

Document B: Supreme Court Must Realize Affirmative Action Doesn't Improve Education

By Douglas A. Kahn

The Supreme Court has permitted affirmative action, but with limitations. The judicial decisions on this issue have focused on the educational value of having diversity in the student body. But I have observed from my experience that racial diversity has no effect on educational quality and is not the real rationale for the affirmative action policy.

In my view, the true rationale for affirmative action comes from the view that it is problematic. If Americans are to live harmoniously together, all parts of society should participate in its important functions. That justification explains why preference is really given to minorities: They also should be able to participate in the American dream.

There is a case for diversity's benefiting student life outside of the classroom. But even there, the benefits are not so substantial as to justify a large-scale program that rests on utilizing race or ethnicity as a factor in choosing a student body. Moreover, socializing students is not the main function of a university.

A university education is primarily an intellectual activity. If the faculty believed that diversity was important, they would seek to have an intellectually diverse faculty. But most universities devote little-to-no effort to add faculty members who hold diverse political and ideological views.

Another rationalization made for affirmative action is to compensate for past injuries done to specific groups. While there is no disputing that great wrongs were done to African-Americans in the past, the people who benefit from affirmative action are not the ones who have directly suffered these past wrongs.

While racial discrimination continues to exist, it is reduced from and evolved from what it once was. There is reason to doubt that racial discrimination today is any more of a problem than discrimination against many other groups who are not included in affirmative action programs - women, people of certain religions, people with disabilities, or people with low socio-economic status.

In my view, while it served its purpose, it is no longer needed. African-Americans occupy important positions in this country. The president of the United States, members of the cabinet and Congress, a member of the Supreme Court, and numerous judges and officials are African-Americans.

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Economic Perspectives On Affirmative Action

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