By Hugh B. Price

Affirmative action has become the focus of an intense national debate whose outcome will profoundly affect America's progress toward racial inclusion.

I'll devote the next several To Be Equal columns to this important issue, which has been misunderstood and misrepresented.

Obessed opponents of affirmative action are mounting assaults on every front. There are court challenges to contract set-asides, minority scholarships, and legislative redistricting. The new Congressional leadership threatens to roll back federal civil rights rules and affirmative action requirements.

Meanwhile, affirmative action and its supposedly underserving black beneficiaries are being positioned as the wedge issue of the 1990 election campaign, which may also include a California referendum to outlaw "preferential treatment" based on race or gender in any state.

The frenzy is fed by the incessant ranting on radio talk shows about angry white males, whose anxiety about job security and declining incomes drives the thrust to scapegoat minorities and affirmative action as the cause of their worries.

The crux of the debate is whether affirmative action has outlined its usefulness. Is it a temporary measure to make amends for past discrimination, and does its continuing use run the risk of transforming racial preferences into a permanent factor in dispensing opportunities?

Tone, the answer is clear: the job of integrating African Americans, who were excluded by official action and unofficial practice, is far from finished.

Millions of our people continue to be excluded from opportunities and are relegated to the margins of our society. For all the talk these days about the need to restore a sense of community and social cohesion, that will ever elude our grasp so long as millions of alienated urban blacks and other minorities remain outside the American mainstream.

Centuries-old patterns of racial dominance and widespread current beliefs in racial inferiority have made it necessary to implement measures like affirmative action, which not only right past wrongs but prevent present injustices.

Racism's continuing strangle leaves little doubt that if affirmative action was ended, discrimination would quickly shrink the already limited numbers available to African Americans.

Admittedly, affirmative action as practiced has occasionally been abused, as in the use of minorities to front for white firms in qualifying for contract set-asides. And it's understandable that there are objections to denying able white candidates job promotions or admissions to graduate school in favor of minorities with less imposing credentials.

The beneficiaries of affirmative action also bear some stigma in eyes of whites who question whether they "belong." And affirmative action (See TO BE EQUAL, Page 4)

**CIVIL RIGHTS JOURNAL**

NEW THREAT TO MINORITY BUSINESSES

By Barrance Powell Jackson

It's ironic. At the same time that there are efforts to eliminate or drastically cut welfare payments to the poorest of the poor, there are also attempts to end government programs which were established to help people of color who own businesses.

These programs encourage government contractors to set aside a certain number of contracts for businesses owned by people of color, many of whom would find it difficult or impossible to compete for these contracts otherwise.

It feels like we are under siege from all sides.

According to the National Minority Supplier Development Council, the number of businesses owned by people of color in the country is rising.

They estimate there are 1.5 million such businesses nationwide, with annual revenues that could go as high as $100 billion.

That's good news, not only for these business owners, but also for their communities and for our country because most jobs are in small businesses and businesses owned by people of color are often located in their communities and employ higher percentages of their own people.

More businesses owned by people of color mean more jobs for our communities.

But a case now before the U.S. Supreme Court endangers many small businesses owned by people of color.

In Adarand Construction Co. v. Pena, Adarand Contracting Company of Colorado is challenging a U.S. Department of Transportation program that encourages large contractors to subcontract with disadvantages businesses through financial incentives.

Under this program, members of so-called minority groups and women are presumed socially and economically disadvantaged and other small non-minority owned businesses can be indulged if they establish that they are socially and economically disadvantaged.

In this case, Adarand, a white-owned business, did not receive a contract for providing highway guard rails, which went instead to a Hispanic business because the prime contractor received a $10,000 bonus for using a disadvantaged business.

The suit charges that this violates Adarand's owner's right to equal protection under the 5th amendment to the Constitution.

The government argued that

(See Civil Rights, Page 5)