

Affirmative Action and the Human Resource Manager in the Twenty-first Century Workplace in the United States of America

John W. Coverdale

(College of Business, Stony Brook University, Stony Brook, New York, USA)

Abstract: An analysis of affirmative action as public policy in the United States. The author explores the Civil Rights Movement as it relates to the birth of affirmative action in the early 1960's. Within that context, affirmative action as public policy is examined from its origins, in the areas of government, business, and higher education. To assess the impact of affirmative action, as well as the arguments over the merits of affirmative action, Human Resource Management professionals in the aforementioned industries were surveyed to determine their attitudes toward affirmative action and whether affirmative action has worked as originally intended. While the Human Resource Managers who responded to the survey indicated that in general they understood the history of affirmative action, and the original intentions of affirmative action, more than half of them disagreed with affirmative action plans in the workplace. Nearly seventy five percent of the respondents wanted to see hiring based on merit and qualifications, not race and ethnicity. However, when asked if the United States still needs affirmative action programs to assure equal treatment for minorities, over one third of the respondents indicated that such programs were still needed.

Key words: affirmative action; human resource manager; American workplace

JEL codes: M12, D23, J18, J24, J78, I24, M51

1. Introduction

At the beginning of the 20th century in the United States, the majority of minorities worked in agriculture, forestry, fishing or domestic service. Few held much hope for equal opportunity in different job markets; indeed many newspaper employment advertisements were accompanied by a proviso: "Blacks need not apply" (Brown, 2005). Midway through the 20th century, black citizens of the United States, in spite of their qualifications or education, were legally, socially, and economically excluded from full citizenship.

Until 1945, when New York State enacted the Ives-Quinn Act, there were no laws forbidding discrimination in either public or private employment. The civil rights movement of the 1950's and 1960's and the racial violence of that era were historic events that challenged legalized and de facto segregation. The Civil Rights Movement "favored sweeping interracial social change: racial desegregation in schools and housing, federal protection of the right to vote, a massive redirection of public funds from spending on warfare and military preparation to social needs, an end to poverty and a reduction in social inequality, community control of schools, radical upgrading of

John W. Coverdale, Ed.D., Professor, Human Resource Management, College of Business, Stony Brook University; research areas: affirmative action, human resource management, organizational behavior, workplace conflict/dispute resolution. E-mail: John.Coverdale@stonybrook.edu or jwcove@hotmail.com.

public goods like health, welfare and housing, higher wages and labor power, and a moral and spiritual renewal of a culture descending into the nightmare of violence and hatred” (Raskin, 1995).

In spite of multiple efforts to assure civil rights for all Americans, minorities were still denied access to employment, housing, higher education and more. The equivalent of an American caste-class system has, for some time, served to retain a large percentage of the Black population in lower income and job sectors of the economy. In 1964 President Lyndon Johnson stated, “affirmative action is the next and more profound stage of the battle for civil rights, civil rights laws alone are not enough to remedy discrimination.” During a graduation speech at Howard University in June of 1965, which was titled “To Fulfill These Rights”, Johnson stated “You do not wipe away the scars of centuries by saying: now you are free to go where you want, do as you desire, and choose the leaders you please. You do not take a man who for years has been hobbled by chains, liberate him, bring him to the starting line of a race, saying you are free to compete with all the others, and still justly believe you have been completely fair...we seek not just freedom but opportunity...not just legal equity but human ability...not just equality as a right and a theory, but equality as a fact and as a result.”

Most commonly defined as “positive steps taken by firms or other organizations to remedy imbalances in their employment of members of minority groups” (Rosenberg, 1983), affirmative action has been a matter of public policy and a significant political issue deeply rooted in the fabric of American society since the early 1960’s. Additionally and perhaps of greater importance, is the fact that human reactions, opinions and interpretations of affirmative action are certainly wide ranging, and connected to the larger social issue of race perceptions and associated differences among the races for employment and education. Supporters of affirmative action argue that the policy is “necessary to offset the systemic barriers that minorities and women continue to face in pursuing education and employment opportunities...while critics generally argue that discrimination—either present or past—now plays a relatively small role in determination of educational and employment differences across race and gender groups” (Holzer & Neumark, 2005).

