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# Center for the Study of Ethics in Society

Papers published by the Center  
Volume 11 No. 2  
June 1998



**Affirmative Action: A Vision For Today**

**Kimberly Hellmers, Barbra Jotzke,  
Patrick Kinuthia and Eric Wampler**

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# **Affirmative Action: A Vision For Today**

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**Barbra Jotzke**

Western Michigan University

**Patrick Kinuthia**

Western Michigan University

**Eric Wampler**

Western Michigan University

**Introduction by**

**Joseph Ellin, Ph.D.**

Western Michigan University

Presented January 19, 1998 for Martin Luther  
King Jr. Day at Western Michigan University

Sponsored by  
the Center for the Study of Ethics in Society, the  
Department of Philosophy and  
the Wesley Foundation



The Ethics Center has sponsored a presentation on Martin Luther King Jr. day since the beginning of the MLK Day celebration on campus. For the past two years the program has taken place in the Wesley Foundation, which has been a co-sponsor, and the program has been put on by graduate students in the department of philosophy. We are grateful to the Wesley Foundation, and their director, the Reverend Jeff Williams, and office manager and program support leader Susan Daniels, for their co-operation

The subject is Affirmative Action and I am sure everybody is aware that Affirmative Action is one of the most controversial social issues in the United States today, ranking with abortion and assisted suicide as one of the issues that seem to generate quite a lot of debate. I would say that Affirmative Action is of those issues by far the most important not only because it has the potential for affecting a vast number of people but also because there is a real potential for making a significant change in American society. Some people think it has been doing that already, some people think it hasn't, but it certainly has that potential and something like that is the goal. Perhaps this is the reason why it is enormously controversial.

You are probably aware there was a referendum in California a few years back to prohibit Affirmative Actions in state programs such as admissions to the University of California and that proposal was passed by the voters and was then challenged in court and has subsequently gone into effect in California. You also may know that in Texas the Federal Appeals Court has ruled that the Affirmative Action program at the University of Texas regarding admissions and other programs was a violation of the Federal Constitution. You also may know that in the recent election the issue of Affirmative Action was on the ballot in the city of Houston, Texas, and there it was approved by the voters in that city. The US Supreme Court has not really had a decision on Affirmative Action since the late seventies and the decision in that case is regarded as somewhat ambiguous and possibly no longer good law. So both the legal status and the status in terms of public opinion and also I would say the philosophical and moral status is very much open to debate.

The goal of the program today is to present you with the kinds of debate that is going on out there. This is an educational and information program. We want the members of the audience, you, to be able to come away from



here with an enhanced understanding of what is being said and what the issues are and what the points are one way or the other in this discussion so that each of you can be in a better position to make up your own mind. So the panel has been organized in such a way so that all of the main points, we hope, will be presented to you in this panel format. At least that is the goal we are trying to reach today.

You might want to know something about our panelists. They are all philosophy graduate students. Barbra Jotzke is from Des Moines, Iowa and did her undergraduate work at Valparaiso University, in Indiana; she is a second year student and will finish her work at WMU in the spring and receive her MA in June. Eric Wampler, from Holland and Hope College, is also a second year student, who receives his MA in April, and then will complete his Ph.D. in philosophy at the University of Illinois. Patrick Kinuthia comes to us from Kenya. This has been a year of firsts for Patrick. Coming to Kalamazoo is not only his first trip to America but his first trip outside his own country. And this winter he has encountered something he never met in Kenya: cold and snow! Patrick is interested in American culture and political philosophy and ethics. Kimberly Hellmers is



originally from Los Angeles but calls Durango, Colorado home. She did graduate work last year at the University of Montana and as she moves ever-eastward, hopes to eventually reach the east coast.

So these folks represent our very diverse and interesting group of graduate students.

I also want to recall that last year the Philosophy Department, Ethics Center and Wesley Foundation sponsored an MLK Day panel on the subject of civil disobedience. The graduate students who comprised that panel were Barbra Jotzke, then a mere first year student, Rick van Every, Pam Houtteman, and Bev van Reenan. Pam completes her MA this year and meanwhile has been teaching medical ethics for us in Grand Rapids. Rick, who came to us from Drake University in Des Moines and lives in Illinois, and Bev, who is from West Virginia, are both doing further graduate work, Rick at the University of Iowa and Bev at the University of Utah.

I think you will agree that these are all remarkable young people and deserve a great deal of credit for their accomplishments. We professors are pleased to be able to assist them as they prepare themselves for their futures.

**Joseph Ellin**

## **Affirmative Action: Diverse Goals, Diverse Policies**

Eric Wampler

Affirmative Action is a name that applies to a diverse range of procedures and activities designed to advance race and gender equality in society. And while the four authors in this publication focus on Affirmative Action in universities, Affirmative Action also targets increased equality in government contract, in jobs, in housing opportunities and in many other facets of life.

Although both seek equality, Affirmative Action is different from federal and state civil rights laws prohibiting discrimination, because Affirmative Action involves an active role of the institution to help bring in under represented minorities or women, whereas anti-discrimination laws play the passive role of keeping institutions from shutting the door on them. In any case, both in the public and private sector, Affirmative Action policies are largely voluntary. Whether or not Affirmative Action policies actually work, or are themselves unfair, is controversial.

