Affirmative Action Essay, Research Paper

Is Affirmative Action Working?

Can America ever stop racial discrimination? One way that some American Institutions have, and still are, trying to end racial discrimination is through affirmative action. Affirmative action is a program that tries to correct the historical effects of discrimination in employment and education for members of certain groups. This program is very controversial because some people believe that affirmative action is helping while others believe that affirmative action is doing exactly the opposite. The intentions of affirmative action are truly noble, but the program needs modifications in order to end discrimination.

Affirmative action is designed to ensure that hiring and admissions practices represent a level playing field for everyone. In other words, affirmative action should be thought of as an invitation to all applicants to apply for employment and education opportunities. Affirmative action tries to compensate for one of the greatest disabilities of minority members: their lack of access to vital employment and education, which white males take for granted. People want and need ethnic diversity in school and in the work place. Ethnic diversity is an equal, representative, amount of individuals from different ethnicities in a certain setting, such as a school campus or a business. This type of diversity is important, as the American voters have demonstrated. Traci Mueller declares in her article ?What?s the Solution,? printed in the magazine Diversity Monthly, that seventy-five percent of voters agreed that efforts for diversity have a more positive impact on college students than a negative one. This will allow students to learn hands on about other ethnic backgrounds as well as improve ?communications and understanding among individuals of different races.? More diversity enhances a wider variety of courses and classroom examples that will help educate people of all races.

Not one person who is fair and in his right mind would argue that affirmative action is a horrible idea. The problem is neither the idea nor the intent; the problem is how the government tries to enforce this diversity.

In 1964, Affirmative Action Laws pushed to end all forms of racial discrimination. Affirmative action programs forced schools, employers, and contractors to end all discriminatory acts. Unfortunately, many white men had difficulties adjusting to this new idea of equality. The program enforced equality by making people take down racial signs and allowing all races apply for jobs and educations. Although, affirmative action allowed for everyone to apply, people still only accepted these applications and usually still did not hire or allow entrance to schools to eligible minorities.

Obviously, in America today the idea that all men and women, of all colors, are equal is a more accepted idea than in the past. Prior to the 1960?s, the almighty, superior group of people in America was the white male. Now, white males are not as superior to women and other races as in previous times; however, to a certain extent, white males are still more powerful, wealthy, and superior to the rest of America. For example, America has never had a President or Vice President who is not a white male. It is very essential that as a society, we need to continue our quest for racial equality. This yearning for equality is why people are in support of affirmative action. If affirmative action actually ended discrimination, the people of the world would be foolish not to be in support of affirmative action.

Unfortunately, people did not and some still do not want equality. Due to the people who were opposed to equality, affirmative action tried to enforce a quota system. In Mississippi and Alabama, highway patrols were forced into adopting a program that would equally represent its society. According to the Philosophy and Public Policy website, the article, ?Civil Rights and Racial Preferences? stated that ?the government required them to hire one black trooper for each white trooper hired until the patrols reached a substantial, specified level of racial integration.? The qualifications of the person were deemed secondary. The most qualified black trooper must be hired, period.

Is it fair that the most qualified minority receives a job over the most qualified person without regards to color? Obviously not, and therefore quotas are not the right answer. The example about the patrols in Mississippi and Alabama demonstrates how quotas can cause reverse discrimination against white workers due to affirmative action. When quotas became popular, UC Davis held sixteen slots open for minority students to insure diversity. Bakke, a white male had been rejected admission into Davis in 1973 and 1974. He sued Davis for discrimination against white males and took the case all the way to the Supreme Court. In Lydia Chavez?s book, The Color Blind, she quotes Justice Powell in his determining opinion concerning the Bakke case: ?Davis had violated the equal protection clause of the fourteenth Amendment by setting aside sixteen slots for underrepresented minorities.? Following his opinion he concluded that race could be a factor in determining a student?s admission, but could not be the main reason for admissions. Depending on how much power a person reads into Powell?s opinion determines the direction that the affirmative action programs will take into universities. Some people took the opinion as he exactly stated: ?no quotas.? Others saw a difference between quotas and goals for promoting diversity. Harvard University interpreted the latter and found that in order to obtain ethnic diversity, that their admission process must pay some attention to numbers in order for a diverse campus.

