

APPENDIX B

Affirmative Action White Paper

Affirmative Action: White Paper

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Affirmative Action is a policy that provides diverse ethnic groups with equal access to employment. The attempt to manipulate Affirmative Action's definition is the beginning of our nation's conflict. The political leadership has attempted to persuade the general public that Affirmative Action is not narrowly defined. The deception practiced is consistent with attitudes that have existed since people of color arrived on these shores. The message is clear, "We are not welcomed."

In spite of the current climate, we are not fearful. People of color have always known that we will have to confront injustices that exist in this country. Therefore, I would like to use this document to explore four reasons for the attitudes of political officials; (1) it is a struggle over economic resources, (2) it is a social attitude concerning the value of differing ethnic groups, (3) it is an intellectual statement about who deserves higher education and (4) it is based on emotion. In addition, I offer some solutions.

During the 70s and early 80s when jobs were plentiful, little attention was given to the economic impact of Affirmative Action, until the outcome of layoffs during the late 80s resulted in greater unemployment. This unemployment struggle has continued during the 90s, with fewer people being hired and corporations continuing to downsize. These changes have affected all ethnic groups, but some believe that people of color are losing their jobs less frequently because of diversity goals established by corporations. Is there any truth regarding statements about people of color maintaining their jobs? In reality, findings proved that people of color experienced the greatest unemployment during the 80s and 90s. Although their numbers were already small, they experienced the highest rate of layoffs from corporations through downsizing due to being placed in expendable positions which could easily be eliminated. During the same process of downsizing, the few who were in middle management, became even fewer which is found in corporations today. According to a report by the Glass Ceiling Commission, the incomes of similarly qualified professionals of color is \$25,000 less than white managers. While similar work is performed by African Americans, their work is not valued in the same way. Affirmative Action has helped to provide a mechanism to improve the value placed on work accomplished by all ethnic group.

The disengaging from Affirmative Action, makes a statement about social support for people who are not given access to fair employment. Racism, discrimination, and prejudice have not failed to raise there ugly heads to make us again a society of people who devalue differences. Negative political attitudes about social policies implemented during the sixties prevail in congress. To our detriment, congress is eliminating social policies that will keep people of color in a vulnerable economic condition. The shift away from Affirmative Action has its roots in the attitude "all that can be done, has been done." Recent surveys of the social conditions of African Americans point out that their condition is not improving. When asked about race relations in this country, African Americans were 20% more likely to feel that they had been treated unfairly. Our inability to agree on where our country's race relations is headed, is one further justification for Affirmative Action. While some white males are claiming reverse discrimination, complaints registered by people of color outnumber them by the thousands.

The attacks on Affirmative Action have not only been limited to politics but exist in institutions of higher education. The attack on Affirmative Action began on a college campus in California, a state which offers one of the most diverse populations of students in the country. The battle for economic resources has taken root in California and claims are being made that access for minorities means less access for other students. Traditionally underrepresented students must not only pass admission scrutiny, they must also complete a challenging academic curriculum. There are few people of color in the administration and faculty ranks across the country in higher education and if Affirmative Action is ended, even fewer faculty and administrators will be found. The new scrutiny that is being placed on hiring procedures has caused some universities in California to become more lenient with Affirmative Action guidelines in hiring practices. These practices, coupled with attitudes in California, are symbolic of some fears over projected minority population growth. While more students of color will be available for higher education in the year 2000, colleges and universities in California are attempting to take steps backward.

Emotions regarding the value of Affirmative Action are evident throughout society. Those who favor Affirmative Action rely on the historical value, while those opposing it say that it is irrelevant for today. Economic and social dismay in the United States provides additional fuel for the growing frustration between those who do and those who do not have resources. Anger is one word that is used to describe white mens emotions, while disillusionment describes the concerns of people of color.

According to the Glass Ceiling Commission, there is little progress for African Americans who believed obtaining a better education would give them equal access to employment. Frustrations mount when they continue to be excluded from board rooms where important decisions are made; observe the advancement of other professionals with less experience and during periods of downsizing when lay offs are greater among people of color. The commission reports that it takes African Americans twice as long to obtain a new job, not because of lack of skills, but due to inadequate access to fair employment. It is difficult to maintain silence under these circumstances.

Is Affirmative Action still needed? I must ask the rhetorical question; Hasn't Affirmative Action achieved its goals? Organizations such as the National Association of Minority Engineering Program Administrators (NAMEPA) have a long history of representing the vital issues of minority administrators and students across the country. The changing attitude toward affirmative Action is a wake-up call to the membership. We must be vigilant in our support of initiatives to provide access to employment. We need to support

those political representatives who understand what we do, and why what we do is valuable.

We need to assert ourselves by taking a position that says that we will not retreat. This country cannot afford to limit the contributions coming from all of our citizens. Affirmative Action not only has historical roots, but its current value is unmeasurable. We will need the following activities to have a penetrating affect on Affirmative Action policies:

1. We must remain committed to providing equal access to employment for people of color.
2. We must continue our work with legislators who support Affirmative Action.
3. We must partner with corporations that support our men and women.
4. We must encourage our institution's presidents to continue their commitment through verbal and written confirmations of their support.
5. Where possible, we must use economic strategies to influence decision making.
6. We must encourage more corporate CEOs to step forward and state their position.
7. More needs to be written and broadcast to educate the public about the true meaning of Affirmative Action.
8. We must hold politicians who are not favorable to Affirmative Action accountable for their actions.
9. Use E-mail, faxes and other technology to inform various constituents about political activities and media presentations that do not support Affirmative Action.

We must not give up!! We must assertively respond to changes in the political climate. There is a need to assess all of our resources and choose a planned course of action. The force that should drive us is the knowledge that our students need help navigating current road blocks to college entry and employment. We must remain vigilant advocates for higher education professionals and students and with the unity of many of us, for all of us, we will Succeed.

