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Toward an Integrative Approach to Affirmative Action

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Abstract

Having taken advantage of quotas and set-asides in the job market and in university admissions, considerable numbers of African Americans have managed to bridge the socioeconomic gap with the more prosperous groups, but the backlash against preferential treatment during the past few years has cast doubt over its very constitutionality. That racial preferences need to be continued for the greatest number of African Americans to truly take advantage of it is a basic postulate in this essay. But the system of racial preferences, as it currently stands, will shortly lose the support it has had for decades, whereby a well-structured reform plan is urgently needed. This essay proposes a reform plan for affirmative action so that it eventually fulfills the goals for which it was initially designed.

Keywords: Affirmative action, African Americans, preferential treatment, welfare reform, racism

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Introduction

The growth in post-industrial era of new types of professional skills has left large sections of the African American community without the necessary means for efficient advancement. A substantial part of the community is in fact still grappling with incapacitating socioeconomic problems, such as poverty, crime, family breakdown, and poor school achievement (Mazumder 38). The same old African American social and economic ailments persist, and adequate solutions are still lacking, while the community is missing out on historic opportunities that might never be available again. One such opportunity is the possibility to fully benefit from affirmative action before it is irrevocably terminated.

Having taken advantage of quotas and set-asides in the job market and in university admissions, considerable numbers of African Americans have managed to bridge the socioeconomic gap with the more prosperous groups, but the backlash against preferential treatment during the past few years has cast doubt over its very constitutionality. That racial preferences need to be continued for the greatest number of African Americans to truly take advantage of it is a basic postulate in this essay. But the system of racial preferences, as it currently stands, will shortly lose the support it has had for decades (Maxwell and Garcia n.p.), whereby a well-structured reform plan is urgently needed.

This article proposes a reform plan for affirmative action so that it eventually fulfills the goals for which it was initially designed. It investigates what may be considered as the real causes behind the failure of the twin policies of community development and community action. It also provides tentative guidelines which combine the objectives of affirmative action and community action, or at least affirmative action and what remains of community action programs, to ultimately reach a practical reform plan. The main assumption here is that if it is to survive the current backlash, affirmative action needs to be reformed along the principles and rationales which gave rise to the rest of the policies which developed in tandem with it (Menand n.p.). Affirmative action, community action, and the programs introduced under the welfare system during the sixties have common roots, and therefore, if they have gone wrong, it is specifically because they departed from the original goals they were first intended to fulfill. The origins are roughly the same, the errors are strikingly comparable, and so the solutions should be found in coordination between these policies and programs.

Rethinking Objectives

The major weakness affecting community action, as well as affirmative action, is essentially conceptual, whereby reform will have to begin with *setting new objectives* in light of which a more *efficient management* of the programs would be possible.

Community Action

Essentially geared towards the black ghetto poor, community action programs were never officially described as such. As noted earlier, the liberal engineers of the anti-poverty programs of the Kennedy and Johnson administrations seemed to care much more for their electorates, who were predominantly white, than for the black poor who they intended to help. It followed that the programs designed failed to address the social and economic problems that were specific to the black community. The black ghetto community, as several thinkers on urban poverty such as William J. Wilson agree, constantly suffered from family disintegration, high school drop-out rates, crime and delinquency and the absence of role models (Wilson, *More than Just Race* 134). Though many such problems affected the white poor, the advantage of color allowed the latter to gain access to mainstream employment, hence the possibility for socioeconomic advancement.