Among Human Resource Managers, those with responsibilities for developing and maintaining a qualified workforce, many questions exist about the history, impact, and original intent of affirmative action. While much has been said about the significant impact of affirmative action in American society, and it’s workplaces, some researchers believe that impact to be largely negative, while others believe that regardless of the impact, as policy, affirmative action ranges from being partially, to entirely flawed. According to philosopher and academic Cornel West, when considering the impact of affirmative action, we must fully contemplate questions such as: Why was the policy established in the first place? What were the alternatives? Who questioned its operation and when? How did it come about that a civil rights initiative in the 1960’s is viewed by many as a civil rights violation in the 1990’s? Whose civil rights are we talking about? Is there a difference between a right and an expectation? What are the limits of affirmative action? What would the consequences be if affirmative action disappeared in America? (West, 1999).

Affirmative action programs, as well as what legal historian Kermit Hall called judicially imposed race conscious remedies for racial discrimination found to violate Titles VI and VII of the 1964 Civil Rights Act, “led to disaffection by white males who felt entitled to positions or promotions gained by minorities or women. This disaffection, along with a more general fear of quotas, in turn led to increased consciousness of ‘whites rights’ to equal treatment employment, and to ‘reverse discrimination’ lawsuits such as *Regents of University of California v. Bakke*, and as the attack on affirmative action continued, *Grutter v. Bollinger*” (Hall, 2005).

Unexamined assumptions about affirmative action legislation and implementations lend themselves to what

has become a very heated social, political and economic debate over the last four decades. The question of implementation and outcome versus original intent is one that is frequently at the foundation of all discussions on affirmative action, particularly those discussions that become somewhat intense. While the debate is largely centered on the general concept of fairness, the question of whether the policy “violates or reinforces American ideals and values of equality and equal opportunity” (Elliott & Ewos, 2000), also come into play. At least part of the outrage derives from the fact that according to the National Opinion Research Center, forty-two percent of Americans cite the media as “the single most important source of information about affirmative action” ...other sources include “political leaders” (Patterson, 1997). In the workplace, views about affirmative action are typically formed through “a combination of personal experience and observation, information and misinformation presented in the mass media, and cultural stereotypes passed on from generation to generation.” (Ibid).

In order to more fully understand affirmative action, the larger and more historic issues of racism and discrimination in the United States must be viewed in totality. Because of a history of deep racism, attempts at remedy such as civil rights laws, affirmative action and other anti-discriminatory regulations became part of the social and political fabric in the United States. The debate in this regard has been lengthy, significant, and at times fierce, and the residual effects are still very much present in today’s workplaces.

2. Background

Affirmative action attempts to correct long standing discriminatory hiring practices. The Supreme Court has, on several occasions, ruled on the legalities of various elements of affirmative action with regard to employment. The intensity of this debate heightened in November of 1969 when President Richard Nixon proposed a reintroduction of what was previously known as the Philadelphia plan. Originally proposed during the Johnson administration, this plan required construction companies doing business with the government to “set goals and timetables for minority hiring and promotion” and “served to increase minority access to union jobs in the construction industry” (in O’Reilly, 1995). The plan also set “specific ranges for plumbers, pipe fitters and other craft jobs, with a five to eight percent hiring goal in 1970 and twenty-two to twenty-six percent within the next four years” (O’Reilly, 1995).