## **What are the goals of Affirmative Action?**

There are several possible goals that Affirmative Action policies attempt to realize. These goals include the following:

1) fighting discrimination, 2) compensating for past injuries, 3) striving for a fair distribution of opportunities and responsibilities, 4) seeking social well-being, and 5) promoting diversity.<sup>1</sup>

Some of these goals may largely overlap, and not all need even be present. Which goals are behind any policy depends only on the institution implementing it.

## **What are the specific policies of Affirmative Action?**

To achieve whichever goals the institution is pursuing, Affirmative Action policies vary widely in university admission procedures, but a range of strengths can be assessed from the weakest--or, some would argue, the least intrusive--to the strongest.

1) The weakest form of Affirmative Action involves outreach programs, notifying under represented groups of the availability of the university's education without actually employing preferential treatment in admission.

2) Providing special educational opportunities for youths in under represented

groups may be seen as next in strength.

3) Next are programs that offer financial aid to accepted applicants of under represented gender or racial groups.

4) Programs in the next stronger kind of policy would, if faced with admitting only one of two students, take the applicant from an under represented gender or racial group over the non-under represented applicant only if both applicants are of equal qualification to do the university course work and graduate in a reasonable amount of time.

5) Next in strength are programs that consider and applicant's membership to an under represented group along with other characteristics for qualification. So, if the university can only admit of two applicants both qualified to graduate from the university in a reasonable amount of time, and one is a white and the other is a minority applicant who is slightly less qualified than the white applicant, the minority applicant would get the offer of admission over the white applicant.

To give an idea of how much weight is given membership in a minority group or gender, it is helpful to consult the results of a 1992 survey of undergraduate admission policies of 2,000 two-year and four-year institutions.<sup>2</sup> On a

scale of '1' being 'not considered' and '5' being 'the single most important factor', high school GPA scored 4.0 for public schools and 4.0 for private. Admission test scores--3.6 and 3.4; essays--1.7 and 2.6; state of residence--1.8 and 1.2; high school course work--2.9 and 1.8; gender--1.2 and 1.4. The survey lists the weighted factors of 16 different consideration in all, although most schools certainly use only a fraction of these considerations.

6) A quota system is the strongest form of Affirmative Action, in which the university takes a certain number of applicants of the under represented group no matter what the relation is in qualification to the white or male applicants. Quota systems have been ruled unconstitutional by the Supreme Court, but universities have been allowed to continue to use non-quota race or gender considerations in their admissions policies as long as doing so serves a compelling state interest and is a necessary means of achieving that interest.<sup>3</sup>

The controversy of Affirmative Action centers on whether some of these specific policies are acceptable, or whether any kind of policy by the university to actively promote greater representation by minorities or women will be unjust.

## NOTES

1. Lopez, Gerald P. et al. "An Affirmative Action Manual" World-Wide Web. Available at: <<http://www.law.ucla.edu/classes/archive/civaa/>> Section 2.3
2. American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers, Challenges in College Admissions: A Report of a Survey of Undergraduate Admissions Policies, Practices and Procedures 1995. As appears in "Getting Into College" CQ Researcher Feb. 23, 1996: 169-192. p. 172.
3. Zembaty, Jane S., Chapter 7. "Affirmative Action" Social Ethics: Morality and Social Policy. 5<sup>th</sup> ed. Eds. Thomas A Mappes and Jane S. Zembaty. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1997. 298-304. P. 301.



## **Affirmative Action: A Contradiction of Theory and Practice**

Kimberly Hellmers

The struggle for equality has been long and difficult and it is on-going. We have made great efforts to acknowledge past wrongs through word and deed and to use knowledge gained to create a more positive and beneficial future for all. As a society, we have come to champion those causes that strive towards and support equal opportunity in every aspect of life. Policies have been, and still are, created in the name of equality alone. The civil rights movement of the 1960's offered the possibility of equality in a way that had never been politically or socially attempted in this country. It proposed the idea of a true and just equality that would be guaranteed to all individuals. Each and every one of us would be given the same opportunity to grow and prosper. The Civil Rights Act of 1964<sup>1</sup> deems that all people have the right to be free from individual discrimination based on race, color, religion, national origin and sex. The act was intended to address all individuals, not groups, not classes, not genders. These are the words and ideas that



people have fought and died for. These are the words and ideas that just may save us as a civil society. In September of 1965, less than two years after signing the Civil Rights Act, President Johnson signed Executive Order 11246, giving legal life to what is commonly known as Affirmative Action. The argument to made here is that Affirmative action policies, although implemented to bolster individual, equal rights as designated under Title VII in the Civil Rights Act, have come to reject the very ideas behind those rights, and therefore need to be abolished.<sup>2</sup>

For years, women and minorities have fought for the right of equal status; in position, in pay, in recognition and opportunity. It was not a fight for special or elevated status, but simply, equal status. Affirmative Action (hereafter referred to as AA) was intended to be a policy that ended individual discrimination and promoted equality. It ended up being a policy that acknowledges and ultimately pursues preference, not equality, in hiring and admittance practices (among others) for minorities and women based on a group status. This is, by definition, a discriminatory practice. As a minority and/or a woman, one can expect to be granted preference, not based on character or

qualification, but on the group status of one's race and/or sex. It is one thing to target specific groups for the purpose of soliciting the most diverse and qualified individuals to apply or otherwise seek out a position on their own for the sake of diversity, but AA takes a great step further and *awards* positions with preference to those who fit a racial or biological category. This is blatantly contradictory to the Civil Rights Act which states,

