

LOS ANGELES FIRE DEPARTMENT: DIVERSITY IGNITES DISCRIMINATION

STEPHEN J.J. MCGUIRE, JEEWHAN YOON, PATRICIA ROBBINS, OSHIN BABAIAN, FERNANDO INIGUEZ, VARDUI KOSHKARYAN, MARIBEL PELAYO & TAGUHI SOGOMONYAN
California State University, Los Angeles

“How can we diversify our workforce and get rid of discriminatory problems in our organization?” asked Ralph Terrazas, the first Latino Fire Chief since the 1186 founding of the Los Angeles Fire Department (Exhibit 1). Terrazas was appointed by L.A. Mayor Eric Garcetti in the hope of transforming the Los Angeles Fire Department (LAFD) into an organization that reflected the communities it served. Since its founding, LAFD’s recruits had been predominantly White and overwhelmingly male. In 2018, Whites comprised just under half of the 3,397 uniformed LAFD employees, but were only 28.5% of the population of a city that was more than half Latino. In addition, despite repeated calls for reform, LAFD’s 109 female firefighters represented about 3% of the total — no real change since 1995. (See Exhibit 2.) It seemed that little progress had been made toward Mayor Garcetti’s pledge to diversify the fire department. Moreover, LAFD continued to struggle to overcome a long history of racial and gender discrimination.

From 2006 to 2018, lawsuits for discrimination and sexual harassment had cost taxpayers nearly \$30 million. How could LAFD optimize its recruiting efforts to women and ethnic minorities? What changes to human resources policies could the department make to increase diversity? Chief Terrazas was well aware that LAFD needed to change its organizational culture, but what actions could he take to create a culture of inclusion?

Exhibit 1. Fire Chief Ralph Terrazas

Source: Daily News

**Exhibit 2. Ethnic and Gender Breakdown of LAFD Uniformed Personnel in 2018**Source: LAFD 2018 Firefighter Recruitment Plan³³

| Ethnicity | Male | Female | Total |
|------------------------------|--------------|---------------|--------------|
| Black | 11.13% | 0.21% | 11.3% |
| Hispanic | 31.06% | 0.41% | 31.5% |
| Asian | 5.56% | 0.21% | 5.8% |
| Caucasian | 46.63% | 2.36% | 49.0% |
| Filipino | 1.97% | 0.03% | 2.0% |
| Native American | 0.44% | 0% | 0.4% |
| Total Sworn Employees | 3,288 | 109 | 3,397 |

Racial and Gender Discrimination

“Feed the Big Dog!” touted 49-year-old African American fire-fighting veteran Tennie Pierce at the crew’s early morning beach volleyball game in October 2004 at Fire Station 5 in Westchester. Pierce, who called himself *“Big Dog”* during the games, taunted a much shorter Latino paramedic, 24-year-old Jorge Arevalo, as he repeatedly shouted, *“I take craps bigger than you!”*² The dinner bell rang at 6:00 that evening. It was Arevalo’s turn to cook dinner. Arriving 15 minutes late, Pierce began eating the spaghetti with meat sauce that awaited him

on the stove. After a few bites, he noticed some of the men laughing. Pierce demanded to know what was in his food, and as the others chuckled, he ran out. Jorge Arevalo apologized to Pierce that night for mixing dog food into his dinner. An Asian female firefighter stated that Pierce accepted the apology and called it “*water under the bridge*,”² so it was a surprise when Pierce later sued the City of Los Angeles for racial discrimination and was awarded \$1.43 million in settlement with \$60,000 in back pay.

LAFD’s long-held tradition of horseplay and pranks had resulted in a number of lawsuits alleging discrimination and harassment on the basis of race, gender, and sexual orientation.

In a field dominated by men, Captain Alicia Mathis (see Exhibit 3) felt that the voices of female firefighters were suppressed. Captain Mathis filed a claim in 2006 against the City of Los Angeles threatening a class-action lawsuit on behalf of female firefighters. She said,

“It needed to be done. I really was fearful for women in the organization. I was really fearful that we would never go beyond.”

Captain Mathis aggressively sought to reduce discrimination, harassment, and “*grueling*” drills that she felt were targeted at women. Several incidents motivated her to file the claim. For example, a woman was sexually assaulted at her assigned station and another woman was “*trained to the point where she had to have a hysterectomy.*” Captain Mathis believed that the LAFD’s problems needed to be made public in order to stop what she called rampant discrimination and harassment.

