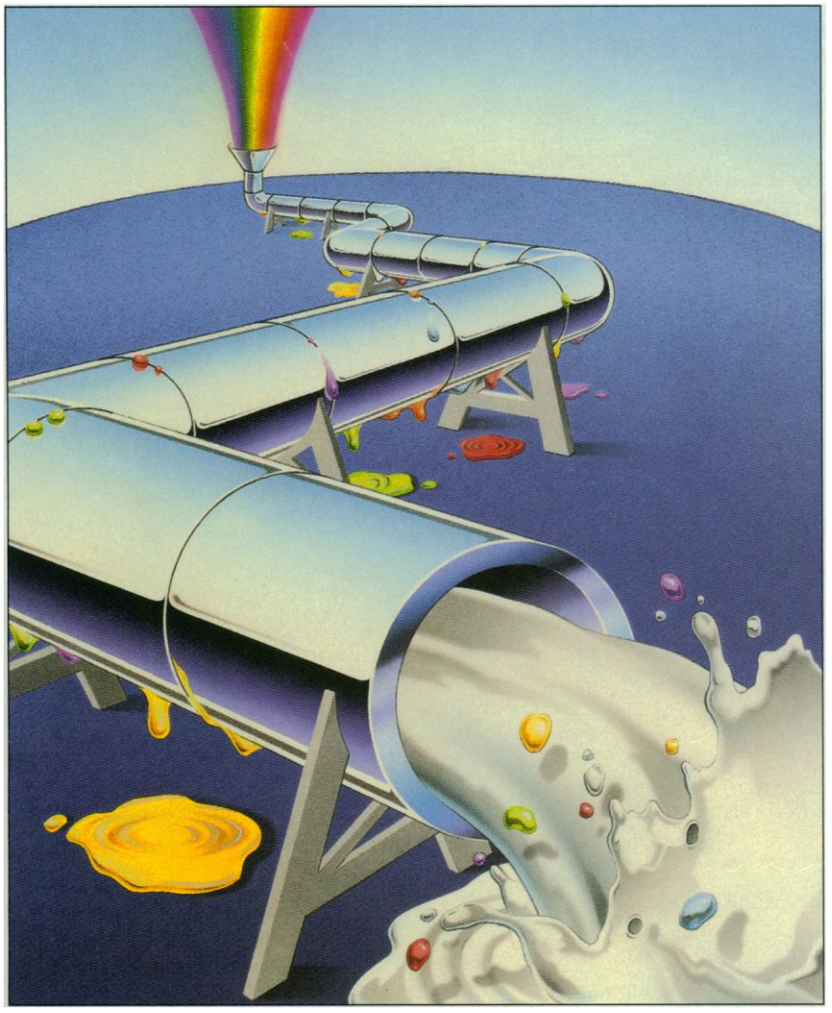
Two Generations of Struggle

Special Report Overview



For 20 years, science has been wrestling with "the pipeline problem": how to keep minorities from turning off the obstacle-strewn path to careers in science, mathematics, and engineering. Thousands of programs have been started since the late 1960s to bring diversity to the scientific work force. But their results have been dismal, a point powerfully made by National Science Foundation Director Walter E. Massey in the essay that follows. Indeed, the science and engineering enterprise remains overwhelmingly white —even though the percentage of minorities in the U.S. population has grown dramatically.

This special section—*Science*'s first, but not last, to address such burning issues—includes an unflinching attempt to analyze what went wrong. This investigative report was produced by *New York Times* journalist Calvin Sims, who is himself among the rarest of the rare: a black journalist trained as an engineer.

Next, we offer a package of articles on the lessons to be learned, beginning with an overview of promising new approaches to the pipeline problem. Helping us in this task were scores of people on the inside—members of the small band of minorities who have made it. An older generation tells how they broke new ground in science in the early days of the Civil Rights movement, and the new generation describes growing up in a world of affirmative action.

When we speak of "minorities," we speak of blacks, Hispanics, and American Indians—all underrepresented in science, but each group with its own set of issues. Even "overrepresented" Asian-Americans have a tale to tell—of barriers at the top.

Last but not least, we invite you to provide us with your comments using the fax questionnaire on page 1237. Let's commence a dialogue on this important topic.

–Elizabeth Culotta, Ann Gibbons; editors, "Minorities in Science"