Nothing contained in this title shall be interpreted to require...preferential treatment to any individual or to any group because of the race, color, religion, sex, or national origin of such individual or group on account of an imbalance which may [already] exist...<sup>3</sup>

AA is a policy that actively pursues, and gives preference to, groups of people, as opposed to granting equal opportunity to individuals based on individual qualification and character. The design of the Civil Rights Act was to acknowledge people as individuals. It grants equal opportunity for everyone. It was written in response to the categorizing and rejection of people based on a group status. It was an attempt to curb discrimination. AA is itself doing the one thing that the civil rights act

set out to rectify and is therefore itself a contradictory policy. By granting preference based on race and sex, it is, at the same time discriminating against people based on those same group identifying features. It is in this respect that AA intentionally and willfully rejects specific groups of people, which, is how we have come to define discrimination.

The obvious and logical objection here is that AA is distinguishing certain groups as in need of preferential treatment based on their race and gender alone. The one thing that women and minorities have been fighting against all along. In the present climate of political correctness at all cost, how can they ever be certain that their gained status is just? How can they ever be certain that their position was granted on ability alone? They cannot. Because of the promotion of AA, women and minorities can not be certain that they have been granted a position or have gained admittance based on their individual abilities and accomplishments. Even those who do succeed on their own merits are, unfortunately, statistically grouped with those who are a product of a policy of prejudice. The unfortunate consequence of AA is that women and minorities are in many cases given preference over more qualified candidates, in an

attempt to make up for past prejudices and discrimination. Under Title IV of the Civil Right Act, when discussing education, it is specifically stated that, ... “ ‘desegregation’ shall not mean the assignment of students to public schools in order to overcome racial imbalance.”<sup>4</sup>

Compensation is a complex issue, and as a justifiable reason for AA, it is unobtainable and impossible. As a society, or even a culture, we can change our ways. We have, and we continue to do so. What we can not change is the past. The fact is that the policies made today need to be those that will affect, and be a reflection of, the people of tomorrow. When the legal system upholds *any* policy that gives a favorable nod to a group of people based on anything other than their character and skill, the door is opened for a tidal wave of resentment, fear and hate. It is time for forward looking policies that hold equality up to the highest standard. AA is a policy that is backfiring on those it was intended to aid and is only serving to widen the gap between those who would otherwise be brought together.

In striving for equal opportunity, the goal was, and still is, to strike a balance, to find a single standard by which every person could be evaluated without regard to race, color, religion



and sex. This is a noble and needed goal indeed, and one that should not be thrown out with the proverbial bath-water. In the process to achieve this balance, AA policies have succeeded in gaining for certain groups position through a redistribution of political and social weight. The scales, simply put, have been tipped in the other direction. The idea of equal opportunity has been rendered either useless, or incapable of accomplishment.

In the age of political correctness it is risky to point at any policy that deals with race or gender and claim discrimination, or worse, reverse discrimination. But when one policy, any policy, is replaced by it's opposite, there are very few ways to describe it in a palatable manner. Discrimination by any other name, is the same. AA does not provide equality, it only replaces one preference with another

It is by this standard alone that AA is completely, and by definition, counter intuitive to the goal of Equal Opportunity and the Civil Rights Act in general. How can we expect to achieve equality in any respect, when there are socially and politically embraced policies that grant racial and gender preference, whomever the recipient may be? The answer is, we can not.

This is not a claim that equality has been achieved. There are obviously many obstacles to be overcome, but they are social and psychological obstacles, not political policy ones. We can not force people to change their ways of thinking with laws. AA is policy that was never capable of being implemented in any useful manner and now only stands to make matters worse. Through these types of continued preferential practices, we as a society move further away from the harmony we want and from the equality we deserve.

Affirmative Action has shown itself to be inherently contradictory and at the very least, morally questionable. It certainly has not lived up to its name as a 'positive' movement. Being a form of discrimination, it should be abolished altogether.

## NOTES

1. "Civil Rights Act of 1964" Public Law 88-532 - July 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1964 (H.R. 7152) An Act.
2. For the purposes of this discussion I will be referring to academic and other hiring or placement opportunities. These should not be viewed as exhaustive categories.
3. Public Law 88-532, Title VII - Equal Employment Opportunity - Section 703.2.j.
4. Public Law 88-532, Title IV - Desegregation of Public Education - Definitions, Section 401.b



## Affirming the Affirmative Action Intention

Barbra Jotzke

I shall argue that Affirmative Action, while commendable in theory, does not work on the university level. Affirmative Action would better serve its purpose if it were implemented in the K-12 education level.

In order to discuss Affirmative Action in the University, an important distinction is needed between 1) the purpose of Affirmative Action, including its goals and aims and 2) the specific implementation that we have currently.

The first step must be then to understand the purpose of Affirmative Action as it was initially conceived. One goal of Affirmative Action, on which I will focus, is to create a just society in which each member has an equal opportunity and resources to achieve the best in their particular lives. This does not necessarily imply that each person should be given equal outcomes, but equal opportunity.