Exhibit 3. Captain Alicia Mathis

Source: Alumni.ucla.edu

**LAFD'S Mission**

Located in a “salad bowl” of ethnic communities, LAFD consisted of 112 fire stations spanning over 470 square miles. Fires attacked large industrial and commercial structures, single-family homes, oil tankers, and hillside brush communities. LAFD was a full-spectrum life safety agency and firefighting force that protected the “approximately 4 million people who live, work, and play in America’s second largest city.”³ This was congruent with the LAFD’s mission statement:

*It is the mission of the Los Angeles Fire Department to preserve life and property, promote public safety and foster economic growth through leadership, management and actions as an all risk life safety response provider.*⁴

Complementing the department’s mission was its service statement:

*We owe the residents of Los Angeles the highest quality of service possible, characterized by responsiveness, integrity and professionalism. We will continually strive for quality improvement.*⁴

According to Captain Mathis, firefighters were expected to respond in full firefighting gear in 60 seconds and be on the scene within 5 minutes. Some of LAFD’s goals included managing an operating system to minimize the effects of disasters and life or property in emergencies.

Included in this plan was an effective emergency medical services system, fire prevention system, and public safety system.

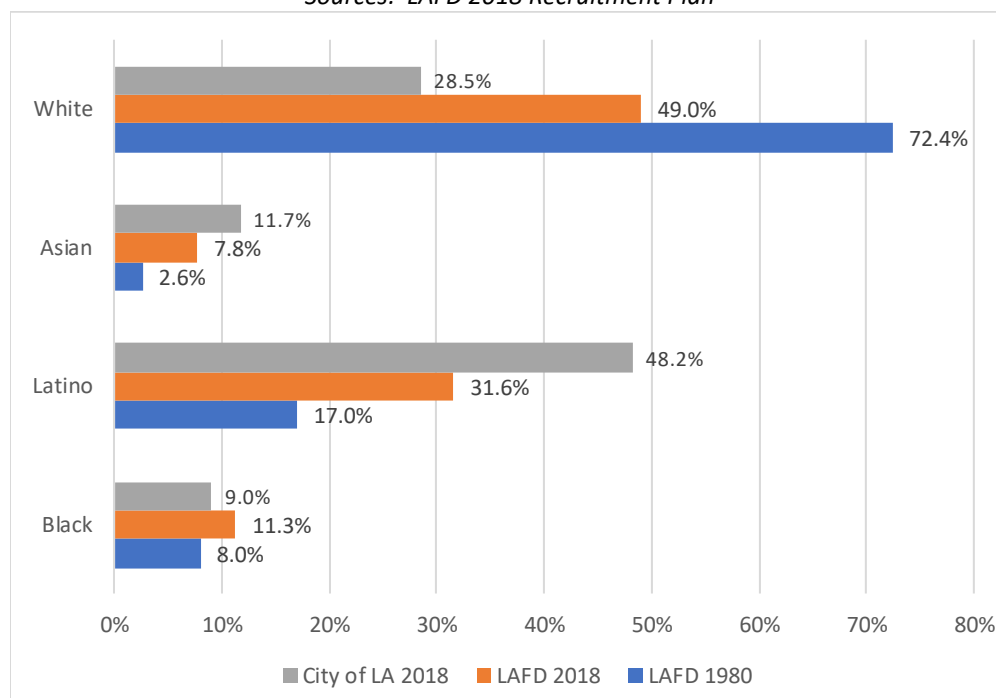
LAFD'S Background and History

The first Los Angeles city-owned fire station, Engine Company No. 1, was established in 1887. In 1955, when fire stations became racially integrated, Black firefighters were prohibited from talking to Whites at work or even eating at the same time as Whites did. One station even posted a sign on the kitchen door specifying “*White adults.*”² Black firefighters’ beds were assigned near locker rooms and toilets. By 1972, the federal government filed a lawsuit against Los Angeles claiming that the city discriminated against Blacks, Latinos, and Asians. In 1974, to increase diversity and overcome discrimination, LAFD established a Minority Recruitment Unit and implemented an affirmative action program to hire and retain women and ethnic minorities. In 1980, 72% of the force was White. By 2018, the LAFD employee population had begun to look a bit more like the population of the city it served: nearly 32% of firefighters were Latino, 11.3% were Black, 7.8% were Asian, and 49% were White (See Exhibit 4).

Challenges continued in the recruitment of women. In 1980 there were female paramedics, but no female firefighters. Three years later, LAFD had on board the first female assistant chief, Captain Roxanne Bercik. By 1994, 5.4% of firefighters were female, but this figure dropped to the national average of 2.5% by the end of 2007. Women were provided with additional training to prepare them for the physical requirements of the position. Nonetheless, despite increased efforts to help women pass the drills, a 1990 video was released to the media, ridiculing women at the firehouse. The video, dubbed ***Female Follies***, portrayed “*a perfume saleswoman from Macy's and an 18-year-old babysitter awkwardly struggling to climb over a 5-foot wall.*”⁵

Exhibit 4. Racial Groups in LAFD and the City of Los Angeles

Sources: LAFD 2018 Recruitment Plan



In 1996, Fire Chief William Bamattre (see Exhibit 5) was hired by the Mayor with intentions to increase the number of minorities and women in the LAFD. Although Bamattre successfully hired 83 women, who were predominantly paramedics, there were rumors of a secret no-fail policy *“to pass women who plainly could not heft chain saws up ladders or run with heavy hoses, or who had other physical deficiencies.”*⁵ Many male firefighters were upset and felt that the department was jeopardizing the public’s safety. Bamattre declared that he had not created a double standard. In 2002, a federal judge decided the city had fulfilled its hiring goal and removed the consent decree. By 2004, there were 90 women out of 3,300 firefighters, and in 2018 there were 109 women out of 3,397.

