

## Pillars of Diversity

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Expert Forum



One of the books I was reading in 1968 as I was finishing up work on my master's degree from the University of Oregon was *Black Rage* by Drs. Price Cobbs and William Grier, both psychiatrists, both black men. The book was released following the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and received significant attention, eventually leading to a television special. Dr. Cobbs had participated in the march to Selma and was active in the civil rights movement.

In 1971 a prominent Fortune 500 company asked Dr. Cobbs to come and help them address issues they were facing in hiring people who were black. One invitation led to another so in the mid 1970's he gave up his medical practice to meet the increasing demands of the corporate sector. His newfound consulting practice helped companies address issues of race relations, organizational development and workplace competencies (dealing with the underlying issues of prejudice and bias).

In the mid 1980's diversity became an industry and Dr. Cobbs was on the ground floor. Businesses enlisted his help in training their employees in diversity and inclusion. At that time awareness training was a 3-5-day course with follow-up sessions over the next 9-12 months. He and I agree that D&I practitioners today are not getting the same grounding necessary to do their work at a deeper level.

In 1988 I heard Dr. Cobbs deliver a keynote address at a "Valuing Diversity" conference in San Francisco. I approached him to shake his hand and told him how much I enjoyed reading his book. Four years later I was invited to join a prestigious professional group which he co-founded, the Diversity Collegium, and have had the privilege of getting to know Price. Though the two of us have a solid professional relationship, I also find him to be personally engaging and quick witted. I refer to him as the "older black gentleman" and he refers to me as his "younger Asian brother."

For the purpose of this article, I "interviewed" Price and asked some questions:

- Why do you choose to identify as Black instead of African American? - He said both terms are acceptable, but he uses Black because "I am constantly being judged by the pigment of my skin."
- What does diversity and inclusion mean to you? - People need to rid themselves of both conscious and unconscious bias; it is the intellectual work that is required so that people can help others do the same thing. We need to ask "how are people like you, unlike you and how are they culturally different from you?"
- What kind of advice do you offer D&I practitioners today? - It's the constant peeling of the onion to get more forthright, candid, and transparent with each other. There is a journey practitioners must take before addressing measurement issues that businesses seem to be requiring.