The goal, as stated by President John F. Kennedy was "equal opportunity in employment" by eradicating the then widespread practices of racial, religious and ethnic discrimination.<sup>1</sup>

President Lyndon B. Johnson in his 1965 commencement address at Harvard University, argued that fairness required more than a commitment to impartial treatment.

You do not take a person who for years has been hobbled by chains and liberate him, bring him up to the starting line of a race and then say, "you're free to compete with all the others," and still justly believe you have been completely fair. Thus it is not enough just to open the gates of opportunity. All our citizens must have the ability to walk through those gates... We seek not ... just equality as a right and a theory but equality as a fact and equality as a result.<sup>2</sup>

Thus, in order to reach these goals, extra assistance is given to those, women and minorities, who have been disadvantaged traditionally in the United States.

This aim, providing all people the resources needed for advancement and providing particular assistance to individuals who, for reasons of social convention, are not adequately equipped to compete on an equal level, is fundamentally commendable and should drive our lawmaking decisions.

However, considering the second part of the division made earlier, the particular implementation seen in universities does not facilitate the aim of Affirmative Action. Affirmative Action in Universities has been implemented as:

1) a two tiered system whereby students of particular minority groups are accepted based on less strict standards;

2) quotas whereby students are accepted to represent a particular racial mix among students regardless of academic ability;

3) different, unstated, performance standards where minority students are not challenged to achieve high standards; and/or

4) active recruitment of minorities and women.

Affirmative Action in these forms injures both the people it is intended to benefit and the University system.

Consider an example close to us and recently publicized in the news. University of Michigan appears to have a two track system of admissions.<sup>3</sup> This was discovered, even with widespread denial, by finding charts used in determining if individuals met basic entrance criteria. Carl Cohen obtained the top secret

charts through the Freedom of Information Act. The charts referred to the race of applicants often and appeared to have different and lower selection criteria for minority applicants.<sup>4</sup> In such a system, applicants were judged by different criteria, in this case the minimum GPA and sat scores required for admittance, depending on their race.

This practice does not benefit the students whom it intends to benefit. Because students of particular minority groups are admitted with lower requirements, they may not be as adequately prepared to succeed. Considering the University of Michigan example, those admitted through the Affirmative Action criteria are 2 ½ times more likely not to graduate in six years than other students. Affirmative Action is not working if students don't graduate.<sup>5</sup>

Also, the university as an institution, and all students it intends to serve, suffer. The university is structured so that it builds upon basic skills and specializes those skills into specific fields. The criteria for admission are intended to select students who have a particular level of mastery of basic skills. Without this guarantee classes are unable to begin with each member having an equal opportunity to succeed.



Because of these two reasons and the number of individuals who may require assistance to even reach the university level, the university is not the best place to implement Affirmative Action practices to bring about an ideal just state.

The benefits of Affirmative Action as currently implemented have diminished in time. When formed, Affirmative Action may have gone a long way to equalize the treatment and the opportunities afforded minorities and women. However, times have changed and Affirmative Action practices must as well. To reinvigorate Affirmative Action so that it may reach its intended end, we should focus our attention on giving all people the opportunity to achieve the academic level required to enter the university on a single scale.

It is thus the K-12 educational system which needs to be reevaluated and renewed. Affirmative Action practices should work with students in K-12 so that they may be prepared for a university. So that they have the tools needed to compete with other members of society.

The exact method for creating this change is still largely unknown. However, confidence should be placed in those individuals

who have an expertise in education to develop the best programs for a positive outcome. Some changes have already begun and others are needed. For instance, funding should be equalized so that even schools in economically depressed areas can provide competitive education. Mentoring programs should be developed for minorities and women by individuals who have succeeded in academic and professional pursuits. University recruitment of minorities may not be the best system to encourage them to attend school.

Encouragement to attend college should begin early in a student's academic career. The K-12 school system is the most appropriate place for setting expectations for students to achieve admittance into college.

Affirmative Action should not be required at the university. With initiatives such as these and others in K-12 schools, all people will be given the opportunity and equipped to excel and achieve entrance to the university system. By doing so the goal of Affirmative Action will be better served. Having all people equally prepared for university, we are one step closer to having a just society.

## NOTES

1. From "Stephen Cahn on the History of Affirmative Action (1995)" found at <http://humanitas.ucsb.edu:80/projects/aa/docs/Cahn.html>
2. *ibid.*
3. "TRB from Washington: Numbers Racket"  
The New Republic December 22, 1997. Page 8.
4. *ibid.*
5. *ibid.*



## **The Forgotten Factor: The Economic Principles of Affirmative Action**

Patrick Kinuthia

The position that I stand for this afternoon is that Affirmative Action should not be done away with but should be changed so that preferences in education are provided on the basis of economic class, not race or gender. (Kahlenberg 1995, ix). This position implies three things:

1. That America needs Affirmative Action;
2. That the present forms of Affirmative Action are not what America needs; and
3. That Class-based Affirmative Action will avoid the shortcomings of race- and gender-based Affirmative Action.

Let us look at the three separately. Why does America need Affirmative Action? America needs Affirmative Action because of historical reasons. Its history is one that is tarnished by discrimination against minorities and women. To most people this discrimination has led to the poverty witnessed among the minorities and women.