This inaccurate diagnosis of the specific ailments of the black community, which may have indeed been done on purpose so as not to make the programs appear to be designed solely for the blacks, naturally led to ambiguous, and ultimately wrong prescriptions. Investment in job training alone was by no means an appropriate remedy for the problems of the community as employment, in my opinion, did nothing to help the collapsing families or to improve parenting habits. True, a few programs, such as Head Start, provided preschool daycare for black children with working mothers, while others offered legal counseling for African American families. But such programs could have been more successful *if* the mothers had been given financial help and the fathers encouraged to stay. The fact was that the welfare amendments of the mid-sixties gave the latter incentives to desert home by entitling only single mothers to welfare assistance (Khazan n.p.). Admittedly, healing the black household from within required more than legal counseling or daycare for children. A closer look at the black ghetto community would have to raise awareness about the two most serious problems affecting it: *the lack of material support for most households* and *the absence of role models*. Both issues were ignored by the lawmakers whose afore-mentioned conservative

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approach to poverty disengaged them from the realities of the people who they intended to help.

A conservative "hand-up" approach to community action, as opposed to the truly liberal "hand-out" approach, is not specifically what the black ghetto poor need (Patterson 115-117). Job training and education programs will have little significance if the beneficiaries lack the material means to support themselves in the event they are laid off, while educational programs will be jeopardized if parenting is deficient. In 1966, an OEO program known as Coahoma Opportunities enrolled 932 adults (a majority of whom were black) to teach them "personal habits, cleanliness, dress, and attitude." How can such "personal habits" and "attitude" possibly be retained if they are not perpetuated by a healthy family environment, with all the members sharing the same commitment? With the lack of financial means to sustain an accommodating environment (absent father, mother struggling in vain to keep her children off the streets), it can be particularly difficult for the individual enrollee (be it a child, teenager or adult) to observe the acquired norms and values. Values and habits without minimum financial security can easily be degraded, while financial security can only be short-lived in the absence of a healthy family environment. Programs directed at the black community should therefore take into consideration the problems of the family first. They should address the individual beneficiaries as members of dysfunctional households with specific cultural patterns which set them apart from their white counterparts. For this reason, anti-poverty programs directed at the African American households should be designed with the *express purpose* of helping them *financially*, which *does not cancel out* the educational and job training programs already in place. As argued, all such programs will have to be implemented within the larger framework of affirmative action, the latter being a consolidation or carry-over program.

Macroeconomic approaches to the problem of poverty have proposed higher wages and national jobs programs, but the latter have often proven ineffective, and community action is a classic example for that matter. It is argued here that macroeconomic solutions to poverty would bear fruit only if the targeted groups were culturally uniform, which is barely the case with US minorities. The structure of the underclass African American family illustrates how the authority of females is "normalized," making it acceptable for such families to survive without males for reasons that many scholars have attributed to the "unmarriageability" of certain categories of black males (who may be caught in drug addiction, alcoholism or chronic unemployment) (Sawhill and Venator 3-4). The female-headed household, however, is not a common pattern in the white community, while statistically most families belonging to the higher socioeconomic categories are two-parent families (Wilson, *Declining Significance* 160). Therefore, black poverty should, in my opinion, be addressed as a distinct phenomenon having specific social and cultural origins which resist holistic, class-based theorizing.

Jobs and education programs alone will only have limited impacts in helping African Americans out of poverty if the current trend in family structure is not reversed, meaning that the position of the African American male as a full-status care-provider for the family will have to be reasserted. The point, however, is that the existing jobs programs (as designed by the states in keeping with the 1996 Welfare Act provisions) (See "Major Provisions of the Welfare Law"). prepare the poor black males to little more than subsistence-level jobs which, naturally, do not allow them to support a family. Although the number of people on welfare since the passage of the 1996 Welfare Act decreased to a historic 7.3 million, the number of those who managed to get jobs are very likely to fall back on welfare in the event of economic recession, and black males are predictably part of the most vulnerable category given the persistence of discrimination on the job market (White n.p.). It is suggested here that there should be post-training programs that target the black males in particular. Such programs could be run by both private organizations and public authorities, and should promote skill-retention and rehabilitation of the workers/employees (who may easily lose the skills and abilities acquired under the state-sponsored programs and welfare) to enhance their chances to stay on the job or have new jobs in highly competitive environments (in case of economic recession).

