

Affirmative Action

Despite antidiscrimination legislation, discrimination still occurs in the United States, and wide economic and social gaps exist between groups. Affirmative action programs are an additional strategy to help address past inequalities in employment and education based on race and sex. In the late 1960s, both the federal government and the courts required some employers and educational institutions to address discrimination in employment and education by taking affirmative action. This meant that the organizations were to come up with plans to diversify their workforces and student bodies and to establish timetables for the achievement of the plans.

Affirmative action programs aim to increase the number of women and people of color in jobs and schools. The idea is that groups that have more resources should provide something to groups that have fewer resources. Many people think that affirmative action means preferential treatment and quotas. The original purpose of affirmative action programs was not, however, to set quotas. Instead, the policies were designed to require institutions

to develop plans enabling them to go beyond business as usual and search for qualified people in places where they did not ordinarily conduct their searches or their business. . . . The idea of affirmative action

is not to force people into positions for which they are unqualified but to encourage institutions to develop realistic criteria for the enterprise at hand and then to find a reasonable diverse mix of people qualified to be engaged in it. (Wilkins, 1995, p. 3)

In spite of many years of antidiscrimination legislation and before the institution of affirmative action programs, women and people of color were almost completely shut out of many fields in many parts of the country. The implementation of affirmative action programs helped correct years of exclusion. For example, in 1979, women made up 4 percent of entry-level officers in the San Francisco Police Department; after the institution of an affirmative action plan, women made up 14.5 percent of the entry-level class in 1985. Affirmative action programs in the San Francisco Fire Department increased the number of African Americans in officer positions from 7 to 31. Latino officers from 12 to 55, and Asian American officers from 0 to 10. In a Louisiana aluminum plant, only people with prior craft experience were hired before 1974. African Americans had long been excluded from craft unions, which explained why only 5 of 273 skilled craft workers at the plant were African American. An affirmative action agreement instituted by the plant and the union established new training programs and required 50 percent of all new trainees to be African American (White House, 1998). There are many other success stories.

LO 5 Affirmative action has been increasingly challenged in recent decades. Critics argue that past discrimination is not reason enough to give preferential treatment today. They label affirmative action as reverse discrimination against dominant groups, and they argue that any type of discrimination is wrong. In their view, affirmative action means hiring unqualified

people and lowering standards in schools and on the job, they say that it results in members of target groups believing that they cannot succeed on their own merits. However, the goal of affirmative action is to broaden the scope of training and access; this actually increases the pool of available skilled workers.

In 1996, voters in California approved a law to ban the use of affirmative action by government entities. The Board of Regents of the University of California system voted to end the use of affirmative action in admissions to all of its campuses in keeping with California law. Results were seen almost immediately; in the year following enactment, there was a 57 percent decrease in the number of nondominant students admitted to University of California at Berkeley and a 36 percent drop at University of California at Los Angeles (Malosantos & Chiu, 1998).

In June 2003, the US Supreme Court handed down two rulings on affirmative action, one striking down an affirmative action admissions policy and the other allowing the use of affirmative action to increase campus diversity (Cohen, 2003). The debate over affirmative action continues into the present. In 2014, the Supreme Court ruled that voters have the right to ban affirmative action in college admissions (Boddie, 2016). In 2016, the Supreme Court upheld an affirmative action program at the University of Texas (Lipiak, 2016). Recent court cases and legislative proposals suggest that the issue of affirmative action is still very much contested.

Immigration Rights



EP 3a, 3b

The history of immigration to the United States, which is covered in Chapter 5, reflects centuries of policies that have at times protected immigrants and at times limited their rights and services. An estimated 11.1 million people are unauthorized or undocumented immigrants in the United States (Krogstad, Passel, & Cohn, 2016). For some, the issue is very clear—if a law was broken, then there should be punishment and deportation. For others, there is recognition that most of us in the United States are descendants of immigrants, and they would like to see new policies that allow more immigrants to legally reside here and move toward citizenship. For social workers, regardless of a person's legal status, he or she is entitled to protections for human rights and social and economic justice.

State and federal governments have been struggling with policies to address the issue of illegal immigration. In 2010, Arizona passed an immigration law designed to identify, prosecute, and deport undocumented immigrants. What became known as the “Papers Please” law gives broad powers to the police to detain anyone they suspect of being in the country illegally. It also makes failure to carry immigration documents a crime. The law has been criticized by many who see it as open season for the police to harass and discriminate against the Latino community. President Obama said that the law threatened “to undermine basic notions of fairness that we cherish as Americans, as well as the trust between police and our communities that is so