In the 1960's, some people felt that

something ought to be done to compensate for the misdeeds of the majority's ancestors. Some, like James Forman, demanded cash compensation.

However, the popular idea was not aimed at mere reparation of descendants of the actual victims of discrimination but also aimed at reversing the effects it had on them.

Martin Luther King, in his book *Why We Can't Wait* writes that America

"...must incorporate into its planning some compensatory consideration for the handicaps [the Negro] has inherited from the past"(King 1964, 134).

He adds,

"It is obvious that if a man is entered at the starting line in a race three hundred years after another man, the first would have to perform some impossible feat in order to catch up with his fellow runner"

The Civil Rights Act of 1964, was therefore, not enough. More than just outlawing discrimination and segregation in education and employment, it was required to enable the minorities face the challenges of the new, transformed America.

Lyndon Johnson also recognized this fact and took the banner from King. He says,

"Freedom is not enough. You do not

wipe away the scars of centuries saying: now you are free to go where you want, and do as you desire, and choose the leaders you please. You do not take a person who, for years, has been hobbled by chains and liberate him, bring him up to the starting line of a race and then say 'you are free to compete with all others' and still justly believe that you have been completely fair" (quoted by Kahlenberg 1995, 3).

Thus, for historical reasons Affirmative Action is justified.

Why then do I say that it should be changed from the way it is? This brings us to the second point,

2. Why America should change the present form of Affirmative Action.

Most people are likely to either support or condemn Affirmative Action basing their judgement on the present form of Affirmative Action. To support, or merely object to, the present form of Affirmative Action indicates our failure to grasp the finer but very essential details of the making of American history. Among the supporters are those who connect Affirmative Action to the Civil Rights Movement and would therefore see its eradication as a reversal to the

1960's and the preceding years. To condemn Affirmative Action altogether would be tantamount to refusing to acknowledge the reality of past discriminations' effects.

Affirmative Action both as an idea and as a policy has undergone radical metamorphosis.

I) Civil-Rights-Linked Affirmative Action advocated by Martin Luther King, Robert Kennedy and Lyndon Johnson. This kind of Affirmative Action advocated equal opportunities in education, employment etc.; a color-blind future for America; racial integration to reduce prejudice and foster social harmony; compensation for past discrimination; and addressing the problem of the disadvantaged poor. However with the assassinations of Martin Luther King and Robert Kennedy, and retirement of Lyndon Johnson, this form of Affirmative Action was never endorsed in the American book of policies. Instead it was transformed into:

II) Politically-Linked Affirmative Action, which resulted from the election of Richard Nixon to the presidency. Nixon was not famous for his sympathy for civil rights activities. The question is *Why did he ratify minority preference?*

Surely Nixon and the minorities could



not be said to be the best bedfellows. The only answer we can give is that he wanted to gain some political mileage.

Nixon was aware of a possible Democratic political coalition of labor and civil rights groups. If he were to survive as a politician, he had to, prevent such a coalition. The easiest way of attaining this was to put a wedge between the white workers and the minorities (Kahlenberg 1995, 22). *And the best wedge he could handle was making the minorities appear to be stealing the white workers' jobs.* In effect causing conflict and division between the two. This is the Affirmative Action that was endorsed in America.

The insincerity of Nixon was clear when he sought presidential reelection in 1972. He opposed racial quotas that he participated in creating. He had already made the wedge and it was important to remove the tool from the Socio-political wood, just in case it rusts to his disadvantage.

Politically-linked AA drew much criticism and policy makers were quick to justify it saying that AA creates diversity. Therefore, AA was again transformed into;

III) Diversity-supported Affirmative Action.



Proponents of DSAA argue that it is good because it creates diversity in all sectors of American life. There is however a negative side to this argument. The minorities are given a price tag, i.e., they have something to contribute to our university. The fact that they may be qualified students comes after they are seen as valuable commodities to the universities admitting them. The idea that they are valuable to the university triggers the notion of being used by the university (Kahlenberg 1995, 35)

So the university does not admit the minorities for their own good but for its own selfish goals. In brief, the present form of Affirmative Action has the following shortcomings: By helping only the minorities it applies racial discrimination as it excludes the disadvantaged poor majorities. By using race as a criterion for university admission, racial based Affirmative Action increases racial consciousness instead of working toward color-blindness. By concentrating the policy at the university and job market, and not at the ghettos, AA comes a bit too late, it does not reach out to those who might not have gone to school in the first place because of poverty inherited from long years of racial discrimination. Thus it does not address the

original question of compensation.

Since it excludes the majority whites they feel discriminated and thus it works against social harmony and integration. Thus, America finds itself in a dilemma, it wants to provide equal opportunities, create a color-blind society and simultaneously address the effects of past discrimination without using discrimination, and thus create harmony and racial integration. So which way out for America?

The best way out of this dilemma is to adopt a class-based affirmative action. Class-based affirmative action is a system of preference for the economically disadvantaged.

How does class-based Affirmative Action avoid the shortcomings of radical-based Affirmative Action?