A return to the cash relief approach, together with the adoption of legislation, policies and programs aimed to help consolidate the two-parent structure of the African American household should emanate from an appreciation of the social, historical and cultural distinctiveness of the African American underclass. The black poor have needs that *may not necessarily be similar* to those of the white poor, and therefore standard programs that seem to work for the whites can well fail to work for the blacks. Many such generic programs have been proposed by scholars of urban poverty (see Wilson's *The Declining Significance of Race*, for example), and many offer creditable insights into the realities of the black community. Moreover, they do reckon the absence of the male as a serious stumbling block in the way of economic advancement and integration. But while some suggest better wages and cash relief for the most disaffected categories, they tell us little about *how* such relief alone could sustain integrated households. Such assistance

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models remain incomplete if they are not related to a broader reform which takes integration into mainstream economy as a process, not a categorical goal, where new programs build upon what previous ones have achieved. And within a reformed assistance model, affirmative action programs will have to take over where community action stops.

Affirmative action

Affirmative action suffers from a few major problems which have caused it to lose much of its early popularity. One of them is the afore-mentioned failure to benefit the individuals who are at the bottom ranks of the black community. Other important issues include the structure of incentives it has created for blacks *not* to improve their qualifications (by lowering standards, for example), the seeming timelessness of affirmative action programs (the impression that they will continue to be enforced regardless of their deficiencies). Obviously, such reservations warrant careful reflection as they bear closely upon the very rationale and scope of the policy.

To begin with the issue of accessibility to affirmative action programs, it bears repeating that there is little consensus as to *who* they are supposed to benefit. For conservative critics such as Thomas Sowell, affirmative action has so far focused on the positions which require better educational qualifications and expertise, assets that are *not* quite common among lower-class individuals. It is the better-educated and more experienced middle-class blacks who have, therefore, taken advantage of the policy despite the fact that, as Sowell argues, the demands for preferential treatment are made in the name of the disadvantaged members of the community: “Even when demands are made in the name of the less privileged racial or ethnic groups, often it is the more privileged members of such groups who make the demands and who benefit from policies designed to meet such demands” (*Race and Culture* 141-42). For the advocates of affirmative action, it is not so much a question of *who* benefits from the policy as *how many* black individuals take advantage of it. In other words, the only measure for the success of the policy is the number of individuals it affects provided they belong to the designated minorities.

Scholars, such as Sowell, are perfectly aware of the ambiguity associated with the issue of eligibility, but they seem to favor the hypothesis that preferential programs were first designed to meet the needs of the less fortunate. They may also be aware that this category of people lacks the credentials to benefit fully from the programs and some of them, such as Shelby Steele, propose a better school preparation as an alternative to the allocation of special privileges to undeserving applicants. It is argued here that, insofar as they see that the less fortunate should have a better representation among the beneficiaries of the policy, they judiciously point to a major shortcoming that should indeed be remedied. An easier access to preferential programs by the less fortunate members of the community is specifically what any reform should make possible. In brief, affirmative action programs should focus on two major categories: (a) the individuals who cannot pursue their higher education in the discipline they initially coveted because they received a sub-standard education at the early stages of their school life as a result of poverty and bad parenting; and (b) the individuals who fail to integrate the job market *because* they lack marketable educational qualifications. A straightforward identification of the categories of individuals eligible to affirmative action programs would have to be the first step for the government (and the courts) to take if such programs were to benefit those who are in real need of them.

However, by suggesting that better schooling alone prepares black individuals for more successful careers, critics of preferential treatment in general simply ignore the fact that better education requires a bare minimum of careful follow-up by (a) vigilant parents (s), a reasonable measure of material comfort, and a healthy family environment. In the case of a large number of black ghetto school children, at least one of these requirements is missing. The number of single-parent families inside the African American community has dramatically increased over the past few decades; single mothers are grappling with poverty and lack of support in the absence of a male provider; and if a minimum of material resources is available, the absence of a role model (despite, sometimes, the mother’s effort to provide one) compromises the child’s upbringing and education in a society that still valorizes patriarchal values. Obviously, better school preparation has to do with more than just improving the quality of education for ghetto children. Besides, cash assistance to female-headed households may not alone guarantee a smooth passage to adulthood for children brought up in a culture which tolerates deviant patterns of behavior (such as illegitimate childbearing).

