

# The many faces of affirmative action

[History](#)



The Many Faces of Affirmative Action When Lyndon B. Johnson introduced the Affirmative Action program in 1965, it was hailed as a concrete step in redressing the wrongs perpetrated by 200 years of slavery and created an avenue to the new equality of civil rights. Affirmative Action would level the playing field and give African Americans the help that 200 years of Constitutional Amendments had failed to provide. In a country that guaranteed justice and equality, African Americans were significantly under-represented in the professions, law enforcement, and on college campuses. Affirmative Action gave them the slight step up that they needed to begin to rectify 200 years of institutionalized discrimination in education and the workplace. Affirmative Action is a laudable program that has provided significant justice for women and minorities, compensates for centuries of disadvantage, and helps to raise the standard of living of all the citizens around the country.

The concept of compensatory justice for wrongs that were committed against a race of people on a massive scale is a part of the American tradition. America has a long history of reparations regarding the Japanese in World War II, Native Americans, and General Sherman's promise of 40 acres to the freed slaves at the end of the Civil War (Burch, 2008, p. 121). As moral agents, citizens not only have an obligation to compensate those that have been wronged by society, " it would be unjust to prevent [them] from living up to [their] responsibilities" (Radzik, 2003, p. 328). In addition, it gives the African Americans a fast track to catch up to the society that had left them behind centuries earlier.

Catching up in the free market of education or employment cannot be done when a person is severely disadvantaged, and Affirmative Action simply

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removes the disadvantage. By 1965, the white dominant class had a near monopoly on education, the professions, and upward mobility. Affirmative Action helped to break this stronghold and presented opportunities to the African Americans that were previously excluded due to unfair competition. Supreme Court briefs filed by executives and retired military officers argued that, " the United States cannot compete in today's global economy, or maintain an effective military, without racially diverse business and military leaders" (Foner, 2003, p. 5). By introducing these additional women and minorities into the marketplace for education, it has improved the quality of the educational system, the students, and our global status.

Giving women and minorities an advantage at gaining an education has been instrumental in breaking the cycle of poverty and the destiny of culture. Young people, who had little or no cultural capital, and no family tradition of higher education, would be doomed to repeat the life of poverty and continue the struggle endured by their parents. Though there has been some progress made, there is still a significant gap in representation in the professions such as the legal field (Tatum, Nichols, and Ferguson, 2008, p. 80). Still, Affirmative Action is the best, if not the only, hope that many of these people are given.

In conclusion, America's moral tradition of accepting responsibility, and correcting the wrongs that have been committed as a nation is a basic principle of our country. I believe that rectifying the centuries of job discrimination is our duty as citizens, and Affirmative Action is the best vehicle available to accomplish this worthwhile goal.

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