Affirmative action, conceptually, stems from the provisions of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, specifically Title VII, which is the statutory basis of affirmative action in private employment. Title VII as amended in 1972, bans all discrimination in employment based on race, color, religion, sex, or national origin. Its purpose was to increase equity and opportunity, to permit race and, subsequently, gender to become a factor in hiring, contracting, admissions, and financial aid. It justified using unequal means to achieve greater equality among diverse groups of people, which would contribute to the public welfare because it reduces poverty and inequities” (Stein, 1995). Although affirmative action has been officially and legally in existence since the early 1960’s, “neither the scholars, courts, public officials, nor lay persons have arrived at a consensus about its fundamental purpose, its legitimacy as a public policy, or reason for its continuation” (Soni, 1999). Some of the blame for this lack of consensus is due to the Supreme Court’s “uneven and contradictory record concerning affirmative action’s definition, legality, and intent,” leading to “uncertainty and confusion to its interpretive meaning” (Pace & Smith, 1995). The U.S. Supreme Court’s “ambiguous, and oftentimes bitter and divisive, rulings over affirmative action have only exacerbated the controversy rather than fixing the policy meaning and purpose” (Ibid). In 1995, New York Times reporter Linda Greenhouse wrote that in the matter of affirmative action, the “mood of the Court and

the mood of the country are substantially in sync—closely divided, increasingly impatient, skeptical at best, and not persuaded that there is a single, easy answer to the questions posed by awarding public benefits on the basis of race” (Greenhouse, 1995). One wonders how Human Resource Managers should view affirmative action in a climate of such discordant thinking.

For the Human Resource Management professional, the broader and more current debate over affirmative action includes such questions as whether affirmative action still needs to exist, is affirmative action fair to white males, and does affirmative action “promote inefficiencies in the workplace because minorities and women are hired and promoted to jobs for which they are not qualified” (Soni, 1999). Affirmative action becomes “more pronounced when one considers that a quarter century’s experience with Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and its promise of employment equality for racial minorities and women in the American economic system has done little to diminish the strong disagreement over the fundamental meaning of employment equality” (Pace & Smith, 1995). Title VII of the 1964 Civil Rights Act “carried a clear interpretation of affirmative action, and became a cornerstone of employment discrimination law prohibiting employment discrimination in areas such as selection, promotion, and training based on race, color, religion, gender, or national origin” (Elliot & Ewch, 2000). Title VII “did not mandate differential policies by employers” (Ibid). A key element of the legislative debate on the bill was Senator Hubert Humphrey’s assertion that nothing in Title VII of the bill would “give any power to the commission [EEOC] or to any court to require hiring, firing or promotion of employees in order to meet a racial quota” (Huntington, 2004). In fact, Title VII of the Act specifically states that the language is “not to be interpreted as requiring preferential treatment” (Ibid). Senator Humphrey continued by adding that there was also nothing in the bill designed to “achieve a certain racial balance...Title VII prohibits discrimination...and is designed to encourage hiring on the basis of ability and qualifications, not race or religion” (Ibid).

Between 1968 and 1970, the Department of Labor “issued orders requiring government contractors when hiring workers to take into account the proportion of races in their geographic area of their business” (Huntington, 2004). The Labor Department directed businesses “to establish ‘a set of specific and result-oriented procedures’, keyed to the problems and needs of members of minority groups” (Ibid). According to Huntington, President Johnson’s Executive Order “required nondiscrimination—its literal command was still that government contractors ‘ensure that applicants be employed without regard to their race’...had been formally interpreted by the Labor Department to require the contrary.” Huntington asserts that the Labor Department’s actions “also ran afoul of the nondiscrimination language of Title VII”. In fact, according to Huntington, “the policy of the U.S. Department of Labor by 1969 was thus to require what Congress had prohibited scarcely five years before.”

The undercurrent of concern regarding the question of fairness pertaining to affirmative action re-surfaced in 1990, when North Carolina Senator Jessie Helms faced a close re-election campaign against Harvey Gantt, a black man who supported a civil rights measure that Mr. Helms and other conservatives said could lead to job quotas. Helms authorized a commercial that “showed a white man’s hand crumpling a job rejection letter with a white voice over stating you needed that job and you were best qualified, but they had to give it to a minority because of a racial quota” (O’Reilly, 1995). Helms won reelection with fifty-two and one-half percent of the vote.