Exhibit 5. Former Fire Chief William Bamattre

Sources: Addiemiller.us

**LAFD'S Diversity Strategy**

According to Captain Armando Hogan (see Exhibit 6), a firefighter of 25 years and captain of 12 years, LAFD held five academies per year with a goal of bringing in at least 50 rookies per academy. Hogan said diversity was important because of the different points of views and mentioned that female firefighters were *“reminders to be more professional and more respectful.”*

Exhibit 5. Captain Armando Hogan

Sources: Farm4.static.flickr.com



Typically, of the 50 recruits, only one or two were female. Hundreds of female recruits were discouraged after the initial examination, the Candidate Physical Ability Test (CPAT), which entailed climbing and running with over 75 pounds of protective clothing and gear.

The Candidate Physical Ability Test

The CPAT was a timed pass/fail standardized test that was not administered by the City of Los Angeles but was the only test accepted by the City. The test consisted of eight separate events that simulated real, in-the-field, firefighter job duties: stair climb, hose drag, equipment carry, ladder raise and extension, forcible entry, search, rescue, and ceiling breach and pull.

Throughout the test, each candidate had to wear a 50-pound vest to simulate the weight of the self-contained breathing apparatus along with protective clothing, such as a hard hat and work gloves. The stair climb event required an additional 25 pounds, used to simulate a hose bundle, which was added to the shoulders. All events needed to be passed in a total of 10 minutes and 20 seconds or less. Candidates were required to have a passing score on the CPAT at the time of the certification to be eligible for hiring and to be scheduled for an interview. The physical requirements were the same for men and women. Firefighting equipment was very heavy and duties required repeated lifting, which men and women both agreed to be a difficult task. Firefighters pulled heavy lengths of hose, climb stairs while wielding giant power tools like chain saws, and lifted 180-pound, 35-foot wooden ladders—akin to carrying a concrete lamppost. Firefighters' physicians said that a human expected to pull the heaviest hose lines needed to weigh at least 143 pounds (see Exhibit 6).⁵

Exhibit 6. The Candidate Physical Ability Test

Sources: Lavc.cc.us.



In an attempt to recruit more women into the program, LAFD used different marketing strategies. It recruited at construction sites, military bases, truck stops, health clubs, and community colleges in search of physically fit women who were used to working in male-dominated workforces. Captain Hogan said, *“We will recruit anyone who is interested, but we have had more success with those accustomed to the lifting and moving. There is a certain amount of stamina needed to do it, not just with women but also with men.”* According to LAFD, finding the right candidates was the toughest part of the recruiting process.

One deputy chief hoped to utilize a new plan of pairing firefighters with potential candidates during each step of the application process to advise them and encourage them on a weekly basis. The Los Angeles City Hall invested millions of dollars into advertising and providing extra training and resources to recruit minorities and women. Billboards were placed in predominantly Black and Latino neighborhoods. Los Angeles had also *“outfitted most of its 106 fire stations with costly women’s lockers and women’s showers.”*⁵ Yet few women actually fought fires in the department; the quiet locker rooms were bare and empty, sometimes being utilized for studying (see Exhibit 7).

Exhibit 7. Firefighter in LA Weekly and LAFD's women's locker room

Sources: Media.newtimes.com and LAWeekly.com.



When asked her opinion on recruitment efforts and training programs, Captain Mathis said she believed that LAFD went about the recruitment process the wrong way. Mathis ran a high school recruitment program at Harbor College for 8 years and believed that such outreach programs were very cost-effective. She felt that the LAFD could collaborate and do more joint programs with community colleges and school districts to help the department reach its recruitment goals. She stated, *“If we had a more integrated, long-term approach, we would be much more successful.”*

Internal Issues

Captain Mathis stated:

“What we ended up with was a for cause finding with the EEOC Federal Government and they found a pattern in practice of discrimination against women and African Americans within the LAFD.”

