



Is Affirmative Action Reverse Discrimination?

By Dr. Maura Cullen

Claims of reverse discrimination have been around for a while; however, recent events have brought it back into the forefront. The election of our first black President, Barack Obama, the appointment of Sonia Sotomayo, the first Latina to serve on the United States Supreme Court and the last four Secretaries of State were two white women, a black woman and black man. Some white people are claiming that white men are the ones who are currently being discriminated against.

However, the numbers tell the truth. There are nine Supreme Court justices; seven of them are white men. There have been 44 Presidents, 43 of them have been white men. I think it's a sure bet that we will see at least one white man as President again in the years to come. I recall seeing a photo of then Presidential candidate John Edwards on the cover of Esquire magazine, with the caption, "Can a White man still be President?" Instead of asking such a silly question, we should be asking ourselves why have there only been one non- white President and no women?

I recall reading a quote by Barry Switzer, "Some people are born on third base and go through life thinking they've hit a triple". That profound statement truly sums up the essence of racial privilege and what it is to be white in the United States. It demonstrates that some people are given a head start while others have to work much harder to get to the same place. There is no denying every President had to work hard to earn the highest office in the land. However, President Obama had additional challenges to overcome due to his color.

To continue the baseball analogy, affirmative action is not about taking white players off the field. What it means is that they are no longer given the advantage of starting on third base but must take their turn in the batter's box along with everyone else. It's about creating a level playing field where everyone must earn their way on base and where everyone has a chance to step up to the plate.

There was a time in our history in which African-Americans were prohibited from competing in Major League Baseball and were relegated to the separate but unequal Negro League. In 1947, Brooklyn Dodgers general manager Branch Rickey, motivated both by the ideal of racial equality and the desire to win ballgames, added a black player to his team. The player was the legendary Jackie Robinson. In doing so, the pair ended the baseball color line of the sixty-year era of segregation. Branch Rickey wanted the most talented ball players and was smart enough to know that some of the best players were not white.

Today, there are many Jackie Robinsons so to speak, who deserve a chance to demonstrate their exceptional skills and talents. Affirmative action is not a perfect solution, but does provide the best opportunity for people of all backgrounds to be given the chance to compete.

At times affirmative action policy is not implemented to its true intent. There are white people who are passed over for positions they deserved. They have every right to be upset at the injustice.

Yet for every one of those instances where a white person falls prey to discrimination, there are ten times the numbers of People of Color who experience such discrimination.

This is how I make sense of claims of reverse discrimination. For simplicity, the black team represents all People of Color.

America's Favorite Pastime White vs. Black

The white team is allowed to field three times the numbers of players than the black team.

Instead of three outs, the white team gets six outs.

The umpires are employed by the white team and use to be members of the white team.

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All the games are played at the white team's home stadium where they are cheered and supported while the black team is booed and taunted.

The white team has all of the latest and greatest equipment while the black team has to settle for the white teams discards.

The white team grew up playing baseball in organized leagues and attending private baseball camps.

All of the previous 43 commissioners of baseball have been from the white team. Now the first black commissioner is attempting to appoint a black umpire. Yet the white team is claiming it is unfair.

Discrimination is discrimination not matter which direction it is pointed. However, it would appear that the only time many whites condemn such behavior is when the bus is backing up on them. Racism in America still results in a disproportionate number of white people getting on base because they were walked while many people of color were hit by a pitch. The end result is the same, but one is much more painful.

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