#### A. Compensation:

Given that there is a strong link between past discrimination and current economic situation in America, those minorities who suffered the worst kind of discrimination are concentrated at the lowest stratum of society, while the minorities who suffered the least are the most advantaged minorities. But as is often pointed out, AA benefits often go out to those who can make it in life even without the help of AA. The relationship between the degree of

compensation and the degree of discrimination is thus inverted.

By helping the most economically disadvantaged minorities, class-based affirmative action arguably compensates the most discriminated against minorities other than the least discriminated against (Kahlenberg 1995).

It is not only effective in addressing the problems of minority poor but also the plight of the white poor, a dream that King and Kennedy would have wished come true.

#### B. Integration:

Class-based affirmative action will obviously benefit more minorities but without the increased racial prejudices and hostility associated with racial preferences. Because class preferences maintain a commitment to address past discrimination, the minority will have no reason to be hostile toward the majority than if AA was eliminated all together. The majority will also have no reason to be hostile toward the minority because class based affirmative action includes them as well.

#### C. Color- Blind society:

Using color-conscious means like race-based affirmative action contradicts the very message that most Americans would want to create. Class-based affirmative action though it

addresses the problems created by racism does not use racial means. That is, it caters for the poverty experienced by the minorities because of racial discrimination but does not use race as the criterion to help the poverty-stricken. It will increase the number of minority role models without conveying the message that skin color is a qualification.

#### D. Equal Opportunities:

The phrase 'equal opportunity' is often confused with the word 'opportunity'. We are interested with the former which, according to Kahlenberg, can be realized only if individuals have equal chances to develop their natural talents to the maximum, should they choose to take the time and effort to do so.

Class-based affirmative action will ensure that even the poorest American child will have as equal an opportunity as the child of the richest American. This is because both will not have to worry about inability to pay for their education.

#### Concluding Remarks:

Affirmative Action in its conception was a great idea, but was polluted by political selfishness. If the wishes of Martin Luther King were followed, perhaps America would not be in the social-political quagmire that Affirmative Action presents. In November 1967, King had



said, "Gentlemen, we are going to take this movement and we are going to reach out to the poor people in all directions in this country. We are going into the Southwest after the Indians, into the west after the Chicanos, into Appalachia after the poor whites, and into the ghettos after Negroes and Puerto Ricans. And we are going to bring them together and enlarge this campaign into something bigger than just a civil rights movement for the Negroes" ( quoted from Kahlenberg 1995). But for all Americans.

### Postscript

It was brought to my attention after the presentation that 'class' is another 'four-lettered word'. The argument that was put across is that a system like class-based affirmative action will raise class consciousness and therefore cause class tensions, which would result in class hatred and a high degree of class warfare. Such a fear can be diffused if we looked at class in a more positive rather than Marxist perspective.

To claim that class-based affirmative action will raise class consciousness is analogous to saying that race based affirmative action raises race consciousness. They are however different in the sense that while there is something that cannot be done about one's race, a lot can be



done to improve one's economic class.

Rather than being cowed by the Marxist definition of class, we should see class-based affirmative action simply as a way to provide equal opportunities to enable the children of all the disadvantaged utilize their potentials so that they can improve their situation through hard work. The disadvantaged should include both the poor majorities and poor minorities.

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## **University Policy, Affirmative Action, and the Principles of Justice**

Eric Wampler

The position I take in this paper will be that Affirmative Action policies in university admissions are in accord with the principles of justice. I am defending a strong form of Affirmative Action: given that both applicants are qualified to do the university course work and to graduate in a reasonable amount of time, a university acts justly in admitting a slightly less qualified minority over a slightly more qualified white.

One of the possible goals of Affirmative Action includes compensation for past centuries of injustice and injury. And while the compensation argument might be a defensible position and certainly appeals to our initial moral intuitions, I will not focus on it. Instead, I will focus on a forward-looking argument that strives for a fair distribution of resources and for social well-being; the ultimate end being a greater egalitarian society.

My defense of Affirmative Action contains two elements. First, I will argue that the ends, or goal, of Affirmative Action are just.

Second, I will argue that Affirmative Action does not use unjust means to reach its ends.<sup>1</sup>

### **Ends of Affirmative Action**

To begin with, then, it may be helpful to remember some facts that seem to suggest strong inequities in this society. In a 1995 report, for example, while 42 percent of white high school graduates, ages 18-24, attended college, only 35.8 percent of Latinos and 32.8 percent of blacks likewise attended an institution of higher education.<sup>2</sup> In 1988, 34 percent poor whites resided in the inner cities; this contrasts with the 57 percent of poor blacks who lived in the inner cities.<sup>3</sup> The life expectancy of a black baby born in 1990 is 6-8 years less than that of a white baby.<sup>4</sup> The infant mortality among whites is 7.5 per thousand live births; among blacks it is over double that: 16.5 per thousand live births.<sup>5</sup> Maternal mortality rates during child birth among blacks are over three times that of whites,<sup>6</sup> and blacks have an approximately 16 percent less likelihood than whites of surviving five years after diagnosed with cancer.<sup>7</sup> And finally, while there are more whites than blacks below the poverty line, 9.4 percent of white families live below the poverty line compared with 31.3 percent of black families.<sup>8</sup>