According to a letter written in December 2007 by the Los Angeles District Director of the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC),

“The commission further finds reasonable cause to believe that a pattern and practice of different terms and conditions of employment, harassment and retaliation exists for a class of female and Black firefighters based on gender and race.”⁶

An internal audit in 1995 revealed that both harassment and hazing were more rampant than suggested by the number of investigations the LAFD had conducted. Furthermore, the audit critiqued the formal investigations as insufficiently documented, lacking independence, and undertaken by inexperienced personnel.⁸ The report also addressed some of the decisions made by former Fire Chief Bamattre during his leadership, which stated that the fire chief overrode more than half of the LAFD’s training academy instructors’ recommendations to fail underperforming recruits, *“particularly women and African Americans. In 75 cases, the fire chief overruled 45 cases and graduated the recruit. The audit found that 77.8% of the women and 40% of the African Americans ultimately did not pass probation.”⁹*

In defense, the deputy chief of training and risk management argued that one reason these recommendations for termination were overruled was to improve diversity and hiring statistics among certain groups that were underrepresented in LAFD’s overall workforce. Bamattre added that he overruled several cases because the recruits’ scores were *“borderline”* in meeting drill tower standards.

Costs

LAFD imposed a significant cost burden on the city’s taxpayers because of recruiting efforts, work-related injuries, and lawsuits. Millions of dollars were spent in providing marketing and appropriate accommodations, such as women’s locker rooms and housing, in efforts to recruit women.⁵ And, although they accounted for only 3% of firefighters, females accounted for 56% of all multimillion-dollar lawsuits. With a large number of recruits who attended the academy and only a few who succeeded, a heavy price was paid. *“Taxpayers [are] ponying up \$82,692 to*

send a single recruit through the drill-tower academy—and spending another \$82,692 each time a failed recruit is encouraged to try again.”⁵

In addition, costs were incurred due to the payout to many injured trainees who automatically qualified to receive firefighter injury pay. Hogan said a substantial amount of costs had been allocated to disability pay, which compensated up to 1 year for set injuries with a reasonable accommodation process.

Culture of Hazing

Although hazing was prohibited in the 1940s, it continued. Many firefighters ignored the longtime ban on horseplay and Black firefighters were primary targets. According to Captain Hogan: *“A lot of pranks started before then, but I know they became more mean-spirited when African Americans joined the fire stations.”* A long-held tradition, hazing came under increased scrutiny and speculation as firehouses became progressively diverse. In late 2006, City Controller Chick, in addition to condemning former Fire Chief Bamattre’s lack of leadership for allowing the behavior to continue, stated, *“Part of the hazing and discrimination come from the perception that women and racial minorities are not qualified to work in the department.”⁹* On the contrary, according to Professor Carol Chetkovich, author of a book on gender and race in the fire service, *“Hazing and practical joking serve a purpose among firefighters. ... Firefighters are concerned with personal qualities of the people they work with, because lives depend on each other.”¹⁰* After Pierce sued the city, the city mayor issued an executive directive in November 2006 declaring a policy of zero tolerance against hazing in all city departments.

In the culture of hazing, whenever a firefighter was promoted to captain, the person was treated to a *“chairing.”* This meant that the firefighter was tied to a chair with duct tape and slathered with mustard, ketchup, salad dressing, and BBQ sauce (see Exhibit 8). Two days before the infamous dog food incident, four crewmembers including Pierce treated a newly promoted Captain to such a *“chairing.”²*

Exhibit 8. Tennie Pierce sprays water in the face of an immobilized hazing participant

Sources: LAWeekly.com



Photos surfaced that showed Pierce enjoying the culture and camaraderie of hazing other firefighters. Two weeks after the prank, Pierce took a series of paid sick leaves and stress leaves. It was later determined that he had been paid the equivalent of a full-time salary for approximately 2 years, during which he worked fewer than 40 days.²

The Pierce case led to the suspension of two fire captains, one for 24 days and the other for 30 days; additionally, they were later disciplined and relocated. Jorge Arevalo, the firefighter who put the dog food in Pierce's meal, received 6 days of suspension. The two captains filed a reverse racial discrimination lawsuit and eventually received \$1.6 million in settlement by a Los Angeles Superior Court jury. The captains alleged that they received a longer suspension than Arevalo because they were White. One of the captains admitted during the trial that he had bought the dog food, but only to give it to Pierce as a "Joke Trophy" for his volleyball victories, since Pierce called himself "Big Dog."²

Firefighters had often broken the “*unwritten rule*” to not mess with each other’s food, family, or equipment. Prior to Pierce’s case, there were many similar incidents, such as one in the 1970s in which a firefighter in South Los Angeles made lemon meringue pies out of sawdust and shaving cream. In the 1980s, a white captain was tricked into eating dog food when he did not chip in for daily meals. Lastly, a white colleague of Pierce’s was tricked into eating cat food after making offensive remarks about a firefighter’s cat.