The June 2007 poll conducted by the Gallup organization reveals that there have been some changes in attitudes or viewpoints on affirmative action from year to year. Regarding the increase of affirmative action programs; 47% of blacks, compared to 53 % in 2003, said affirmative action programs should be increased, while only 17% of whites agreed, compared to 22% in 2003. Seventy six percent of whites surveyed in 2007 believed that blacks in their community had the same chance as they do of getting any kind of job, compared to 79% in

2003, while only 37% of blacks agreed, compared to 46% in 2003. Eighty percent of whites and 49% of blacks agreed that blacks had equal opportunities in education, compared to 71% and 93% in 2003. Eighty-four percent of whites and 44% of blacks agreed that blacks had equal opportunities in housing, compared to 86% and 58% in 2003 (Gallup, 2007). While the Gallup Poll does indicate that from 2003 to 2007, there was an increase among both blacks and whites surveyed who felt that there was no need to increase affirmative action programs, the percentage of blacks surveyed in 2003, who felt that they had the same chances as whites for jobs actually went down in 2007. While the explanations for this statistical decline are potentially numerous, the tightened economy, the largely conservative Supreme Court decisions, and perceptions of the policies of the Bush administration could be potential reasons for the change.

Since its implementation, affirmative action's purpose, effects and applications in actual employment settings have been widely misunderstood. With no clear consensus on one of the most critical public policy issues of the last four decades, effective and proper implementation has been difficult. Moreover, further implementation and acceptance problems arise due to the fact that no one "comes to a policy issue *tabula rasa*, value-free, uninfluenced by personal experience and social messages" (Stone, 2002). The result has been an ongoing discussion with no real conclusion, during which, "everyone responds by increasing the volume or complexity of their arguments, yet few people change their minds" (Edley, 1996). The issue of affirmative action, now once again before the United States Supreme Court in the Fisher v. Texas case, requires a more careful examination as public policy, which could facilitate constructive dialog, leading to enhanced understanding, reconsideration of long held beliefs, both pro and con, and eventually more effective workplace practices. While we may never reach true consensus, a more guided discussion could help bring our society and our workplaces closer to that point than we are right now.

A critical initial step in determining the future of affirmative action is to determine how Human Resource Managers who actually make recruitment, hiring, retention and admissions decisions, assess the impact of affirmative action in the workplace, and gain insight to their conceptions and misconceptions of affirmative action, the barriers and impact they perceive for employers and employees relating to affirmative action. Members of the Society for Human Resource Management were invited to participate in completing an anonymous questionnaire. The study sought to determine whether participants differed in their views of affirmative action based on their gender, age, race, veteran status, political identity, level of education, income, employment history, citizenship, and geographic residency. The survey instrument was posted on the Society for Human Resource Management's website, to which any of its 210,000 individual members have access. Respondents had the opportunity to respond and return the survey anonymously for a period of three weeks. The Society for Human Resource Management website announced the survey and encouraged its members to participate. The survey data was collected from the Society for Human Resource Management members through Survey Monkey.

The instrumentation used to analyze how members of the Society for Human Resource Management assess the impact of affirmative action in the workplace was comprised of eight questions regarding knowledge of affirmative action, eight questions regarding impact of affirmative action, six questions regarding barriers to affirmative action in the workplace and five questions regarding benefits of affirmative action. In addition, eleven questions assessed employer judgments of affirmative action, which comprised the dependent variable for this study. The survey was accessed through the Society for Human Resource Management's website discussion board, which has approximately 1,885 visitors each month, with a thirty percent usage rate. Sixty-seven completed surveys were returned.

3. Data Analysis and Findings

Table 1 Revised Categories and Survey Items, Range Score and Alpha Statistic after Factor Analysis

Categories/Dimensions	Items	Range Score	Alpha
Knowledge of affirmative action	38,23,48,31,27	8-40	0.77
Perceived Impact of affirmative action in workplace	17,25,15,24,43	6-30	0.87
Racial Barriers to affirmative action	33,45,32,34,37,16	6-30	0.88
Favoring of Affirmative Action	12,14,26,13	4-20	0.82
Qualified Hiring in Affirmative Action	22r, 35r, 41,28r, 30,36r	6-30	0.83
Positive Judgment of affirmative action	39,20,44,18,40		0.83

Table 2 reported the descriptions of the participants by gender, there were 48 female respondents and 17 male respondents.

