

**Main Point**

Affirmative action is a complex and confusing issue to deal with. Different people have different definitions of what the proper way to advance equality is. It is undeniable that the United States is currently not a “color-blind society.” Knowledge of the history of racism is imperative to understanding the modern troubles surrounding race relations. In this chapter Payne presents arguments in favor of and in opposition to affirmative action, as well as historical background, and suggestions for the future.

**Central Issues and Concepts**

- Opinions on this topic are highly variable. Even supporters of equality have different perceptions about what it should mean. Colin Powell, for example, holds that institutions should provide equal opportunity of access for all people regardless of minority or majority status, but that minorities should not receive “preferential treatment.” The vast majority of Americans look favorably on equal opportunity and fair treatment for racial minorities and women. However, instituting quotas to make sure minorities are hired or otherwise included is opposed by almost 60% of whites and 40% of blacks. Advocates of equal opportunity say we need to set general goals in relation to hire minorities and women. Americans generally feel that unchecked power breeds unfairness, and thus would support safeguards to verify that discrimination is not occurring in organizations. Even the majority of people who oppose affirmative action are supporters of programs to train and aid women and racial minorities. The majority of Americans believe that our society should have “zero tolerance” for discrimination and implement stricter laws and punishments for organizations that practice discrimination.
- Arguments for affirmative action include the idea of responsibility, which is a popular American value. The current black struggle is deeply connected to historical occurrences. Thus, American is indebted to provide real reparation for the centuries of abuse and denial blacks were forced to endure. Racism did not end with the end of Jim Crow laws. The “glass ceilings” blocking minorities from advancement may be different than they once were, but they have not been shattered. Having connections is very often more helpful than having talent, and older, white men (whose beliefs were formed in a time when inequality between the races was deemed acceptable) still hold most of the power. Therefore, minorities are at a disadvantage when it comes to networking. Something must be done to level the playing field. Advancement is dependent on the inclusion of minorities into organizations that remain primarily white, because that is the way in which majority and minority group members become acquainted and “information networks” are integrated. The addition of minorities into high profile jobs tells minority children that they can realize even their wildest dreams, which leads them to work harder and become more successful in the future (consistent with the theory of performance expectations). The criteria currently used to test merit are not necessarily adequate.
- On the other hand, it has been asserted that demanding less from minorities than from whites has a negative effect on the diligence of minorities. Additionally, receiving affirmative action can place a stigma on women and minorities, regardless of skill level, because it is implied that they are inferior and need to be given a handicap in order to compete. The fact that people self-segregate even in organizations with much diversity could indicate that affirmative action is

essentially failing to integrate society. It is also said that those minorities that need affirmative action the least (e.g.: financially well-off persons who have not faced very much discrimination).

- A balance must be struck between ignoring the implications of race and becoming overly preoccupied with race.
- Presidents (F. D.) Roosevelt, Truman, Eisenhower, Kennedy, Johnson pushed racial equality forward. Nixon and Reagan had somewhat shaky records regarding the matter. However during the Nixon years, legislation was indeed passed to make sure that the workforce accurately reflected the surrounding community with regards to race. Later Clinton made strides to continue the work of his earlier predecessors to the White House and worked to combat the systematic exclusion of individuals based on race or gender rather than talent.
- Payne proposes that a policy of affirmative action based on class, rather than race, will do more to alleviate the hardships faced by disenfranchised persons.

### **Quotes**

- “Few white Americans are willing to trade places with black Americans, a reality that underscores the need to implement policies that are not entirely race neutral.” (Payne 109)
- “The idea that white Americans are naturally entitled to be always at the head of the line cannot endure in an open competitive society, a realization that is at the heart of the affirmative action controversy.” (Payne 108)

### **Questions**

- Payne suggests that “class-based” affirmative action would be superior to race-based, because poverty restricts access to resources. Does he not feel that there is any discriminatory treatment that is solely based on the fact that a person is not white? What would he say about the study in Gallagher’s book that equal résumés attached to “white names” received more callbacks than those with “black names” in the header?
- Payne asserts that we should “strive to eliminate all preferences.” He also seems to be a proponent of special programs to give minorities more upward mobility. Where does this author draw the line between equal opportunity and preferential treatment?