Harassment

Following in her grandfather’s steps and after years of fighting fires with the U.S. Forestry Service, Melissa Kelley decided to join the LAFD. Before entering, she understood, as a female, the firehouse could be an uncomfortable place for her. She was aware that other female recruits had endured harassment and ridicule. She said, “*I wanted to be a firefighter so bad, I was willing to put up with almost anything.*”¹¹ It wasn’t long before she had her own experience with harassment. When she was a rookie, one night a firefighter climbed into her bed and placed his hands under her clothes. After resisting, he mocked her by clucking like a chicken in her presence for several weeks. Kelley didn’t share this with anyone. She said, “*I didn’t want people to think I was a complainer.*”¹¹

In 2004, Kelley’s situation was exacerbated when she was injured during a drill called “*the humiliator*,” which left her hospitalized with a back injury and off-duty with pay for 6 months. As part of the drill, Kelley had to hoist a 180-pound, 35-foot ladder, climb it holding a rotating saw, and, once at the top, cut through a window’s metal bars. In her attempt to lift and swing the ladder around, she dropped it and became pinned under the ladder. Her helmet got stuck between the rungs, and she was unable to elevate the ladder. As one firefighter colleague approached her to help, Captain Frank Lima ordered him to stop. Lima later said, “*She basically couldn’t raise the ladder. That’s it in a nutshell. After the first try, I gave her another chance. And I continually asked her if she was ok, and she insisted, yes.*”¹² After Kelley completed the drill, she was rushed to the hospital where she was diagnosed with lumbar and cervical spine

damage along with a torn rotator cuff, which required surgery and months of rehabilitation. Kelley, who did not report the incident, said, *“I made a mistake. I became pinned by that ladder. Everyone noticed I was pinned. A firefighter came to help me. Lima told him to stop.”*¹³

Fire Chief Bamattre suspended Captain Lima. Captain Lima filed a reverse retaliation discrimination lawsuit against the LAFD on the premise that he was a male who employed the same standards of training on a female that he would have applied to a man. Captain Lima’s attorney argued that Lima was told to treat women differently since it was a challenge to recruit and retain female firefighters.¹⁴ In June 2007, a Los Angeles Superior Court jury comprising seven men and five women ruled in favor of Captain Lima and awarded him \$3.75 million.

Like Kelley, Captain Mathis recalled a colleague who crawled into her bed and tried to kiss her. Mathis, who initially suppressed the incident, ruefully said, *“Oh God, I never said anything.”*¹⁵ Justifying to herself, she recalled thinking, *“That was just me. I got out of it and made my way and I was fine.”*¹⁵ However, as time passed, Mathis realized that *“almost every female firefighter in the LAFD has suffered unwanted touching, leering or derogatory comments.”*¹⁵

After she filed her claim, Mathis was frightened of retaliation and fearful for her family, career, and personal safety. She feared that someone would try to hurt her in a fire or even kill her in an emergency situation. She felt the fire department was unique in the sense that all training exercises were justifiable because any emergency situation was possible. She noted that

“There were no controls being put on the training that was happening. People were able to set up these sorts of punitive physical exercises that were destroying women, essentially.”

Thirty-nine-year-old Brenda Lee became part of this diverse team after following a dream she had as a 6-year-old to one day become a firefighter. She found herself assaulted by the macho

culture that existed within LAFD Station 96 in Chatsworth. She claimed she was discriminated against on the multiple premises of being Black, a woman, and a lesbian. According to her, she incessantly endured disparagement from colleagues and her supervisor. One day when Lee complained about an unflushed toilet, her supervisor said to her, *“What’s the matter, Brenda? Does it look like you?”*¹⁶ Additionally, according to Brenda, in coerced compliance, she performed rigorous exercises entailing a heavy ladder, her locker and personal unit were burglarized on several occasions, and urine was added to her mouthwash. Lee’s former colleagues testified against her, stating she displayed a *“lack of responsibility and accountability on the job.”*¹⁷ They recalled one situation where Lee got into an altercation with another firefighter while putting out a fire and he slapped her in the face. According to Superior Court documents, Lee was initially offered \$2.5 million to settle by a city attorney. After declining the offer, she hired another attorney and left the LAFD upon filing of her lawsuit in 2005. In 2007, the jury awarded her \$6.2 million.

Cornell University’s Institute for Women and Work in the Institute of Labor Relations School reported that almost half of all female firefighting candidates passed the physical ability test, yet fewer than 4% of the nation’s firefighters were women, and more than half of all fire departments had never hired a female firefighter (See also Exhibit 1).¹⁸ The research involved surveys from 675 firefighters in 114 departments in 48 states. Of the 175 female firefighters interviewed, 85% reported that they were treated differently than male firefighters; specifically, *“80 percent said they were issued ill-fitting equipment; 37 percent reported that their gender created barriers to career advancement; 50 percent felt shunned or socially isolated; and 37 percent were verbally harassed.”*

Fire Chief Bamattre Resigns

Fire Chief Bamattre had made contributions to an improvement in funding and staffing for the department. However, persistent pressure from the City Council and Black leaders, along with his failure to control hazing and harassment, compelled Bamattre to resign in December 2006.