Now since all of these things--making

money, surviving illness, and having healthy children--are things that most people desire, regardless of gender or race, the fact that minorities lack them to a greater proportional extent than whites suggests that the current system of resources, essential services, and opportunities is consciously or unconsciously unfair to minorities. In addition to this racial inequality, there is out-and-out racism, which is evident by the presence of hate crimes; high-profile, substantiated charges of housing and job discrimination; and sobering polls such as following: according to a University of Chicago General Social Survey, National Opinion Center (1994), approximately 15 percent of Americans answered 'yes' when asked if whites have a right to keep black out of their neighborhoods.<sup>9</sup> It should be no surprise that the result of racial inequality and racism<sup>10</sup> is an exacerbation of racial tensions which can further divide society: Peter Singer notes that

...when these inequalities coincide with an obvious difference between people like the differences between African Americans and Americans of European descent, or between males and females, they do more to produce a divided society with a sense of

superiority on the one side and a sense of inferiority on the other. Racial and sexual inequality may therefore have a more divisive effect than other forms of inequality.<sup>11</sup>

A policy, then, that ameliorates racial tensions and helps bring about social harmony is a good policy, all other things being equal.

Affirmative Action in university admissions procedures tends to increase qualified minority representation in professional occupations like doctors, lawyers, and teachers. And since professional occupations tend to confer greater enjoyment of resources, this procedure brings about a more equitable distribution of resources. Also, as Singer points out,

Minority and female doctors and lawyers can serve as role models to other members of minority groups, and to women, breaking down the unconscious mental barriers against aspiring to such positions.<sup>12</sup>

Singer goes on to suggest that having more minority professionals would benefit more minorities in general, as minorities proportionally tend to provide more services for other minorities in typically professional-under-



represented areas. Also, having the universities more closely represent the diverse real world would better enable graduates to know the concerns and expectations that can differ across racial lines as well as differ widely within the same racial group, which would benefit both minorities and whites: according to Robert Atwell, president of the American Council on Education (representing 1,800 colleges and universities):

The whole basis of affirmative action is to recognize that we need to make the educated work force of this nation look like America if we're to compete in this world.<sup>13</sup> [Note that Atwell's "whole basis" is only one goal in this paper.]

If these factual claims are true, then, Affirmative Action would represent a progression towards racial equality concerning our society's resources, which would help repair racial tension and promote social harmony. And, so, all other things being equal, Affirmative Action is a just policy as its ends are the establishment of a greater egalitarian society.

### **Means of Affirmative Action**

It could be said, however, that I am trying to have the ends justify the means, means which are themselves unjust. Certainly any talk

of ends will plant one squarely in the consequentialist realm of moral justification but what of the deontologist who claims that a deontological requirement (e.g., along the lines of, "One should not lie.") is being violated? Always using equality in one's dealings with others would be a vague formulation of the requirement in question.<sup>14</sup> But as we do not treat the homeowner equally when he or she is subject to eminent domain in order to construct a direct road from the community to the hospital--thus saving precious moments and lives--sometimes unequal treatment is warranted by a situation.<sup>15</sup> But the deontological thrust of the question remains: If the original actions of discrimination were unjust, shouldn't actions of reverse discrimination be unjust as well? To answer this, since university positions are a resource that should be divided up in a fair way, we must look to distributive justice to aid us in our inquiry.

Distributive justice demands that we observe the principle of equal consideration of interests. This is a principle that says that we must weigh exactly the same any two persons' interests--or desires--regardless of whose interests we are considering.<sup>16</sup> If I come upon the scene of an accident, for example, in which

two people have sustained the same extent of injuries, I cannot give my only shot of morphine to one person simply because that person is white or simply because that person is black. I am obliged to weigh both of their interests equally (and presumably, here, pick arbitrarily).

So in considering two applicants for one university spot, both of their interests must have the same weight. For example, while both of our hypothetical applicants are qualified to graduate from the university in a reasonable period of time, one is a white applicant and one is a slightly less qualified minority applicant. As they both equally want the spot, I must make the decision as to which to accept by using the university's goals as the deciding criteria. Many say that the university's goal here should be to enroll the most qualified applicant possible. But that only raises the question of why being the most qualified is the only relevant characteristic for our criteria. Edwin C. Hettinger presents and examines three main reasons--efficiency, desert, and rights--and offers explanations why each is unsatisfactory in the context of the Affirmative Action debate.<sup>17</sup>

Concerning the first, efficiency, it would seem that the university wants to take only the most qualified applicants so as to create greater

efficiency in society. We could rely on more professionals being more qualified since the universities themselves were taking only the most qualified applicants possible.