Table 2 Gender Demographic Analysis

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	2	3.0	3.0	3.0
Male	17	25.4	25.4	28.4
Female	48	71.6	71.6	100.0
Total	67	100.0	100.0	

Table 3 reveals that 83 percent of the respondents were white, nearly 11 percent were Black, 3 percent were Hispanic, and 1.5 percent were Asian, while 1.5 percent reported “other”.

Table 3 Race

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	54	80.6	81.8	81.8
White	7	10.4	10.6	92.4
Black	3	4.5	4.5	97.0
Hispanic	1	1.5	1.5	98.5
Asian/Pacific Islander	1	1.5	1.5	100.0
Native American	66	98.5	100.0	
Total	66	98.5	100.0	
Missing	1	1.5		
System	1	1.5		
Total	67	100.0		

Table 4 reveals that for political identity, 10.8 percent of the respondents said they were strongly conservative, 12.3 percent somewhat conservative, 18.5 percent conservative, 6.2 percent strongly liberal, 20 percent somewhat liberal, 15.4 percent liberal, and 16.9 percent reported their political identity as none or independent.

Table 4 Political Identity

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	7	10.4	10.6	10.6
Strongly Conservative	7	10.4	10.6	21.2
Somewhat Conservative	12	17.9	18.2	39.4
Conservative	6	9.0	9.1	48.5
Strongly Liberal	14	20.9	21.2	69.7
Somewhat Liberal	10	14.9	15.2	84.8
Liberal	10	14.9	15.2	100.0
None/Independent	66	98.5	100.0	
Total	66	98.5	100.0	
Missing	1	1.5		
System	1	1.5		
Total	67	100.0		

**Affirmative Action and the Human Resource Manager in the Twenty-first Century Workplace
in the United States of America**

Table 5 reveals that 19.4 percent of the respondents earned between 30,000 and 69,000, 35 percent between 70,000 and 109,000 and 22 percent had incomes above 110,000.

Table 5 Income

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	30-49,999	13	19.4	20.3	20.3
	50-69,999	13	19.4	20.3	40.6
	70-89,999	16	23.9	25.0	65.6
	90-109,999	5	7.5	7.8	73.4
	110-129,999	10	14.9	15.6	89.1
	over 130,000	7	10.4	10.9	100.0
	Total	64	95.5	100.0	
Missing	System	3	4.5		
Total		67	100.0		

Descriptive statistics (Table 6) were used to analyze how members of the Society for Human Resource Management assess the impact of affirmative action in the workplace.

Table 6 Mean Scores For Impact, Positive Judgment and Favoring of Affirmative Action

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
IAAW	63	8.00	25.00	16.6032	4.15638
POSAA	65	5.00	24.00	12.8769	4.30301
FAVORAA	62	4.00	19.00	10.7258	3.52122
Valid N (listwise)	60				

The mean score of 16.6 for attitudes towards Impact of Affirmative Action at Work indicated that Human Resource Managers slightly agree that Affirmative Action has impacted their worksites. The mean score of 12.87 for Positive Judgments about Affirmative Action indicated that the Human Resource Managers disagreed with the positive statements about affirmative action. Furthermore, the mean score of 10.72 for Favoring of Affirmative Action indicated that Human Resource Managers slightly agreed that they favored affirmative action.

In Table 7, the mean score of 21.62 for Qualified Hiring under Affirmative Action indicated that Human Resource Managers tended to agree that the qualified were not hired in affirmative action. The mean score of 18.2 for their recognition of Racial Barriers indicated that Human Resource Managers slightly agreed that there were racial barriers in their worksites. Furthermore, the mean score of 16.1 indicated that they agreed that they were comfortable with their knowledge of affirmative action requirements.