“Bamattre was blamed for miserably failing to change the culture of the department. But as Bamattre notes, when he left, the LAFD had ‘more women than many large departments. We did that without a consent decree [or] mandatory hiring.’ The new Fire Chief Douglas Barry was chosen to diversify the department—and, yes, to recruit more women.”⁵ Fire Chief Barry stated that one of his “key challenges will be to change the department culture while trying to satisfy the firefighters union, chief officers’ association, and employee organizations representing African American, female and Latino firefighters.”

Unresolved Problems

Despite the efforts of Fire Chief Barry, the LAFD continued to struggle with racial discrimination and sexual harassment. What was worse, some issues avoided public notice in part because the Los Angeles City Council approved deals barring the accusers from publicizing their settlements. One case quietly resolved in early 2013 included a \$325,000 payment to the department's first Black female firefighter, d'Lisa Davies. Davies alleged that she suffered discrimination over two decades. As part of that settlement, the city agreed to have the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission more closely monitor the LAFD's antidiscrimination training program for firefighters and supervisors. Federal fair employment regulators found Davies had been denied a transfer in retaliation for her protests discrimination.

Enter Mayor Garcetti

Eric Garcetti was elected Mayor of Los Angeles in 2013. He vowed to fight against discrimination in the LAFD. He said, *“My priority in bringing new leadership to the Fire Department is bringing a much-needed change to the culture there.”²⁰*

Some other cities have had more success hiring women, including Seattle, where almost 9% of firefighters were female, and San Diego, where nearly 8% were female. Nationwide, it was estimated that 4% of firefighters were women.

In early 2014, for the first time in 5 years, the LAFD formed a class of new recruits. However, nearly all class members were male and mostly White, despite repeated promises by the LAFD to diversify its ranks. According to Mayor Garcetti's office, the class of 70 firefighters had just one woman and was 60% White; 23% percent of the recruits were Latino, 11% were Asian American, and 6% were Black. The numbers continued not to reflect the population of the city of Los Angeles.²⁰

Mayor Garcetti was not satisfied with the racial and ethnic balance based on information he received from the department. *"Mayor Garcetti thinks these numbers are unacceptable and wants the Fire Department to reflect the city it serves,"*²¹ spokesman Yusef Robb said. Robb further said that the mayor's office was committed to working with the department to improve recruiting and ensure future classes included more women and minorities.

First Latino Fire Chief Ralph Terrazas

On August 8, 2014, Ralph M. Terrazas was appointed by Mayor Garcetti and endorsed by the City Council.²² Fire Chief Terrazas said, *“It’s an exciting and challenging time to be taking the helm and together we will redouble our efforts to transform the LAFD into a metric-driven, technologically sophisticated, community-focused organization that reflects the communities we serve.”*²³

Mayor Garcetti appointed Chief Terrazas to be a permanent head of the LAFD to help improve community service as well as public safety in the city of Los Angeles. Mayor Garcetti explained that *“there is no better person to cut response times, improve technology, and bring reform to the Los Angeles Fire Department than Chief Terrazas.”*²⁴

Chief Terrazas, who held a Master of Public Administration degree with a concentration in human resource management from California State University, Los Angeles, said he hoped to emulate the low-key style of former Fire Chief Bamattre. Terrazas said, *“I worked on his staff and appreciated the way he treated everyone with respect. He called me up and offered to talk with me to help me figure out where some of the pitfalls in the city are.”*²⁶

As for recruiting, Fire Chief Terrazas planned to have all three drill towers open in the future to train recruits—classes he hoped would include more women. One of his goals was to revive a hiring program where firefighters recruit female athletes by encouraging and mentoring them to become firefighters.

Prior to becoming fire chief, Terrazas served as the first head of the LAFD’s Professional Services Division (PSD), formed after a series of expensive lawsuits and scandals involving hazing, pranks, and harassment, an appointment that often put him at odds with the United

Firefighters of Los Angeles City – the union. While the union ended up endorsing his appointment, the endorsement came about only through a collective effort of discussions.

Chief Terrazas commented,

“I was the enforcer and the union was representing firefighters. It’s only natural there was some disagreement.”²⁶ “Before the PSD, there was an arbitrary system in place on how many days of suspension a firefighter would get or if it would go to a Board of Rights.”²⁴

He added, *“We tried to make it a fair system, so people would know what they would get in terms of discipline.”* The result, he said, has been a dramatic drop in the number of lawsuits against the city from firefighters.²⁵

The Trump Effect

In February 2018, the LAFD experienced a series of divisive workplace incidents – arguments and physical altercations between firefighters from different racial groups. Some firefighters – typically white – supported President Trump’s condemnation of NFL football players who knelt during the national anthem, while others – typically black firefighters – supported the players. Colin Kaepernick, a former San Francisco 49ers quarterback, had initiated a national debate by kneeling during the national anthem before games to call attention to racial injustice in the shooting of black Americans by police officers.

