

Nick
WILTGEN

Institutional affirmation

Individual most important minority

Last week, California voters approved a ballot initiative to end hiring preferences practiced by the state government, also known as "affirmative action." At last there has been a concrete victory in the battle against the biggest barrier to ending racism and bigotry in America.

Affirmative action, ballyhooed by its supporters as a tool for ending racism, is the most disgustingly racist idea the government currently espouses. It is the pinnacle of hypocrisy — an institution claiming that the solution to bigotry is more bigotry. Or, more accurately, affirmative action replaces isolated, voluntary discrimination against random groups with across-the-board, state-mandated discrimination against whatever group is deemed to have an "unfair advantage."

Of course, like all big government programs, there is no logical justification for affirmative action; its only defense has been the collective emotional whine of its supporters who never hesitate to talk about the people who have benefited from affirmative action.

But for every "success story" affirmative action has produced, there have been at least two victims — the employee who was more qualified but was not hired because of racial quotas or preferential hiring; and the employer, whose choice was taken away and whose business suffers because he is forced to judge people not on the content of their character, but on the color of their skin or what sexual organs they happened to have been born with.

Beyond those two direct victims of affirmative action, those of us who are not directly affected also suffer. We all suffer because affirmative action programs have kept us from becoming a "color-blind" society. It pits Americans against one another, as various fragmented groups jockey for protected status. Affirmative



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action suggests (in spite of the evidence) that all women and minorities are weak or somehow

incapable of succeeding without the government's help. It also implies that all white men are closed-minded bigots who want only to preserve their "exclusive power structure."

Those are the real implications of affirmative action, whether its supporters acknowledge it or not. Affirmative action rests on the same philosophical premise as racism and bigotry — the idea that it is acceptable to pass judgment on a large group of people based on the character of a few people in that group.

That idea is intellectually insulting. The person who attempts to judge people *en masse* is guilty of evading his responsibility to judge

people only as individuals, and then only when he or she knows enough about an individual to make a reasonable judgment about that individual's character.

The bigoted employer believes, for example, that no women or blacks (or Hispanics or Jews or gays or whites) are capable of doing their job; the affirmative action supporter believes that no employer is capable of ignoring race, gender, etc., when making hiring decisions. Both make unfounded blanket judgments of individuals they don't even know.

Despite knowing all of this, supporters of affirmative action refuse to admit that their program is wrong. They seem to believe that given enough time, big government can end racism and bigotry.

However, the evidence is obvious. Racism and bigotry have not gone away; discrimination lawsuits, some rather frivolous, abound; and more groups are lobbying to gain special status under affirmative action laws.

On a more personal level, though, I have two final observations:

(1) The smallest minority is the individual. No individual is exactly like the rest of society; each of us is a unique one-man or one-woman minority. "Minority rights" can only be individual rights.

(2) One of our individual rights is freedom of association. I cherish my freedom to peaceably associate with whomever I wish, even if others don't approve of my choices. It would be hypocritical of me to demand that other people's freedom of association be taken away, and that includes the right of employers to choose their employees as they see fit, even if I might not approve of their hiring practices.

Wiltgen is a junior broadcasting and meteorology major and a Daily Nebraskan columnist.

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