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## Point/Counterpoint: Is Affirmative Action Still Needed?

Mike A. Cobb, *Liberty University*



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By Mike Cobb

I define affirmative action as granting a person of a certain race, extra assistance or value, solely on the basis of his color, so that he or she is able to be hired or admitted somewhere. Using this form of racial preferences as an attempt to redress a national injustice is rewarding someone who wasn't wronged by punishing someone who isn't guilty. These policies excuse mediocrity instead of mandating excellence. Affirmative action policies are the opposite of the racially neutral way that we're supposed to evaluate prospective employees. Racial diversity is not something so important that we should advocate racist practices to get there. The constitution mandates equal opportunity, not diversity.

#### Approves Racism

Affirmative action policies revert back to the very system of racial preferences that so many fought to overcome. Justifying racism today to recompense racism past is illogical. While decrying the evils of our nation's racist history, it seems that we've decided that for our nation's future, a "little" racism is acceptable, for a time that "someone" decides is ok, in areas where "someone" deems it necessary. For example, Justice O'Connor somehow granted a certain law school another twenty five years to be racist in their admittance of students, after which suddenly racism will be illegal again I assume. Aren't things supposed to be legal or illegal based upon laws instead of a calendar?

#### Racial Disparities Aren't Always Racist

Visible racial disparities may simply be through a lack of interest from those of a certain race in applying or a lack of suitable candidates who have applied. What would be racist would be using a system of racial preferences to force the racially desired mix. When the primary characteristic that a school or business considers is someone's race instead of their interests, abilities, or qualifications, then the school or business is practicing racism -- and that should be illegal. The key should be freedom of opportunity, not freedom of result.

#### Assuaging White Guilt

Affirmative action policies may come from a sense of white guilt, but they seek to atone for racism by being racist. They offer "assistance" to people who never lived under Jim Crow by denying equal access to people who weren't involved in perpetuating Jim Crow laws. Blacks don't need a white benefactor for them to succeed in life. They're smart enough and capable enough to succeed on their own, with a fair chance and an opportunity.

#### Slavery of the Mind

Affirmative action policies mean we've moved from physical chains (slavery) to legal chains (Jim Crow laws) to mental chains. What does it say of a society that used to physically restrain people of color from doing things they should have been allowed to do, that it now teaches the same individuals that they are incapable of doing some of these things on their own?

#### Implied Inferiority, Excused Mediocrity

Affirmative action policies teach that you either can't attain certain academic standards, or don't need to, since your skin color will be the final evaluative measure anyway. Shelby Steele calls it "...the hidden incentive *not* to do what we believe preferences will do." Affirmative action policies imply inferiority by claiming they're needed because there are standards that blacks can't reach. While some blacks may say

they need to be twice as good as whites to get recognition, affirmative action policies state explicitly that you can be only mostly as good, and then your race will grant acceptance in places where whites would be rejected. As John McWhorter writes: "... the lowered bar only deprives black students and parents of any reason to learn how to hit the highest note."

#### Can Reinforce Negative Stereotypes

Bringing races together to demonstrate common interests, abilities, problems, and goals makes sense, but bringing in unqualified people to a group solely because of their color could do more harm than good. As Shelby Steele writes, "...white incompetence is always an individual matter, while for blacks it is often confirmation of ugly stereotypes."

#### Demanded By Current Racism?

Affirmative action can't be used as a fix to societal "inequality" since for one, society can never attain a total equality of circumstances. Even people from the same family have different experiences. Second, is anyone accountable for their behavior as regards their state in life or is it always someone else's fault? What of McWhorter's description of some black students today thusly: "Black students who reject school as "white" do so while ones who lived when lynching was ordinary pursued education obsessively." Third, doesn't seeing affirmative action as needed for economic justice label blacks as poverty-stricken, and fail to recognize those blacks who are successful in today's society?

#### Conclusion

Affirmative action has brought us successful individuals, but at what cost? Would we permit racist means that brought successful whites to the forefront? Placing worth or value on the color of someone's skin is racist and should be illegal both today and in Justice O'Connor's supposed race-free future. These policies often have noble inspiration, but they discourage self-reliance and tolerate a failure to meet the highest of standards. We will not advance to a race-neutral society through legalized racism.