Table 7 Mean Scores For Qualified Hiring, Racial Barriers, and Knowledge of Affirmative Action

QUALHI	62	12.00	29.00	21.6290	4.36917
RACBAR	63	7.00	30.00	18.2222	5.03998
KNOWAA	61	7.00	25.00	16.1967	3.88081
Valid N (listwise)	56				

In addition to fifty-one-questions in the survey, there were two open-end questions. The first question asked: If given the opportunity and the power to do so, how would you deal with affirmative action, as you know it. Table 8 presents the responses that twenty-eight Human Resource Managers offered. The responses indicate that there is little agreement among Human Resource Managers regarding the need for affirmative action and its

**Affirmative Action and the Human Resource Manager in the Twenty-first Century Workplace
in the United States of America**

benefits. Several managers believe that the Federal policy regarding affirmative action is no longer needed. One respondent suggested that Title VII of the Civil Rights Act should be strengthened and affirmative action as policy be abolished.

Table 8 Commentaries on How to Deal with Affirmative Action

<p>Abolish it. Through Education, change the behavior of people who are discriminating. I don't want preferential treatment, and I don't know why anyone would. Eliminate affirmative action plans and strengthen Title VII of the Civil Rights Act. Stop Office of Federal Contract Compliance Program audits after two successful audits. Abolish it; it is an administrative task that adds no value to the bottom line. Ensure that diversity training include Lesbian, Gay, Transgender, Bi-Sexual training. Hold managers accountable for increasing workplace diversity awareness. Continue affirmative action in accordance with applicable laws. Trash the program, put the money elsewhere. Get rid of affirmative action plans. Get rid of bureaucratic record keeping. Phase it out of the workplace in the next few years, but keep it in college programs longer to ensure diversity. I don't see how affirmative action can be dismissed. Dissolve affirmative action, it has outlived its usefulness and reduces standards. Get rid of it. Do away with it. Hire the best person for the job period! Do away with the program. Get a good education to help with a good job. Continue affirmative action plans as originally designed. Get senior management to understand affirmative action and Equal Opportunity. Continue affirmative action but educate supervisors on its importance. I am a minority who doesn't believe in affirmative action. Treat everyone the same at work. Educate employees to help dispel affirmative action myths. Come up with a good faith plan to promote woman and minorities. Eliminate affirmative action.</p>

While several of the respondents indicate that if given the opportunity and power to do so, they would continue affirmative action as they know it, the majority of the responses clearly indicate that they would make varying degrees of change. The major themes appear to be increasing awareness of the benefits of diversity in the workplace, improving training and education opportunities, and eliminating affirmative action altogether.

Twenty-eight people responded to this open-ended question. Sixteen of the twenty-eight who responded indicated that if given the opportunity and power to do so, they would, in some way, eliminate affirmative action as they know it. Of the twenty-eight responses to this question, eighteen were white females, six of which were age 30-39, nine of which were age 40-49, and three of which were age 50-59.

Of the eighteen white females, who responded to the first open-ended question, twelve of them indicated that they would eliminate affirmative action. Analyzed by age, all six of the respondents from the 30-39 age group sought the elimination of affirmative action, as did six of the nine from age group 40-49, and two of the three respondents from age group 50-59.

There were four African American females and one Hispanic female who also responded to the question. Three were in the age range of 30-39, one was 40-49, and one was 50-59. One of the four African American female respondents indicated that she would eliminate affirmative action, as did the one Hispanic respondent. Both were in the 30-39 age range.

There were eight male respondents to the open ended question, seven whites, two that were age 30-39, two

that were 40-49, and two that were 50-59, as well as one that was 60-69. Additionally, there was one Hispanic male who was age 21-29. Of the seven white male respondents, one (age 40-49) indicated that he would eliminate affirmative action. The one Hispanic male indicated that he would treat everyone the same, and the remaining responses ranged from keeping affirmative action, but without quotas, to full support for affirmative action.

The second open-ended question asked how do you perceive the long-term existence of affirmative action in your employment field. Table 9 presents the responses that fifteen commentators offered regarding their perceptions of the long-term prospects for affirmative action in their fields. Overall the respondents differed about the need for affirmative action and some saw it as necessary for many years, while others noted “as workforce diversity increases, affirmative action will no longer be necessary.”

