

The affects of affirmative action on social inequality assignment

[History](#)



The Affects of Affirmative Action on Social Inequality Noam Hassid Social Inequality in America Professor Todman 06/12/08 Affirmative action was created to help level the playing field for disadvantaged minorities. It was set in place by people that understand that because of inequality of opportunity, some minorities need a helping hand to get to a position that others in the society, who are not part of a minority group, don't have to fight for. In its tumultuous 45-year history, affirmative action has been both praised and pilloried as an answer to racial inequality.

The term "affirmative action" was first introduced by President Kennedy in 1961 as a method of redressing discrimination that had persisted in spite of civil rights laws and constitutional guarantees. It was developed and enforced for the first time by President Johnson. "This is the next and more profound stage of the battle for civil rights," Johnson asserted. "We seek... not just equality as a right and a theory, but equality as a fact and as a result. (Brunner) "Affirmative action" means positive steps taken to increase the representation of women and minorities in areas of employment, education, and business from which they have been historically excluded. When those steps involve preferential selection??? selection on the basis of race, gender, or ethnicity??? affirmative action generates intense controversy. (Fullinwider) The development, defense, and contestation of preferential affirmative action have proceeded along two paths.

One has been legal and administrative as courts, legislatures, and executive departments of government have made and applied rules requiring affirmative action. The other has been the path of public debate, where the practice of preferential treatment has spawned a vast literature, pro and con. <https://assignbuster.com/the-affects-of-affirmative-action-on-social-inequality-assignment/>

Often enough, the two paths have failed to make adequate contact, with the public quarrels not always very securely anchored in any existing legal basis or practice. Fullinwider) One specific positive affect that affirmative action has had on our society is that the universities now have greater reason to recruit minorities. Unlike in the recent past, when most institutions of higher education saw themselves as ivory towers of theory and intellectuality, many now consider supplying specific companies with minority recruits to be one of their key missions. Above the high-toned and often hypocritical arguments opposing affirmative action in college admissions, a long-overdue revolution is under way at many of the nation's major universities. Maxwell) At the core of this new movement are common sense and hard reality, the two ingredients that have been sorely missing in the mean-spirited debate over affirmative action in this conservative era. And the University of Michigan, supported by several Fortune 500 companies, is at ground zero of the movement. (Maxwell) In our highly competitive global economy, American companies increasingly are being forced to recruit overseas. For this reason alone, assisting American minorities and training them at our universities make perfect sense in the real world.

This collaborative effort, although symbiotic, is especially important in fields such as engineering, the sciences and business, where companies are desperate for minorities. (Maxwell) University officials acknowledge that they are not operating solely from higher principles of social and economic justice. (Maxwell) Many small to large non-profit groups, such as Inroads, the Consortium for Graduate Study in Management and the National Consortium for Graduate Degrees for Minorities in Engineering and Science, have made a

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science of matching industry with institutions of higher education that provide recruits.

Most of these organizations offer minority students — with 3.0 grade-point averages — fellowships and match them with companies that will give them paid internships, mentoring and offers of permanent employment. (Maxwell) In addition to money, the universities get an added benefit for pairing minorities and corporations: The minorities in the programs become highly motivated and stay in school. Hewlett-Packard reports that 80 percent of its scholarship recipients remain in college as of their junior year.

The Chronicle states that this is a retention rate “ more than double that of black and Hispanic students overall. ” Other firms that give such scholarships also report exceptionally high retention rates among minority student recipients. (Maxwell) Evidence on the effects of affirmative action efforts is frequently imperfect and ambiguous. For example, while programs addressing employment and government contracting have had modestly positive effects in the aggregate, their role is frequently difficult to disentangle from other antidiscrimination or opportunity-creating efforts.

The Clinton administration, in its review of governmental affirmative action policies, found that active federal enforcement during the 1970s “ caused government contractors to increase moderately their hiring of minority workers. According to one study, for example, the employment share of black males in contractor firms increased from 5.8 percent in 1974 to 6.7 percent in 1980. In non-contractor firms, the black male share increased more modestly, from 5.3 percent to 5.9 percent. ” (Gewirtz) A significant

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number of the 1.3 million black government employees owe their jobs (or promotions to managerial rank) to affirmative action.

Corporate affirmative action programs (some voluntary, others reflecting consent decrees in response to government pressure) have opened up managerial ranks, though not yet the very top echelons, to minorities and women. Any assessment of the expansion of employment opportunities over the past three decades must take into account, in Jerome Karabel's words, "how exclusionary many labor markets were in 1965 not only in high-status professions such as law, medicine, and academe but also in strategic working-class domains such as construction unions and police and fire departments. Karabel notes that while increased minority representation in the professions is widely recognized, "the record in certain blue-collar jobs is just as impressive. For example, between 1970 and 1990, the number of black electricians more than tripled (from 14,145 to 43,276) and the number of black police officers increased almost as rapidly (from 23,796 to 63,855)." A significant portion of these gains is attributable to affirmative action plans applicable to unions and local governments.

Aggregate gains in employment and promotion for women and minorities have continued during the past decade, considered by some to have been a period of diminished attention to equity. (Gewirtz) However, there are negatives in regards to the Affirmative action program. Ideas such as "reverse discrimination" have surfaced. The term "reverse discrimination" suggests that minorities have enjoyed such advantages over whites that now they are better off than whites or, at least, have achieved parity

proportionate to their numbers in society. The facts do not support this suggestion.

Affirmative steps to include minorities in the workforce appear to have produced minimal or quite modest gains. For example, a carefully controlled study of the impact of affirmative action on 68, 000 firms that had contracts with the U. S. Government revealed that between 1974 and 1980, the employment of black men in these firms went up 6. 5 percent while that of black women rose by 11 percent. In higher education, the Tomas Rivera Center reports that between 1981 and 1993, the number of Latino faculty in the University of California System went up 1. percent and black faculty increased 0. 6 percent, from 1. 8 percent to 2. 4 percent. Arguably, without these affirmative measures, there would have been little or no progress in black and Latino hiring, and possibly even some erosion of earlier gains. (Fernandez) But even if affirmative action loses popular favor, we must not fail to stress the need for the implementation of some other positive strategies to increase the participation of all groups into our national life.

It is in the self-interest of all Americans to ensure that inequality is reduced and economic and social benefits are distributed more fairly among the groups that make up our society. Not to do so will lead to increased conflict between the well-to-do and the have-nots, with the attendant social and economic costs to the nation. The United States cannot afford a large population of unprepared, under prepared and excluded workers and expect its economy to prosper in direct competition with other countries. This is a national problem, not just a problem for minorities.

Whatever faults may be attributed to its implementation, affirmative action has moved us closer to the American ideal of a truly inclusive society.

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