Consolidating the African American family by encouraging fathers to stay seems an ideal option for the conservatives, but shouldn’t African American women tolerate marriage first? Two major factors clearly obstruct such development. First, the current welfare legislation does not encourage mothers to preserve their families since, as observed earlier, they can live on welfare for relatively long periods (up to

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five years and more) so they can do without husbands. Second, the low income of African American males makes them less attractive as potential partners (or simply "unmarriageable"). Wilson's insistence that the better-off social categories are being dominated by male-headed households (*Declining Significance* 160) may be an oblique way of saying that the problem with the African American urban community lies with the predominance of female-headed families. This is obviously in keeping with my argument here, but I also suggest that, for affirmative action to benefit the largest possible number of African Americans, the federal government should perhaps attempt first to reverse this trend by encouraging parents to preserve their families. This could probably be achieved by making welfare even less attractive to mothers and by raising minimum wages for unskilled and semi-skilled work to improve black male median income.

On the other hand, it would be a great loss for the African American community if middle-class beneficiaries were to be denied the benefits they have so far enjoyed. The assumption that affirmative action benefits the less fortunate does not necessarily mean that the better educated and more prosperous members of the community should not be made eligible to preferential treatment. In fact, the whole point behind the rehabilitation of the African American family is to pave the way for the growth of a middle-class capable of taking full advantage of affirmative action benefits. At this particular stage where the number of beneficiaries from the lower classes is relatively small, denying middle-class applicants eligibility to affirmative action programs will obviously affect the representation of the community in the better-paying jobs. Affirmative action attention should therefore be focused on the less fortunate as more individuals from this category acquire the competitive skills necessary for integration in mainstream economy.

Sowell's, Steele's and others' claim that quotas will only jeopardize commitment to self-improvement cannot be justified if affirmative action is seen again as a transitional policy, with fixed phase-out dates. But in the mean time, they would argue, whites would have to suffer "huge losses" in terms of opportunities and resources. For such transfers of opportunities and resources to be regarded as real losses, no returns are expected from them. In the case of a transitional affirmative action, however, such transfers will be considered as investments in human capital, and the losses incurred upon white society will cease to be considered as such if decision makers defend their stand in light of this cost/benefit analysis. Critics of affirmative action have also voiced their skepticism about phase-out dates for the termination of the policy. They highlight the sacrifice that whites have had to make for African Americans to integrate, arguing that in education, for example, it would be much more reasonable to "make it a little harder" for minority students "right now" so that they help themselves build competitive skills later in life. Quite the opposite is herein suggested: let the national government "make it a little harder" *for whites* until affirmative action, now reformed, benefits the highest possible number of poor blacks. Affirmative action has been operative for so long and benefited so many blacks to be abandoned without attempting reform, one that prudently draws upon the lessons of the past.

Quotas and set-asides are now accepted along a tacit agreement between schools, universities and employers on the one hand, and the federal government on the other. They are considered as bitter medicine, a last resort for the larger society to remedy the wrongs it did to its largest minority, but contrary to what conservative scholars such as Sowell have argued, they do represent a well-thought-out remedy in the absence of a better alternative. Discrimination existed in the past, still exists today and the victims are the same, not just the "off-spring" of those who suffered from it in days gone. For despite the fact that the victims of discrimination and racism "have long ago died as flesh-and-blood human beings" (Sowell, *Race and Culture* 251), the fact is that it is not by chance that the descendants of those very victims are suffering from the same kind of disadvantage.

