

Affirmative Action

13 Myths Promoted by the Right

Myth #1. Affirmative action is no longer needed because gender and race inequalities are nonexistent in America.

The statistics prove otherwise. White men are 33% of the population, yet:

88% of tenured professors.	95% of Fortune 500 CEO's.
85% of partners in major law firms.	97% of school superintendents.
80% of House of Representatives.	99.9% of professional athletic team owners.
90% of U.S. Senate.	100% of U.S. presidents.

White women earn 71 cents, African-American women 64 cents, and Hispanic women 54 cents, to every dollar earned by white men. We do not live in a race/gender blind society.

Myth #2. Affirmative action are quotas where preference is given to white women and people of color.

Quotas are illegal and unconstitutional. Affirmative action permits the consideration of race, provided it is only one of many contributing factors considered (US Supreme Court ruling *Bakke*, 1978). Gender, race, and socio-economic levels are viewed as supplemental criteria -- just as state residency, extracurricular activities, family ties, and athletic ability are also considered. This benefits everyone. "Consent decrees," which are court-mandated hiring goals and timetables imposed by judges towards specific institutions after decades of proven failure to end discrimination, are the only government policies involving quotas. Ending affirmative action would not affect "consent decrees."

Myth #3. Affirmative action fuels reverse discrimination.

Affirmative action does not impose the hiring or admittance of unqualified applicants. Furthermore, of the 91,183 discrimination complaints filed in 1994, only 1.5% alleged that white men had been discriminated against (National Organization for Women).

Myth #4. Affirmative action prevents admissions based on merit only.

Merit is not as simple as SAT or GPA scores. As long as there exists a disparity of resources and opportunities, there will never exist an objective SAT or GPA which tells us who is the most talented, who has the most potential, who has worked the hardest, or who has more of a right to education (even in a perfectly just and equitable society these factors could never describe the talent or potential of an individual). SAT and GPA scores are closely correlated with socio-economic backgrounds, and not related to success in college (Linda Clement, U of Maryland Admissions Director).

Myth #5. Affirmative action puts white women and people of color in positions where they are predisposed to fail.

Some claim that affirmative action is the cause of high drop-out rates for African-American students. The truth is that affirmative action creates a more level playing field for qualified white women and people of color, who would otherwise have been institutionally discriminated against -- regardless of achievement. As a direct result of affirmative action, the number of women physicians has doubled in the last 25 years from 7.6% to 16.9%, and black professional women has increased 125%. The fact that the gaps still exist is an indication that affirmative action is still desperately needed.

Myth #6. Affirmative action has gone too far.

Affirmative action is working but there is more to be done. As the statistics above show, discrimination by race and gender still exists. Studies show that 86% of available jobs are not presently listed in classified ads

but are filled by word-of-mouth. Since neighborhoods and social networks tend to be segregated, word-of-mouth leads to the perpetuation of discrimination, intentionally or not (American Jewish Congress). Of the 4,200 contracts reviewed, the U.S. Labor Department found that 50% were in violation of the Civil Rights Act, resulting in \$39.6 million in back wages.

Myth #7. Affirmative action results in mediocrity.

The University of California system, which (used to) implement aggressive affirmative action policies, has raised its standards 5 times in the last 12 years, becoming one of the most prestigious public universities in the world (UC, Office of the Vice-President, 5/95). Diversity in the work force improves creativity, enhances performance, and improves productivity (*USA Today*, 3/24/1992; *Fortune*, 8/8/1994). A recent ACLU poll shows that 68% of CEO's find affirmative action programs "good, very good, or outstanding." Only 2% of those polled rated them "poor."

Myth #8. Asian Americans are harmed by affirmative action programs.

Affirmative action policies have historically assisted Asian Americans, who have been and continue to be discriminated against. Pacific Islanders and Southeast Asians have poverty rates 3 times greater than white Americans (UCLA School of Urban Planning). In 1992, the admissions rate of Filipino students to the UC system decreased from 32% to 18% when they were dropped from the affirmative action list.

Myth #9. Affirmative action is a gesture to repay black people for past suffering.

Even conservative Shelby Steele acknowledges, "It is impossible to repay blacks living today for the historic suffering of the race....Suffering can be endured and overcome, it cannot be repaid." Affirmative action is a vehicle to end discrimination by ensuring that the net of opportunity is cast widely enough to ensure equal opportunities for everyone. It redefines merit, acknowledging the totality of a person's experience.

Myth #10. Affirmative action benefits only black people.

More than 50% of affirmative action policies are directed at white women, making them the primary focus of affirmative action. Hispanics, Asians and other people of color are also beneficiaries of affirmative action. Affirmative action makes the United States a more just and equitable society, benefiting all who live here.

Myth #11. Affirmative action promotes racial tension and "black inferiority" complexes.

To blame affirmative action for racial tension is double-speak. With or without affirmative action, racism and racial tension has been and is present. The truth behind affirmative action is that it brings more equity to U.S. institutions by guiding hiring/acceptance practices to include individual struggles against racism, sexism, and poverty.

Myth #12. Affirmative action should be based solely on socio-economic factors.

White women and people of color have been victims of discrimination for hundreds of years. Policies addressing discrimination must address all spectrums of discrimination at school and work. The least progress has been made in the upper level salary positions. We need programs based on economic need in addition to, but not instead of, affirmative action.

Myth #13. Affirmative action is to blame for lower income among white males.

Average real wages have fallen 19% and 26% for young families with children since 1973. But affirmative action is not the problem. Everyone is losing jobs as corporations move overseas, downsize, hire part-time workers, automate and computerize. The real travesty is when any student -- male or female, white or of color -- is denied access to education -- not because of affirmative action, but because society has devalued and divested money away from education. According to the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, Affirmative Action is considered essential to insuring that jobs are genuinely and equally accessible to

qualified persons, without regard to sex, race, or ethnicity.

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