the government's affirmative employment program. If the plaintiff in this case has personally suffered discrimination, it is indeed unfortunate. However, he should seek individual redress under the Civil Rights Act, not threaten opportunities for those who historically have been excluded from the upper levels of the federal government.

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