African American representation at universities and in specific job categories across many regions of the US is quite low and does not reflect their concentration in large numbers in those regions. Conservative scholars argue that discrimination cannot account for the under-representation of African Americans in such institutions and explain the latter in terms of poor school preparation and lack of marketable skills. The question is: *who* is to blame, then, for the substandard school preparation most African Americans, especially those living in the ghettos, have received and *why*? To put the blame entirely on African American culture(s) is, in the words of Ryan William, to "blame the victim" and ignore the persistence of racism in contemporary America (see *Blaming the Victim*).

Part of the question points in fact to the rigidity and insularity of the African American culture(s), but white attitudes toward the lower strata of the African American community explain why, in regions where more than half the population is black, the latter's representation in specific universities and job categories is strikingly low. The disengagement of white politicians from African American affairs has given rise to what came to be known as "black politics." White politicians have become typically concerned with issues affecting the white community and their black peers with issues affecting the black

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community. Whites prefer white candidates for local government and blacks black candidates. Whites vote for the republicans and blacks for the democrats (see Wilson's comment on the crisis inside the Democratic Party quoted in Mills 211). So, if white politicians (who dominate the political arena across the country) invested as much effort to improve the quality of education in inner-city schools as they did for other issues, better educated generations of African Americans would be better represented in mainstream institutions. This has not been the case since Johnson's so-called War on Poverty. Even representation is not an illusion but a *reasonable expectation*, particularly in states with a sizable African American community. It certainly cannot be achieved today, but a more equitable socio-political order would probably make it possible in the long run.

Reform Management

The guiding principle of the reform is that community action and preferential programs complement each other by targeting the same categories within the African American community for the educational assets and training experience gained under the first to be preserved and sustained under the second. In other words, the only guarantee for a standard school preparation and a set of marketable skills *not* to be lost over recurrent periods of idleness and redundancy may be to integrate the beneficiary in a challenging environment, be it a prestigious university or a mainstream economic sector. Community action and preferential programs shall be refocused mainly on the neediest, less organized urban African American households, which requires larger investments and new styles of organization and management.

For an effective administration of community action and preferential programs, at least three requisites should be met. These could be listed as follows: (a) a common policy which aims to narrow down the pool of potential beneficiaries from specific communities determined in advance in line with an explicit set of criteria; (b) joint committees responsible for fund-raising, personnel recruitment, and program follow-up and assessment; and (c) respective flexible organizational structures which allow for an efficient coordination and liaison.

The idea of combining preferential programs with programs designed to assist the disadvantaged communities is, to begin with, not new to many scholars of US public policy, except that they are often quick on dismissing it as a stumbling block for minority advancement. Discussing the structure of incentives created by preferential programs for minorities in education, Sowell, for instance, argues that "perhaps some judicious blend of preferential programs and programs designed to improve the performances of less educated groups *might be attempted*, but the two kinds of programs create incentives that work at cross-purposes, even if their goals are the same" (emphasis added) (*Preferential Policies* 184). He goes on to explain that:

> Forcing students to meet higher standards – a process for them and their teachers alike – will be made all the more difficult if the students know that these standards are unnecessary for them to reach whatever educational or employment goals they have, or even to be prompted to the next grade. If group representation statistics are the standard by which institutions are judged, other standards will be sacrificed for the sake of body count. This is true not only of educational institutions but of other institutions as well. (*Preferential Policies*, 184)

It is important to note, first, that the above is all that Sowell has to say about "blending" affirmative action and outreach programs in a book of more than 185 pages wholly focused on preferential programs. In this less than a half page long paragraph, he does not tell us much about how students are "forced" to meet "higher standards," for example. It is obvious that he refers to students admitted according to quotas, those who are pushed into a highly competitive environment without prior preparation. But what about well-prepared students, those who have received quality school preparation in an establishment supported by an efficient community action program, and who therefore may find themselves perfectly comfortable in such an environment? Despite his suggestion that it is possible to combine affirmative action with outreach programs, Sowell seems to lack a clear vision about what this "blend" is made up of, or how the programs involved in it are supposed to operate. If properly designed and administered, a combination of affirmative action and outreach programs definitely will not work "at cross-purposes."