Fire Chief Terrazas noted, in a letter to the firefighters, noted that there had been *“on-duty heated discussions regarding the perception of a lack of patriotism by NFL players”* as well as a *“near physical altercation”* after someone showed up late to work.²⁷ *“These types of issues and incidents are divisive and can erode our ability to accomplish our collective mission to protect the lives and property of the people of Los Angeles,”* he wrote.²⁷

Terrazas reminded the LAFD that he expected every firefighter to behave in a way that *“fosters a professional and respectful workplace free of discrimination, harassment, retaliation and hazing.”* He also reminded employees to use the job title firefighter, not ‘fireman.’²⁷

See Appendix B for the Fire Chief’s letter to the LAFD employees.

Additional Lawsuits

In August 2018, African American firefighter Emanuel Brown filed a lawsuit against the city alleging that he repeatedly faced discrimination while working at a fire station in South Los Angeles, and retaliation after he complained. On Easter Sunday, Brown opened his locker only to find that somebody had smeared his equipment with feces.²⁸ He reported the incident to a Captain outside his unit because he was afraid of retaliation. He further alleged that colleagues retaliated against him for complaining, calling him ugly racial slurs, including *“chocolate piece of shit.”*²⁹ One firefighter made *“cork-popping noises”* whenever Emanuel Brown walked into the room, Brown’s lawsuit claimed. During a drill, another firefighter *“mentioned that someone may die”* as a result of the training exercise. A co-worker mocked Brown by asking how much sugar he would be putting in his coffee, insinuating that Brown was *“soft and weak.”*²⁹

In a separate 2018 lawsuit against the city, 5 Black and 2 Latino firefighters claimed that they had been *“systematically looked down upon”* because of their race, gender or association with black firefighters.²⁹ The lawsuit claimed:

*“The LAFD is essentially an all-white boys club, and anyone who fails to align themselves with this mentality is looked down upon and treated differently.”*²⁹

Black and female firefighters in the bureau were branded by other department employees as *“lazy and afraid”* to fight fires.³⁰ The lawsuit also alleged that black and female firefighters were called *“slugs.”*²⁹

"If you're a Black female, you're pretty much a non-entity," remarked d'Lisa Davies, who claimed that she was denied a promotion for 10 years because of her gender and race.³¹

The firefighters' lawyers claimed:

*"Due to this department-wide systemic racial and gender animus, plaintiffs have continuously been looked down upon and subjected to discrimination, harassment and retaliation because of their African-American race, and association with other African-American firefighter."*²⁹

Appendix A provides a link to a video clip of an NBC News report on discrimination in the LAFD.

Struggling to Hire More Women

At the end of 2018, despite Mayor Eric Garcetti's commitment to increasing diversity, only 3.1% of LAFD's firefighters were women, up from 2.9% when Garcetti took office in July 2013. The Mayor was pushing Chief Terrazas to reach 5% women by 2020.³²

In summer 2018, the newest class of firefighter recruits included 9 women and 56 men. To become a firefighter, the recruits would need to complete a rigorous five-month boot camp. The previous two classes finished with no women graduating, and in the past two years only 57% of women (but 83% of men) graduated and joined the Fire Department. *"Some women left the training academy after sustaining injuries. Others have left for personal reasons or because they failed to perform,"* said a Fire Department official.³²

LAFD had added 17 female firefighters since July 2013, bringing the total number to 109. But during the same period, the department had added nearly 150 male firefighters, maintaining the same female-to-male ratio that LAFD had in 1995.³²

The Firefighter Recruitment Plan

In May 2018, Fire Chief Terrazas released the LAFD 2018 Firefighter Recruitment Plan, a part of the department's 2018-2020 strategic plan.³³ The plan began with an acknowledgement that while the department has not had difficulty attracting qualified applicants, it has done a poor job of hiring people who look the communities LAFD serves.

“Being a firefighter is a highly attractive job that attracts many traditional applicants. The City of Los Angeles is seeking to enhance recruitment efforts so that the Los Angeles Fire Department (LAFD) reflects the diversity of the City it serves. The key to firefighter recruitment is to conduct targeted outreach to attract non-traditional, diverse, qualified applicants.”³³

The 2018-2020 plan included some specific goals, such as increasing the percentage of female firefighters to 5% by 2020. An applicant orientation program (AOP) would be put in place to give non-traditional applicants a good understanding of what LAPD jobs entailed. Job advertising would focus on under-represented groups (See Appendix C for a sample job poster.) Youth programs – including LAFD Girls camps – would be given more attention and greater funding to generate early interest in the profession. Recruiters would also develop relationships with athletic directors at local schools, junior colleges, and universities.³³

But would it be enough? How could LAFD optimize its recruiting efforts to women and ethnic minorities? What changes to human resources policies could the department make to increase diversity and to promote an organizational culture of inclusion? What else would Fire Chief Terrazas need to do?

