

Issue Brief: Women/Gender Issues and Affirmative Action

KEYWORDS:

White women, Equality, Affirmative Action, Opportunity

DESCRIPTION:

This brief will touch upon what affirmative action has contributed to women in the workplace and in universities as a whole. It will briefly describe reasons as to why people still fight for affirmative action for women.

KEY POINTS:

- Women are a minority within the make-up of society, women and people of color tend to support this statement.
- Studies continue to show the discrepancy in number of women attending higher education institutions and the workforce.
- Women continue to suffer an unjust earning in comparison to men.
- Affirmative action has yet to provide equality for women in the workplace and higher education.
- When discussing women and affirmative action, the main beneficiaries of such policy are white women as opposed to colored women.

IMAGES:





'Three-fourths of a penny for your thoughts...'

BRIEF:

Affirmative action is the federal policy that gives help to people of different color, gender; national origin, race, and religion enter institutions of higher education, employment, public contracting, and health programs. It is a way to address discrimination and inequality in these areas. Women and affirmative action tend to be overlooked because race governs the issues of affirmative action. However, studies show that support for affirmative action for women is more favorable than race based affirmative action; even then when referring to women based affirmative action, studies and policy tend to talk about white women as opposed to colored women.

Women and their right to education do not seem to fall upon an equal standard to that of men. The participation rate of women at the University Of Michigan Law School is still low to that of men. Stephanie Wildman in "Affirmative Action: Necessary for Equality for All Women" says that the elimination of affirmative action would eliminate the number of women in law school and consequently women of color. Studies show that women attendance and participation in classes predominantly male are low and that is due to the societal construction of hierarchy in gender.

Affirmative action still does not begin to address the inequality that women have in education and employment. Salary earnings are still low in comparison to men. Women earn 76.4 cents for every dollar earned by men in comparison to 62.5 in 1979. Women of color still earn much lower, at only 66 cents while Latina women earn even lower at 58 cents for every dollar men earn. Talks about equality in higher education institutions are a big issue. Unemployment rate for women is 6.7 percent as opposed to 9.1 percent for white men, 11.1 percent for black and Latina women and 20 percent for black men. Problems within employment go beyond salary earnings. The lack of maternity leave, child daycare, and other facilities that would help women work in an equal playing field as men make gender based affirmative action seem like welfare charity work for women. Inequality still exists.

Although when affirmative action was first introduced by President John F. Kennedy in 1961, gender was not a clause in the executive order. It was not until 1967 that President Lyndon Johnson included women as beneficiaries of the policy. Both gender based and racial based affirmative action arose during the same time, yet the ones that benefit the most are white women not men of color. Gender based affirmative action has translated into the same dialogue race based affirmative action speaks about. Translating this issue into the world of politics one can gather the importance of women in the political field. Women with voting power will take it upon themselves to speak to the Supreme Court's ruling which has led the Federal Communications Commission to think about repealing its favoring policy to women. Governor Pete Wilson of California is a supporter of the abolishment of affirmative action for women and minorities. He would rather buy the women vote with abortion rights rather than with their education. He called this an unfair policy that plays on reverse discrimination. According to him it hurts women and minorities to need that special aid, stating that they are incapable of earning self merit into these employment opportunities and higher education institutions.

When thinking about affirmative action the issue of race is the first word that comes to mind. Gender discrimination is just as common in inequality. Although affirmative action seeks to create a balance and equal opportunity for minorities in theory, it flaws in action. Affirmative action has allowed women to overcome some of that prejudice, colored women need yet that aid. Women and affirmative action just like race and affirmative action has much to endure before it can provide fairness to all it seeks to help.

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