Second, Sowell's argument about incentives loses much of its dependability in this particular case in the absence of a comprehensive plan combining affirmative action with outreach programs. The "incentive argument" may be Sowell's most intimidating weapon in the eyes of his opponents, but it is definitely not the right one to use in this case where no supporting arguments are provided. Its use to counteract all types of arguments in favor of preferential programs has turned it into little more than a stopgap for the weak points of his theory on preferential policies in general.

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Now referring back to the first requisite, notably the need to establish a common selective policy, it is important to observe that bringing into line the goals of community action and preferential programs necessitates the consensus of a majority of policy-makers at the national level on the decisiveness of racial parity for social stability. The public advocates of color-blindness have persistently argued that the nation today does not need race-sensitive legislation any longer, claiming that racial discrimination was eradicated by the civil rights legislation of the 1960s, and therefore race-conscious legislation would only jeopardize the civil gains so staunchly preserved by the democratic process. But by presuming that fairness and equity can be sustained by the democratic institutions of the country, the advocates of color-blindness may well have missed the point that such values depend to a large extent on perception and acuity, and that the latter are purely subjective and bound to be determined by personal predilections and bias. This is the time to launch a national debate on race relations (a call made by former president Clinton in 1997 without much success) (Richter n.p.) to raise decision-makers' awareness about the potential effects of minority discontent on social stability as revealed by the national media in landmark incidents such as the New Orleans flooding (2005), which left thousands of African Americans at the mercy of an inefficient government.

Awareness of the vulnerability of communities such as the African Americans is then a vital condition for the growth of a political opinion that tolerates change and reform. Once acknowledged, the principle of having to provide assistance to the disadvantaged communities becomes a rationale for a "new" affirmative action that is basically limited by phase-out dates and organized in such a way as to complement the job done under other programs such as community action. This boils down to the point about synchronicity or co-application, or the need for both community action and affirmative action to be focused on the same goals: adopting well-determined standards in the selection of communities and individuals, from those very communities, whose profiles meet a set of predetermined criteria.

Determining the most vulnerable communities and selecting the individuals with the most suitable profiles have three main advantages. First, they give legitimacy to the programs in question. It should be observed that many whites object to affirmative action specifically because it is not sufficiently selective, and that therefore it is benefiting the better off more than the disadvantaged. Now if whites were told that the quotas were going to the most deserving individuals and that they were taking these individuals off the streets, hence less violence and lower crime rates among them, many would support the idea. This might well seem simplistic, but the idea that assistance should go to those who are in real need of it is widely accepted by Americans and may be demonstrated by the increasing number of non-profit organizations. Second, restricting assistance and favoritism to the most vulnerable *communities* will obviously reduce the cost burden of the parties operating the programs, preventing the outflow of funds to immigrants who, in the opinion of many conservatives, have no right to compensation for past discrimination since they have suffered none. Finally, strict selection of the most deserving *individuals* shall probably help prevent cases of fraud as the screening out of applicants is fine-tuned to a predetermined set of profiles.

Setting up entitlement criteria shall be the responsibility of joint committees administered by federal officials and private fundraisers, representing respectively the two parties involved in this program, the former being responsible for preferential programs and the latter for community action. There should be basically three major committees, each tasked with a particular process: (a) designing policy options and determining objectives; (b) recruiting personnel for community action programs and fund-raising; (c) screening out applicants and providing follow-up on transition from one program to another, and well into the affirmative action system. The efficiency of these committees depends on their ability to coordinate efforts and to share information and feedback. This obviously requires the kind of flexibility and transparency which the committees and agencies of the 1960s lacked, which ultimately led to their termination.

