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## New Kid on the Block: The Demise of the Least Common Denominator.

### Series: Part 7

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This series of short essays called *The New Kid on the Block* is a retrospective of the progress (or lack of it) of the demographics of the corporate world since about 1960. That period, encompassing little more than a single career, has seen more social change than any comparable period since the Industrial Revolution. Those changes grow from roots that go back to times when to be black or to be a woman, or a Jew, to be anything but heterosexual, or to deviate from any but the most widely accepted social norms was to be excluded.

It used to be said that you couldn't legislate morality. Practical reformers accepted that axiom but did not let it deter them; they simply responded that you could legislate behavior. You could still hate your traditional enemy but, if you threw rocks at him or her, you would be subject to the law against such behavior. In large corporations HR policies began to reflect the law, and to craft ways to regularize in a fair manner, recruiting and hiring. Suddenly there were a lot of new kids on the block.

Within the limits of a short post it is impossible to describe the fervor with which these changes were advocated or resisted. And, considering the size of the playing field – all of corporate America, it is easy to forget that, as influential as these changes would be, they were hardly noticed by the general public that had assassinations, marches, riots, psychedelic drugs, the war in Viet Nam, hippies in the parks, Masters and Johnson in our bedrooms, J. Edgar Hoover, Fidel Castro, The Beatles and The Rolling Stones. It was not a time of attention deficit but of attention overload.

So let's just focus on one small but significant aspect of the times as it relates to women's roles in large business. First, who were these women who wanted to play what were traditionally male roles? Two things motivate outsiders – denial of entry and self-confidence. Yes, yes, I know, I am speaking in unsupportable generalities. Nonetheless, girls of that time grew up with brothers, many of whom would acknowledge that their sister was smarter than they were all through school and who was then expected to forget all she had learned. She was to accept her given role, subservient to her brothers and her husband, forget further education, be a good wife and mother.

Very often the subversive agent in this domestic drama was the girl's father. No matter how he played his role he was encouraging transgression. If he reinforced traditional social restrictions his actions stimulated rebellion and increased interest. If he encouraged ignoring or overcoming tradition, he shone a light on what was possible and set a challenge for ambition.

These father-daughter interactions were taking place in the roiling ferment of waves of social change; they were as likely to be destructive as to be inspiring. They say that those who make the revolution, who fight in it, are not the ones who get to manage the aftermath. Take a walk in the halls of corporate America and tell that to the women running things today. Very often they are the women who fought and who were first across the barricades. Certainly they are the new daughters of the revolution.