Table 9 Commentaries about the Future of Affirmative Action

Still Progressing. Affirmative action will be with us for many years to come. Wish it would go away so we can just pick the best person. More governmental headaches I don't believe that affirmative action is going anywhere for now. I think affirmative action will soon disappear. In the scientific community it has had a negative impact. As workforce diversity increases, affirmative action will no longer be necessary. We will always need programs to help find underutilized people. I hope the need diminishes over time, but I am not sure that will happen. I think it will continue. We still have work to do. Affirmative action is still necessary. I hope it phases out long term. Continuation of an overly burdensome task.

For the last open-ended question, the responses regarding the long-term existence of affirmative action ranged from hoping that it will soon disappear to the belief that affirmative action will continue. Fifteen people responded to this question. Five of the fifteen respondents felt that affirmative action will soon disappear. Eight respondents believe that affirmative action is still necessary.

4. Conclusion

In general, respondents from the Society for Human Resource Management tend to slightly agree that they are knowledgeable about affirmative action and its perceived impact in the workplace. They also slightly agree that racial barriers still exist in the workplace, but disagree on favoring the continuation of affirmative action. They slightly agree on affirmative action not requiring the hiring of unqualified people, and less than slightly agree on the positive judgments of affirmative action. There were no significant differences found between Human Resource male and female managers and their attitudes toward the impact of affirmative action at work, racial barriers towards affirmative action, positive judgments towards affirmative action, favoring of affirmative action, their knowledge of affirmative action and perceptions of qualified hiring in affirmative action. Survey responses indicated that younger Human Resource Managers perceive more of an impact for affirmative action at work. Additionally white Human Resource Managers perceive a greater impact for affirmative action than either Blacks or Hispanics. Finally, the responses indicate the more highly educated Human Resource Managers tend to see a greater impact for affirmative action. Human Resource Managers who had negative judgments for affirmative action accounted for 16% of the variance in education, and believe that the unqualified are hired under

affirmative action. Positive judgments of affirmative action tend to be associated with people who are older and have more education. There was no significant relationship between racial barriers to affirmative action and age, race, political identity, education, income or work experience. A high correlation exists between knowledge of affirmative action and the perceived impact affirmative action has had in the workplace. Similarly, those Human Resource Managers who believed that racial barriers existed in the workplace, also tended to hold positive perceptions of the impact of affirmative action, to believe the qualified were hired under affirmative action, to favor less affirmative action, to perceive less benefits of affirmative action, and to report more knowledge of affirmative action. Among the Human Resource Managers who claimed the qualified were hired under affirmative action, they expressed more accurate knowledge of affirmative action regulations, did not favor affirmative action, did not perceive many benefits in affirmative action and were aware of racial barriers at work.

There may be a historical connection responsible for many of these positions. The original intentions of affirmative action, as presented by Presidents Kennedy and Johnson, were to give qualified people access to opportunity. Under President Nixon, quotas were introduced and affirmative action was perceived as calling for the hiring of unqualified people. It is noteworthy that older respondents to the survey tended to have more positive perceptions of affirmative action which may be the result of a close identification with the Kennedy and Johnson affirmative action efforts as opposed to the later efforts by Nixon.

Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas, who benefited from affirmative action as a young man, is today among its harshest critics. Yet, his situation is one of the more illustrative examples of how affirmative action programs were originally intended to work. Thomas, who graduated cum laude from Holy Cross, desired to attend law school. His undergraduate record placed him amongst those students who could seek admission to some of the best law schools in the country. He applied to Yale, Harvard, and The University of Pennsylvania, eventually gaining acceptance at all three. Thomas selected Yale, which two years earlier had begun a special set aside program to increase the minority student population. While at Yale, and since, Thomas wrestled with both the real and imagined perceptions that he did not belong there, and that his peers believed he gained acceptance because of the special minority set aside or quota admissions program, which later was deemed illegal under the 1978 Bakke decision. He faced this attitude from his professors as well as his fellow students while at Yale (Thomas, 2002). This type of attitude was born largely from what affirmative action became under President Nixon, and is still very prevalent today among the general population of adults in the work force as well as Human Resource Managers in this study.