But while many would take the promise for the most possible efficiency as a self-justifying virtue, in reality it is not at all clear that efficiency is morally relevant here. One may become more efficient if one learns to type correctly rather than peck-type with two fingers, but one is not morally obliged to learn the correct way to type.<sup>18</sup> Also, it is important to remember, the minority applicant, as well as the white applicant, must be deemed qualified to graduate from the university in the first place. So the type of Affirmative Action defended here does not ask society to tolerate any more unqualified professionals in the work place than already surely existed with primarily white professionals. And it also seems that the short-term efficiency costs that Affirmative Action is asking us to make are outweighed by the long-term investment of increasing the talent pool by increasing the proportions of currently under represented minorities:

What sense does it make, particularly with the globalization of markets and services, to waste the potential of nearly



2/3 of the national community? By expanding the pool of candidates who will become tomorrow's teachers, scientists, and management executives, we improve the quality of our products, our services, and our leadership.<sup>19</sup>

Concerning the second commonly-held reason for a university to admit only the most qualified--that of desert--many find it a truism that by simply being the most qualified applicant, one deserves the university spot. Again, however, a closer examination reveals otherwise. As Hettinger notes, most of the things that make an applicant qualified are a function of the following factors:

...(a) innate abilities, (b) home environment, (c) socio-economic class of parents, (d) quality of the schools attended, (e) luck, and (f) effort or perseverance. A person is only responsible for the last factor on this list, and hence one only deserves one's qualifications to the extent that they are a function of effort.<sup>20</sup>

Hettinger goes on to point out that, in fact, many minorities who are slightly less qualified in the normal use of the word would be considered more deservingly qualified due to effort alone,



since statistically they have more hurdles to pass than whites do. But in any case, because so much of one's qualifications depend on circumstances beyond one's control, being more qualified by the application process doesn't make one deserve to be admitted over someone else.

Finally, concerning the third commonly-held reason why a university should admit only the most qualified applicant--that of rights--it would seem that the most qualified applicant has a right to the university spot.<sup>21</sup> But, once again, careful scrutiny indicates otherwise. To see why, we have to remember the principle of equal consideration of interests.

Can a white rejected by a university claim that the university gave less weight to his or her interests than to the minority applicant selected instead? No, because being slightly more qualified than the minority candidate does not make his or her interests weigh more heavily--we must weigh both interests the same and not say to the minority student, "Since you are slightly less qualified, your interests in this regard are of intrinsically less concern to us." So how does the university pick which student it will admit? As Singer notes, it does so by appealing to its goals: "...on matching the applicants against

standards that the university draws up with certain policies in mind."<sup>22</sup> Some of a university's goals may include advancing the various academic disciplines, providing qualified citizens whose industry will benefit the state and the nation at large, and providing for social well-being.

Increasing the representation of minorities as professionals is a specific goal the university can adopt as well, designed for greater social harmony. The interests of the slighted white are not being weighted less than the minority applicant--they are weighted exactly the same.<sup>23</sup> It is the social goals that determine which candidate is picked. Social goals that satisfy the interests of all of us in greater society, seeking to provide more harmony and happiness for all. The different treatment, then, of different applicants is justified by these legitimate goals. This is similar to preferring to give first aid to a doctor injured in an accident even if he or she is less injured than many others present--he or she could then assist in helping those more injured, in this way better facilitating the interests of all involved.

In conclusion, then, since a university might adopt Affirmative Action procedures to bring about a more egalitarian society, and since

they do not resort to unjust means, such as violating someone's rights, to reach that goal, Affirmative Action in university admissions are in accord with the principles of justice.

## NOTES

1. In my paper, I agree that Affirmative Action policies are not morally forbidden, and so open up the door to their being morally permissible. The kind of moral permissibility is different though, from being an amoral action like vacuuming your living room. Furthermore, showing that Affirmative Action policies are not forbidden does not demonstrate that they are merely permissible, as they could be obligatory. For arguments showing that they are neither forbidden nor obligatory but are permissible as a self-imposed moral obligation, see Joseph Ellin's "Racial Preference Redressed: Why Race-based Preferential Treatment Isn't Always 'Naked'."

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10. To avoid (perhaps unavoidable) ambiguity, I take the following three terms to mean roughly the following: (a) racial discrimination--treating others differently because of their race, whether from good intentions or ill, and whether the facts support the reasons for the discrimination or not (e.g., this paper outlines a program of Affirmative Action that seeks to promote social harmony by considerations of race, which has good intentions and, I hope, correct facts); (b) racial inequality--the state of affairs that occurs when resources and/or erroneous facts (e.g., forcing blacks to sit at the back of the bus in an attempt to demean them and /or based on the egregiously erroneous belief that their presence sullies whites). Note that to call the Affirmative Action policies defended here 'racist', based on these definitions, is incorrect.

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15. Thomas Nagel uses the eminent domain analogy, but I have added the hospital, which brings out the justifiability of the action all the more. Nagel, Thomas. "A Defense of Affirmative



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16. Singer, p. 21.

17. Hettinger, Edwin C., p. 308-10.

18. Ibid, p. 308. Hettinger uses a different example--that of carrying two grocery bags instead of one, but the point is not the same.

19. Lopez, Gerald P. et al. “An Affirmative Action Manual.” World-Wide Web. Available at: <<http://www.law.ucla.edu/classes/archive/civaa/>>. Section 2.34

20. Hettinger, p.309.

21. Hettinger gives his own account of why it does not make sense to talk of an applicant’s rights in this regard, but I have followed a different tack here, mostly after Singer’s own consequentialist line of reasoning.

22. Singer, p. 47.

23. Ibid, p. 47

## BIOGRAPHIES

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\*As of the date of publication, Barbra Jotzke and Eric Wampler have completed their Master of Arts degrees in Philosophy. Eric will be starting work on his Ph.D. at the University of Illinois, Champagne-Urbana, in the fall of 1998. Barbra Jotzke, utilizing her practical ethics and public relations background, is moving into the professional arena.

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