AFFIRMATIVE ACTION AT WORK
Freshman Seminar 145
Princeton University
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Overview

The Civil Rights Act and presidential orders requiring “affirmative action” in employment are now over three decades old. Affirmative action remains a hot political topic, yet the debate is largely uninformed by the social science literature. We will review the origins of Civil Rights and affirmative action laws, employer response to the law, changing public attitudes, and the effects of the law on inequality.

What caused Congress to pass the Civil Rights Act of 1964, and to pass subsequent amendments that expanded protections for women, the disabled, and other groups? The Civil Rights movement played a large role at first, but civil rights laws developed momentum of their own. How have employers responded to the law? While pundits mostly debate the merits of quotas, employment quotas are illegal in most instances. Most employers responded to the law by making the hiring and promotion processes more bureaucratic, in order to make them more meritocratic.

How does the public feel about affirmative action at work? Periodic surveys show that the public – men and women, blacks and whites – supports most of the steps employers take to improve opportunities for minorities and women. Most oppose quotas, but quotas are rare. How has affirmative action law affected inequality by race and gender? Recent studies show that affirmative action programs are responsible for many of the gains women and minorities have made in the last three decades.

Details

Our weekly, three-hour, meetings will be broken up into short lectures, debates, and discussions of the reading materials. Attendance is mandatory. For most weeks there will be a brief assignment, in addition to the reading assignment. Two papers are required during the term. The first, based on interviews with local personnel managers, will detail the efforts of one firm to comply with anti-discrimination law. The topic of the second paper is to be negotiated.

Each of our weekly discussions of the readings will be led by a student, who will come to class with questions to discuss and issues to debate. The success of the seminar depends on participants having done the reading in advance. Reading loads are light in parts of the semester when students typically have course assignments and exams.
Four books have been ordered for the course, and are available at the University Store. All other readings are contained in a packet, which can be purchased at Pequod Copy Center, 6 Nassau Street. Phone: (609) 921-7293. Email: pequodcopy@aol.com.

Books available at the University Store:


Weekly Reading Assignments

**Week 1**

**THE NEED FOR CIVIL RIGHTS LAW**

**SEPTEMBER 21**


**Week 2**

**DO PEOPLE CHOOSE BAD JOBS?**

**SEPTEMBER 28**


**Week 3**

**WILL INEQUALITY DISAPPEAR ON ITS OWN?**

**OCTOBER 5**

Week 4
THE CIVIL RIGHTS ACT AND AFFIRMATIVE ACTION
OCTOBER 12


Week 5
CIVIL RIGHTS LAW IN ACTION: THE 1960S
OCTOBER 19


Week 6
THE HEYDAY OF CIVIL RIGHTS: THE 1970S
OCTOBER 26


FALL BREAK

Week 7
ROUND 1: DID THE LAW HELP?
NOVEMBER 9


**FIRST ASSIGNMENT DUE**

**Week 8**

**WHAT DOES AMERICA THINK OF AFFIRMATIVE ACTION?**

**NOVEMBER 16**


**Week 9**

**THE 1980S: THE REAGAN REVERSAL AND SEXUAL HARASSMENT**

**NOVEMBER 23**


**Week 10**

**THE 1990s: DIVERSITY MANAGEMENT**

**NOVEMBER 30**


**Week 11**

**DISABILITY AND WORK/FAMILY ISSUES**

**DECEMBER 7**


**Week 12**

**AFFIRMATIVE ACTION TODAY**

**DECEMBER 14**


**SECOND ASSIGNMENT DUE**