Deciding upon policy options being done in line with the general objectives, appointing the appropriate personnel for the different community action programs remains an important prerequisite, especially if one takes into consideration the fact that it was specifically the lack of commitment of many program leaders and bureaucrats during the 1960s which led to the failure of such programs. As observed earlier, applicants were generally forced to support the separatist cause as a condition for eligibility to job-training programs. Ideological identifications would once again jeopardize the programs, hence the whole mode of assistance, especially if a large part of the funding comes from private institutions and foundations. The committee tasked with deciding on policies should also be responsible for designing a structure for each program committee, depending on the importance of the program within a particular community. Experience dictates that a bare minimum of decisions should be made by the central committees if the programs are to survive.

To enhance grant opportunities, programs should be organized and administered as businesses, with well-defined

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hierarchical structures and modern management styles to guarantee effective communication and decision-making. Clear policies designed by accountable administrators are incentives for foundations and private donors to funnel money into the programs. New management styles are also essential for an effective follow-up of program beneficiaries. But one should first attempt to specify the kind of programs that can be involved in the reform, as well as the profile of the potential beneficiaries.

There are two main conditions for any community program to be considered effective. It should operate inside the ghetto and should eventually allow the beneficiary to be fully eligible to universities or occupations supported by affirmative action. In fact, it is particularly important to consider community action programs and affirmative action as an integrated whole, the former facilitating access to the latter. Daycare programs for children with working parents, preschool programs, and after-school and compensation programs are indispensable tools to prepare African American children for education in mainstream colleges. Such programs existed under community action during the 1960s and some are still operative with varying degrees of success. A more selective policy is likely to enhance their effectiveness, for great efforts by program committees are quite necessary today to make a finer selection and follow-up on individual cases. Based on periodic statistics, children with below-average performance in particular subjects are admitted to charter schools where they would benefit from placement in special classes. (Statistics and averages are determined by the charter school boards.) It is important to note, however, that admission to charter schools today is based on lottery and they should perhaps be reformed so that they target children from modest backgrounds, and one possible way to encourage them to give up the lottery system is through financial contributions.

A child selected for a special program at any stage along the process should also benefit from follow-up by the committee in charge of the program in question. By the time a beneficiary finishes high school, he/she will have benefited from more than one program, and of course, more than one program committee will have been involved. The different program committees should have flexible structures to ensure that information about the beneficiaries is exchanged in an optimal way. High-school graduates will eventually be eligible to colleges supporting affirmative action and those who fail to graduate will benefit from job-training opportunities. The new job-training programs will have to anticipate future market needs based on careful study and analysis of current market trends to ensure maximum chances for the trainees to integrate into mainstream sectors.

Conclusion

Having established that affirmative action, as it stands today, is facing a serious backlash from both conservatives and liberals (because it is not benefiting those who are most in need of it) it is argued that it must be reformed. This need for reform, however, is made all the more necessary because African Americans are still being discriminated against in a variety of areas and settings. But is reform possible in the first place? Both black and white public opinions show that reform can well be a conceivable alternative if it is appropriately addressed; if affirmative action turns again into a transitional policy or program; and if it helps the right category of people at the right time. A considerable part of the reform, therefore, depends on the validity of these considerations. The rest depends on the pertinence of any reform to be made to one of the major anti-poverty programs, notably community action, which is herein construed as a potentially vital ancillary to affirmative action, wherefrom the integrative appellation of “affirmative community action.” The latter shall refer to a combination of the two programs as reformed in light of their respective shortcomings.

A totally new approach to affirmative action is made absolutely necessary today for the policy to survive the unrelenting criticism by conservative scholars and policy-makers. Combining affirmative action with community action programs is quintessential to such an approach which should be adopted in keeping with new principles and objectives. The latter should be determined in light of the immediate reasons behind the increasing unpopularity of affirmative action and the failure of most community action programs. However, considerable efforts remain to be made in terms of political lobbying and scholarly criticism to secure popular support for the reform, especially among whites.

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