As public policy for nearly fifty years, it is now time to reassess Affirmative Action. If one holds a position that affirmative action is still needed, needs to gain wider acceptance as a policy, should be more effective, or is not needed, a thorough review needs to take place, and the ongoing debate must be reframed. In 1995, former President Bill Clinton used the phrase “Mend it Don’t End It” to present his views on affirmative action. This is the right approach. It is time to work toward a supportive plan that seeks to give underrepresented, yet qualified women and minorities, access to jobs. This can be done with the clear understanding that the goal doesn’t necessarily always have to be equal access; just measurable and consistent improvement. The truth of the matter is that in some industries truly equal access is not a statistical likelihood, and the imposition of quotas will never be a fair answer. Philosophically, a new approach seems to require a return to the type of affirmative action that was originally intended by Presidents Kennedy and Johnson. Their approach, along with the concepts of our need for workplace diversity would be an excellent foundation for discussions about an affirmative action plan with the clear goal of addressing social and economic problems. In light of the benefits diversity offers for job productivity

and the elevation of new opportunities, Human Resource Managers should promote diversity and fair employment policies (Page, 2007). A revised affirmative action policy, designed to provide access for the economically disadvantaged regardless of race, would be more likely to gain wider acceptance in today's diverse society. An honest look at the historical failures of affirmative action and consideration of the advantages of diversity may provide a roadmap to potential solutions in the future that promote workforce diversity and more inclusive workplace policies.

References:

- Collie Brown (2005). *Blacks Need Not Apply: Losing The Battle For Equality in 21st Century America*, Ohio: Claystone Press.
- William J. Clinton (1995). "Mend it don't end it", Retrieved, January 24, 2007 from Google.com.
- Christopher Edley (1992). *Not All Black and White: Affirmative Action and American Values*, New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Euel Elliott and Andrew Ewch (2000). "The Evolution of an issue: The rise and decline of affirmative action", *Policy Studies Review*, Vol. 17, No. 2-3, pp. 212-237.
- Linda Greenhouse (1995). "In step on racial policy", June 14, 1995. Retrieved January 25, 2007 from New York Times Select.com.
- Harry Holzer and David Neumark (2005). "Affirmative action: What do we know?". *Journal of Public Policy and Analysis*, November.
- Samuel Huntington (2004). *Who Are We? The Challenge to America's National Identity*, New York: Simon & Schuster.
- Kenneth O'Reilly (1995). *Nixon's Piano: Presidential and Racial Politics from Washington to Clinton*, New York: The Free Press.
- Joseph M. Pace and Zachary Smith (1995). "Understanding affirmative action: From the practitioners perspective", *Public Personnel Management*, Vol. 24, No. 2, available online at: <http://www. Questia.com>.
- Scott Page (2007). *The Difference: How The Power of Diversity Creates Better Groups, Firms, Schools, and Societies*, New Jersey: Princeton University Press.
- Talcott Parsons and Kenneth Clark (1967). *The Negro American*, Boston: Beacon Press.
- Orlando Patterson (1997). *The Ordeal of Integration: Progress and Resentment in America's Racial Crisis*, Washington, D.C: Civitas.
- Jamie Raskin (1995). "Affirmative action and racial reaction", *Z Magazine*, available online at: <http://www. Questia.com>.
- Jerry Rosenberg (1983). *Dictionary of Business and Management*, New York: John Wiley and Sons.
- Vidu Soni (1999). "Morality vs. mandate: Affirmative action in employment", *Public Personnel Management*, Vol. 28. No. 4, p. 577.
- Nancy Stein (1995). "Affirmative action and the persistence of racism", *Racial & Political Justice*, Vol. 22, No. 3, pp. 28-44 available online at: <http://www. Questia.com>.
- Nancy Stein (1995). "Questions and Answers about affirmative action", available online at: <http://www. Questia.com>.
- Deborah Stone (2002). *Policy Paradox: The Art of Political Decision Making*, New York. W.W Norton & Company.
- Andrew Thomas (2002). *Clarence Thomas: A Biography*, San Francisco: Encounter Books.
- Cornel West (1999). *The Cornel West Reader*, New York: Basic Civitas Books.