In broad terms, title VII of the civil rights movement explicitly states that it is unlawful to discriminate against a person based on race, gender, national origin, and religion. Although in the past it was necessary to bend or stretch this law in order for integration of underprivileged persons into society, today it has become unnecessary and therefore unconstitutional. Ward Connerly an African American, once favored affirmative action now believes that ?affirmative action statutes do not have a solid constitutional basis ? I have no doubt that the courts will eventually strike down all preferences based on race, gender, ethnicity, and national origin.? Programs that factor in ?race, gender, ethnicity, and national origin? are encouraging discrimination instead of trying to abolish it. If a law should state that it is unconstitutional for people to factor in race while choosing an applicant, then affirmative action is not in accordance but rather contradictory to the constitution.

Fairness, in the sense of no racial preferences, is another reason affirmative action should be stricken from the law books. In a simplistic and broad sense, if two people were to apply to the same university, one being white and achieving higher-grade qualifications and the other black and lacking the same qualifications, under preferential affirmative action the university would accept the latter. This is not fair for the student who worked hard through his previous education and is denied solely because he was the wrong color. This also undermines Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. dream of living in a colorblind society. The ACLU website wrote an article ?Affirmative Action? where they quoted Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.: ?men should be judged by the contents of the character, not the color of the skin,? which demonstrates his idea of an integrated society. If universities are using race as one of the many factors in determining acceptance, then they are participating in discriminatory acts instead of judging a person by his character and past achievements. Affirmative action gives preferences based on color while a colorblind society does not factor in race.

Most of the people in support of affirmative action programs claim that the policies level the playing field from past discrimination. I do not support this idea. If people want an equal playing field, the new programs must be designed prior to the child turning 18. Programs such as helping children out when they are in their primary education should be a part of equality. Middle and upper class schools receive more benefits than that of a school in the ghetto. According to Jonathan Kozol, the author of Savage Inequalities, in 1987 the city of New York spent on average of $5,500 per pupil. Kozol also states that in the wealthier parts of the suburbs $11,000 per child was spent and that number rose close to $15,000 in the most prestigious parts of the state. Obviously money is not being distributed to the needy children whereas the children with opportunities are receiving benefits that could be used elsewhere. The students of a less prestigious school receive minimum finances and therefore do not have an equal opportunity to learn. These poor children are obviously not benefiting from the equal opportunities of affirmative action. Affirmative action, on the other hand, does not help children learn, but merely assists semi to fully qualified minorities a chance to enter higher education.

Since affirmative action is a compromise, it is far from perfect and far from pleasing everybody. It has opened many doors, but it has not fixed the problem of discrimination. I am for opportunity, but not for special treatment. The majority of people in this country are open-minded and willing to work with people without considering others? sex or color. In today?s day and age, affirmative action is definitely not the answer for equality. It was a good start to ending discrimination and its intentions were morally correct; but in the end, affirmative action is turning discrimination around and not actually helping the people who truly need help. The government needs to take action towards the real problems of equality: poverty and the lack of proper education among other things. Widely supported programs that promote the interests of both lower and middle class Americans that deliver benefits to minorities and whites on the basis of their economic status, and not their race or ethnicity, will do more to reduce minority poverty than the current, narrowly based, poorly supported policies that single out minority groups. A more effective method of hiring fairly, without discrimination, may be a faceless and nameless interview. If perspective employees could send in their resumes, be assigned a number, fill out a written interview, and be hired entirely based on their qualifications, this would solve many of the problems. Using this method to hire and promote would guarantee the most qualified.