Appendix A

Link to TV News Clip: Firefighter Claims Racial Discrimination at Department



Source: <https://www.nbclosangeles.com/on-air/as-seen-on/Firefighter-Claims-Racial-Discrimination-at-Department-Los-Angeles-475939833.html>

Appendix B
Letter from the Fire Chief

Source: Ralph Terrazas, Feb. 16, 2018. http://clkrep.lacity.org/online/docs/2014-14-0560-S1_pc_6-27-18.pdf



From the Office of
the Fire Chief ...

RECEIVED
JUN 27 2018
BY: *AS. Keisler*

February 16, 2018

TO: ALL MEMBERS

SUBJECT: FIRE CHIEF EXPECTATIONS OF WORKPLACE BEHAVIOR

***"I firmly believe that our mission to protect lives, property
and each other, is a much stronger bond among us...
than any issue that may divide us"***

One of the most important responsibilities all Officers have, is to recognize small issues, which if not addressed immediately, can grow into larger issues. One such issue, is the importance of appropriate workplace behavior.

Recently, I have become aware of a few situations which have caused me concern over the workplace environments currently being experienced by our members. These include:

- On-duty heated discussions regarding the perception of a lack of patriotism by NFL players kneeling during the national anthem.
- A perceived lack of sensitivity in addressing members of color during an investigation.
- A near physical altercation due to a late relief issue between members of different ethnicities.

These types of issues and incidents are divisive and can erode our ability to accomplish our collective mission to protect the lives and property of the people of Los Angeles. For the sake of our members and those we serve, that is something we cannot afford. These occurrences can be attributed to a number of factors and theories such as:

- An individual's inability to understand the cultural, societal or historical experiences of different ethnic, gender, generational, and philosophical groups.
- The constant exposure to various media sources expressing varying opinions relating to current perceived acts of defiance towards our government, lack of respect for our flag or love for our country.
- An unrealistic belief that we must all have the same level of tolerance and acceptance for behaviors and comments which may be in conflict with our own.

Appendix B, cont.
Letter from the Fire Chief

All Members
February 16, 2018
Page 2

To proactively address the issues I have previously described, I want to make clear my expectations of our members. **It is my expectation...**

- That all Officers, Managers and Supervisors perform their duties in a manner that fosters a professional and respectful workplace free of discrimination, harassment, retaliation and hazing.
- That all members work towards maintaining a respectful work environment, by behaving in a manner that is in line with our policy of zero tolerance towards discrimination, harassment, retaliation and hazing.
- And especially important, that all members use the title "**Firefighter**" rather than "Fireman" as defined in the Consent Decree between the LAFD and the Department of Justice in 1974.

For more detailed information regarding these expectations and proper conduct, members are encouraged to review the following documents:

- LAFD Rules and Regulations
- LAFD Discrimination Prevention Policy and Complaint Procedures
- LAFD Sexual Harassment Prevention Policy and Complaint Procedures

To reinforce my expectations and to address any questions or concerns expressed by our members, I have directed all Battalion Commanders to personally deliver this message to their areas of responsibility.

To further assist our members in meeting my expectations, we are currently creating a comprehensive personal and professional development plan. This plan will include various training classes and methods, developing a departmental unit focused on assisting our Officers, Managers and Supervisors with difficult workplace issues and the implementation of surveys to better gauge our effectiveness.

It is critically important that we recognize that we are not a team only because we work together. We are a team because we respect, trust and care for each other as we accomplish our collective mission of protecting the lives and property of the people of Los Angeles.

Stay safe,



RALPH M. TERRAZAS
Fire Chief

Appendix C
LAFD Recruitment Ad
Source: www.joinlafd.org

| | |
|--|---|
| <p><i>Come Join Us</i></p> <p>LOS ANGELES FIRE DEPARTMENT APPLICANT ORIENTATION PROGRAM</p> <p>Every Tuesday 6-9 PM</p> <p>FRANK HOTCHKIN MEMORIAL TRAINING CENTER 1700 Stadium Way Los Angeles, CA 90012</p> <p>The best way to prepare for a career with L.A.'s bravest? Show off your skills, strength and smarts while learning about what it takes to be a firefighter at our hands-on orientation program:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Try on personal protective equipment• Try out EMS and firefighting tools and• Review the NEW testing and hiring process• Learn about job and fitness requirements• Interview Prep Overview• And much more! <p>All are welcome!</p> |  <p>WEAR YOUR PASSION <i>On Your Sleeve</i></p> |
| <p></p> <p>REGISTER TODAY AT www.LAFD-AOP.eventbrite.com</p> <p>For More Information: Call the LAFD Firefighter Recruitment Section (213) 893-9899</p> |  <p>WEAR YOUR BRAVERY <i>On Your Sleeve</i></p> |
| |  <p>WEAR YOUR SMARTS <i>On Your Sleeve</i></p> |

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