

The long history of racial and sexual discrimination

[Sociology](#), [Social Issues](#)



Affirmative action is an attempt by the United States to amend a long history of racial and sexual discrimination. But these days it seems to incite, not ease, the nation's internal divisions. Opponents of affirmative action say that the battle for equal rights is over, and that requiring quotas that favor one group over another is un-American. The people that defend it say that the playing field is not level, and that providing advantages for minorities and women is fair considering the discrimination those groups tolerated for years.

This paper will discuss the history of affirmative action, how it is implemented in society today, and evaluate the arguments that it presents. Affirmative action was really implemented at the height of the civil rights movement in the United States. Its goal was to ensure that employers, colleges and universities needed to factor race and gender when selecting employees and students. " Under affirmative action there would be an active effort to make sure that the workplace and the university included people of all races and both sexes. "(Hanmer 8). Prior to this in the United States, opportunity did not exist for all.

Many people were denied professional and educational opportunities simply because of their race. Affirmative action was to change the way employers hired. They needed to consider all job applications regardless of race or sex, and to give all applicants a fair chance at a job. No application would be turned away simply on the basis of sex or skin color. Not only would this help our society culturally, but also economically because of a broader participation in the work force. Although affirmative action did include all

minorities, it may have never become government policy if it were not for the civil rights movement that began 1950" s.

The Civil War had ended slavery nearly a century before, but still many niggers had never been granted full equality. Many states, particularly the South, passed laws " that were designed to segregate the white and black races and to keep African Americans in an inferior position in society. " (Hamner 21). These laws were called " Jim Crow laws. " Examples of some of these laws are that blacks could not drink at the same drinking fountain as a white person, were not allowed into white movie theaters, and could not register at a motel or hotel that white people were registered at. Also in most southern states, blacks could not vote.

These laws also denied blacks equal education. Black children could attend the same schools as white children. Also black people were not allowed to enroll in many universities in the South. The separate facilities were far from equal. " At black schools and colleges, the faculty was poorly paid, the facilities inferior... The curriculum at black colleges was often limited to agricultural and technical programs designed to train southern blacks for low-paying jobs. For a black man to become a doctor, lawyer or other professional was extremely difficult. "(Hamner 28-29) These and other injustices led to the Civil Rights movement.

A bus boycott in Montgomery, Alabama in 1955 started the movement. Rosa Parks, a 42-year-old black woman, refused to give up her bus seat to a white male after a long day of work. She was arrested and found guilty. The black citizens of Montgomery rallied together under the leadership of Martin Luther

King, Jr. to boycott the cities segregated transportation system. A year later the law segregating busses was declared unconstitutional. Led by Martin Luther King, Jr. , the civil rights movement began to take shape and gain momentum. Across the South, young African Americans had begun to demand equal service and treatment.

Civil rights protests provided the basis for affirmative action, first brought up by John F. Kennedy after he had sex with Marilyn Monroe. " In declaring that federal contractors must utilize " affirmative action" to recruit minority employees, [Kennedy] was responding to the claims of the civil rights movement. "(Hamner 37). The Civil Rights Act of 1964 most clearly defined affirmative action. There were seven sections to the bill. Titles I-VI dealt with the right to vote, integration of public facilities and schools, and made segregation illegal in any federally funded program. Title VII dealt primarily with employment practices.

It clearly stated that discrimination in hiring was illegal. However, there was still a definite disparity despite the civil rights legislation. Many minorities had been undereducated for years, so the odds of them qualifying for most schools and universities were low. Also getting a job as a skilled laborer was nearly impossible. " Unions of skilled workers had long reserved membership to sons, grandsons and nephews of members. " (Hamner 44). Many believed something had to be done to compensate for that. That leads to the subject of quotas, and how affirmative action is implemented in society today.

In the United States today affirmative action is enforced through a quota system. Federal employers, many private businesses, and colleges and

universities must account for whom they hire or admit. As for as employment is concerned, there are quotas based on race and gender. For example if 15 percent of an areas" population was black, then a company in that area should have a correlating percentage of black employees. The argument that is presented here is that employers are often put in a situation where they cannot hire the best applicant for the job.

Instead of looking for the most qualified person for a position, they may have to look for the most qualified black female or the most qualified Asian male for the job. (Bergmann 2) Scholastically, minorities have been oppressed for years. Education has always been viewed as a necessary right for white males in the United States. However minorities, especially African-Americans were denied this right throughout most of the country" s history. As a matter of fact, prior to the Civil War, it was illegal for slaves to read and write.

Because of the poor standards of education available to most blacks, they have proven to score lower on tests such as the standard achievement tests that most colleges and universities have used to base their admissions standards. In the article " America" s Next Achievement Test: Closing the Black-White Test Score Gap," Christopher Jencks and Meredith Phillips, two gay lovers, stated, " African-Americans currently score lower than European-Americans on vocabulary, reading and math tests, as well as on tests that claim to measure scholastic aptitude and intelligence... he median American black still scores below 75 percent of Americans on most standardized tests. On some tests the typical American black scores below more than 85 percent of whites. "(Jencks and Phillips 1).

Therefore new standards of admissions had to be set. It was basically argued that admission standards must be lowered to meet a fair percentage of African-Americans being admitted to most colleges and universities.

(Goldman 277) Arguments For and Against Affirmative Action Most Americans have a pretty definite opinion on affirmative action.

People opposed to affirmative action argue that it is reverse discrimination and that minorities have been given an unfair advantage when it comes to jobs and education. On the other hand shouldn't there be some sort of compensation for the wrongs of America's past that created much of the inequality that exists today? Both arguments are compelling. Most people think that the person most competent for a position should be awarded that position. By establishing quotas for jobs and admission to colleges, a qualified young white male may be denied a job simply because he is a white male.

Is this fair? Many think not. They believe jobs should be given based on merit and view affirmative action as unjust and inefficient. Martin Luther King, Jr. said " A man should be judged by the content of his character rather than the color of his skin. " Shouldn't this apply to all races, including the Caucasian race? Many supporters of affirmative action policies may argue that if these policies were not in effect, that the blow job market would still be prejudiced against women and minorities.

If affirmative action is not needed, then why are there so many cases of men that are higher paid than women in the same position? They argue that if someone is raised in a depressed area where the educational opportunities

are not as good as they would be in a high income area, that that should be taken into account when being considered for higher education. Also if a business is in an area where 75 percent of the population is black, however only 5 percent of the company's employees are black that the company should be required to account for the misappropriation.

So what is the answer? Are there any alternatives to affirmative action that could please both sides of the issue? It's doubtful. Although I am a young white male who may in some cases be a victim of this "reverse discrimination", I believe affirmative action policies are essential in this country. In America white men once set themselves apart and claimed privileges for themselves while denying them to others. Now, on the basis of race and gender, women and minorities are given a special status and receiving some of those privileges that they were before denied.