

Point of View

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TO BE EQUAL

AFFIRMATIVE ACTION UNDER ATTACK

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.

Obsessed 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 undeserving black beneficiaries are being positioned as the wedge issue of the 1996 election campaign, which may also include a California referendum to outlaw "preferential treatment" based on race or gender in the 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 declining 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



HUGH B. PRICE

discrimination, and does its continuing use run the risk of transforming racial preferences into a permanent factor in dispensing opportunities?

To me, the answer is clear: the job of integrating African Americans, who were isolated 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 forever 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 strength leaves little doubt that if affirmative action was ended, discrimination would quickly shrink the already limited opportunities 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 admission 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 (See TO BE EQUAL, Page 4)

CIVIL RIGHTS JOURNAL

NEW THREAT TO MINORITY BUSINESSES

By Bernice 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 Suppliers 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 vs. Pena, Adarand*

Contracting Company of Colorado is challenging a U.S. Department of Transportation program that encourages large contractors to subcontract with disadvantaged 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)



POLITICAL POINTS

By Assemblyman Wendell P. Williams



AFFIRMATIVE

It's basic and fundamental logic. If a problem is created based on race or gender, then that same problem must be resolved by the same factor. That is what is so right about affirmative action. However, this logic goes beyond gender or race. It gets right into the core of creating fairness by correcting a past disadvantaged condition for whatever reason.

Let's take a look at another situation that has nothing to do with race or gender to make the point. For decades, these members of the American society that served in the U.S. military are given preference and points on exams such as postal exams and other federal and governmental jobs. The reasoning that is given is because those who serve in the military who were away serving their country, should now be given some

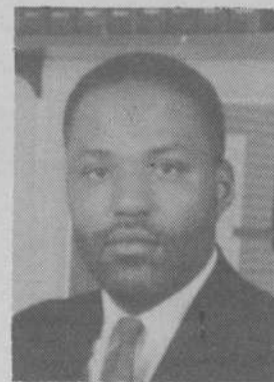
preference on employment exams to level the playing field because of the time they were gone.

Now we all know some houseboy or housegirl who will quickly say affirmative action has played out and we all know those who will say "I've never been discriminated against and it's time to pull ourselves up by the bootstraps." However, it must be remembered that these types of injustices are not so much imposed on individuals, but rather on a caste of people. Just because you were able to get a home or business loan from a bank, that does not ignore the fact that bank redlining is still in full force. Just because you are a proud token on your job, that does not remove the reality of mass employment discrimination on the caste of African Americans, Latinos and others.

White males make up only 31% of the U.S. population, a

number that is decreasing, I might add. However, this same 31% of our population has been 100% of U.S. presidents. 98% of the U.S. Senators, 97% of all public school superintendents, and the list goes on and on. However, this small group of the population wants to claim "reverse discrimination." Again, 31% of the population does not want to share 100% of the nation's advantages and opportunities.

Now, many of those today, including some African Americans and Hispanics who are a part of today's middle class and higher economics status, have forgotten where they are because of affirmative action. Now, all of the sudden, they want others to do more without the opportunities that were afforded to them. How soon do we forget. We must understand that those who became productive citizens and college graduates because



Assemblyman
Wendell P. Williams

of some form of affirmative action, who now denounce affirmative action, only do it because the "31%" have been able to make them feel guilty for their success.

And don't for one minute think that this has anything at all to do with quotas or anything else that the "31%" would have you to believe. It's not about special treatment, but equal access, and correcting past unfair actions and present games with double standards.

Of course, everyone should be judged on their abilities and qualifications, but not when they have been placed at a disadvantage. Its sort of like throwing a 6-foot piece of rope to people down in a hole; the 6-foot rope is fine for those 6-feet deep, but it does nothing for those that are 8-feet deep.

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