

"The human-resources trade long ago proved itself, at best, a necessary evil—and, at worst, a dark bureaucratic force that blindly enforces nonsensical rules, resists creativity, and impedes constructive change," argues Hammonds, deputy editor of *Fast Company*.

One reason is that "HR" isn't seen as a promising career path by many ambitious executives. Another is that it attracts those who say they "like to work with people." "Good, go be a social worker," says Arnold Kanarick, former head of HR at The Limited and Bear Stearns: "HR isn't about being a do-gooder. It's about how do you get the best and brightest people and raise the value of the firm."

Creating value ought to be HR's highest goal, contends Hammonds. But "HR pursues efficiency in lieu of value," and it does so chiefly because it's easier to measure. Dave Ulrich, a University of Michigan professor who has become the "best-known guru" in HR, according to Hammonds, complains that corporate HR departments focus on readily quantifiable things such as the number of hours of training employees receive rather than the results of that training. According to Ulrich, the real question is not "What are you doing?" but "What are you delivering?"

HR also forces people into boxes. Its overlords "pursue standardization and uniformity in the face of a workforce that is heteroge-

neous and complex," charges Hammonds. But "employers keep their best people by acknowledging and rewarding their distinctive performance, not by treating them the same as everyone else."

For years, there's been talk of giving HR a place in the councils of top management. That has happened at some big corporations—including Yahoo, Procter & Gamble, and General Electric—but it's rare. Corporate leaders are partly to blame, but the problem is often a failure of imagination among HR executives themselves, Hammonds believes. They have plenty of technical expertise, but they need to think more creatively about ways to mesh their work with the corporation's larger business strategy and to bring fresh ideas to the table. That's hard to do in itself, notes Lynda Grafton of London Business School, and even harder to execute "because business strategy changes very fast, and it's hard to fiddle around with a compensation strategy or benefits to keep up."

If they don't adapt, Hammonds warns, many HR executives may find themselves writing their own pink slips. HR's technical administrative functions are among the easiest activities for a company to outsource—and 94 percent of large employers say they already consign at least one HR activity to outside contractors.

## *No Teens Wanted*

"The Age Twist in Employment Rates, 2000–2004" by Andrew Sum and Ishwar Khatiwada, with Sheila Palma, in *Challenge* (July–Aug. 2005), M.E. Sharpe, Inc., 80 Business Park Dr., Armonk, N.Y. 10504.

The U.S. economy's lackluster job creation after the Internet bubble popped five years ago has often been noted and bemoaned. What's been missed, though, is the impact the recent rate of job creation has had on one group in particular: teenagers. Between 2000 and 2004, the teen employment rate fell from 45 percent to 36 percent, a record low. The number of employed teenagers was reduced by nearly 1.3 million.

No other age group experienced such a large decline, report Sum, director of Northeastern University's Center for Labor Market Studies, and two colleagues.

Hardest hit, after teens, were the twentysomethings, whose employment rate fell by about four percentage points—to 68 percent for those under 25, and to 77 percent for those over 25. Even as America's young disappeared from the workplace, the employment rate rose among people 55 and older. About 27 percent of Americans aged 65 to 69 were drawing paychecks last year, a three-point hike from the level four years earlier. For workers of all ages, the overall employment rate fell only about two points.

Who was filling the jobs that might have gone to teens? Young college gradu-

ates settling for lower-paying jobs, older women without college degrees getting positions in retail sales, and recent immigrants under 30 taking entry-level work.

“Steady, high levels of payroll job growth will be needed” in the next few years if teens are not to be left idle, Sum and his colleagues conclude.

## SOCIETY

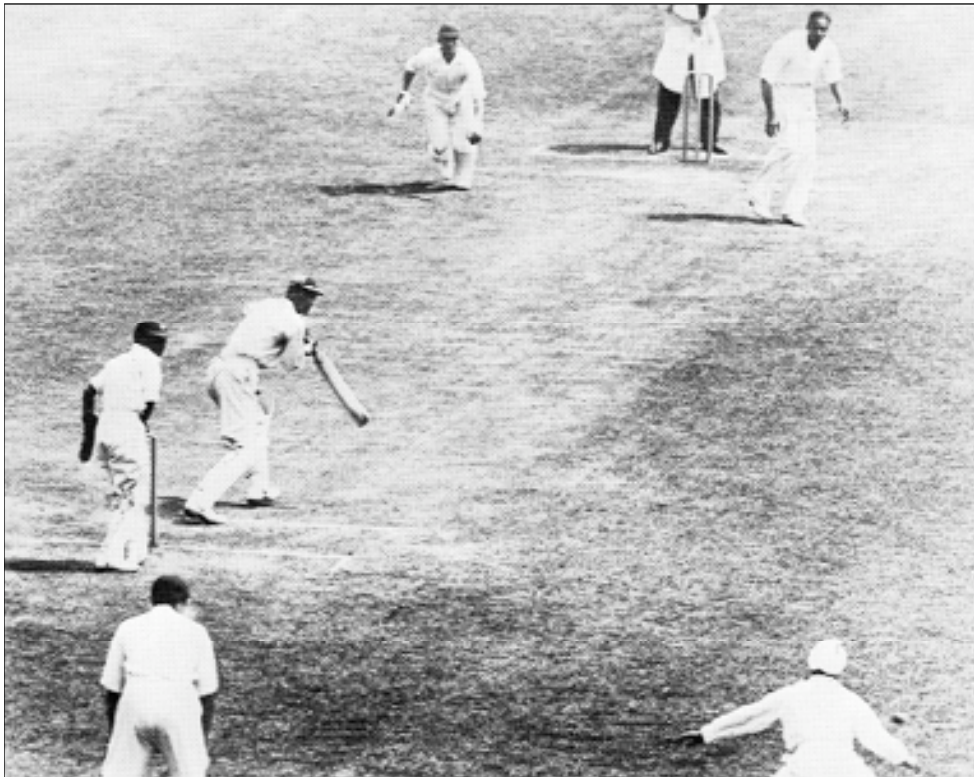
# *Cricket's Empire*

“Cross-National Cultural Diffusion: The Global Spread of Cricket” by Jason Kaufman and Orlando Patterson, in *American Sociological Review* (Feb. 2005), Univ. of Pennsylvania, Dept. of Sociology, 3718 Locust Walk, Philadelphia, Pa. 19104-6299.

Cricket has been called by one historian the “umbilical cord of Empire linking the mother country with her children.” Another called it the “main vehicle for transferring the appropriate British moral code from the messengers of empire to the local populations.” By any measure, the British effort was spectacularly successful; during the 19th and 20th centuries the game attracted players throughout the empire from Australia to Zimbabwe, and it’s now dominated by the former colonies. Yet in

the United States and Canada, the game, after enjoying some initial popularity, failed to catch on. In that experience, according to Harvard University sociologists Kaufman and Patterson, lie important lessons about cultural diffusion in our own global age.

Mass media and popular tastes may dominate the global spread of values and beliefs, but elites also play an important role. That’s certainly the case with cricket. In the British Empire, the English overlords



*India was soundly beaten when it played its first cricket match against England's national team in 1932, but today, India and several other former British colonies dominate the sport.*