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# Arthur Fletcher, G.O.P. Adviser, Dies at 80

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Arthur A. Fletcher, a Republican civil rights advocate whose plan in the 1960's requiring the government to enforce timetables and goals in the hiring of minority workers became the framework for affirmative action, died Tuesday at George Washington University Hospital in Washington, D.C. He was 80.



Marcy Nighswander/Associated Press  
Arthur A. Fletcher created the framework for affirmative action.

His son, Paul Fletcher, confirmed the death.

Mr. Fletcher, who was an adviser to Presidents Richard M. Nixon, Gerald R. Ford and Ronald Reagan, headed the United States Commission on Civil Rights from 1990 to 1993, under President George Bush.

In Kansas in the 1950's, at a time when most black civil rights leaders were Democrats, Mr. Fletcher, the son of a career military man and the son-in-law of a

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entrepreneur, seemed perfectly at ease pushing for better opportunities for blacks by instituting policies for Republican administrations.

Yet his political leanings left other black leaders uneasy, while some white Republicans questioned his support of hiring quotas. Mr. Fletcher favored taking race into account to remedy discrimination as a practical matter, despite its loftier ideal of leveling the playing ground.

"It's not about social justice," Mr. Fletcher said at a church assembly in Peoria in 2001, according to The Peoria Journal Star. "Social justice is nice, but I've got something in my pocket that can buy all the social justice I need."

A college football star who studied under the G.I. Bill of Rights at Washburn University in Topeka, Kan., Mr. Fletcher was tapped soon after graduating to manage the campaign of Fred Hall, a liberal Republican running for governor, among black voters.

Mr. Hall won, and Mr. Fletcher was rewarded with a job overseeing the building and maintenance of Kansas highways. The job, in the 1950's in the middle of a boom in highway building, gave him a firsthand look at how lucrative government contracts were handed out, and Mr. Fletcher took from it a belief that better access to those contracts was a cornerstone for improving the prospects of minorities, his son said.

A staunch defender of education, Mr. Fletcher personally helped finance the lawsuit against the Topeka Board of Education in the landmark *Brown v. Board of Education* case, which successfully sought to desegregate the Topeka schools.

Mr. Fletcher left Kansas after some white business leaders were critical of his efforts to steer contracts to minorities, his son said, and he moved his family to the West Coast. After rocks were thrown into the family's house in a white neighborhood in Sacramento, Calif., they moved to Berkeley; eventually, they settled in Washington State.

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There, Mr. Fletcher organized a community self-help program in East Pasco, catching the eye of President Nixon, who appointed Mr. Fletcher his assistant secretary of labor, launching his career on the national stage.

It was while at the Department of Labor that Mr. Fletcher implemented what became known as the revised Philadelphia Plan, a program to enforce the hiring of minorities by businesses and trade unions contracted by the government. Largely successful, it was later amended to include women.

Mr. Fletcher resigned from the Nixon administration in December 1971 to become the executive director of the United Negro College Fund, but stepped down a little over a year later after being at odds with the leaders of the 40 predominantly black schools in the fund, whose trust he had failed to gain as a Republican.

But he was lauded for starting a management training program in the fund and beginning a grass-roots effort to include blacks beyond the middle class.

In 1968, Mr. Fletcher defeated two white candidates to win the Republican primary for lieutenant governor in Washington State, although he lost the general election by a slim margin.

His first wife, Mary Fletcher, died in 1961. In addition to his son, he is survived by his second wife, Bernyce Hassan-Fletcher, and two daughters.

Arthur Allen Fletcher was born Dec. 22, 1924, to Andrew and Edna Fletcher, at Camp Huachuca, Ariz., where his father was stationed in the a black cavalry unit.

His family moved frequently in his youth, and before settling in Junction City, Kan., where he attended high school, and organized a boycott of the school yearbook, which segregated the photos of black students at the back of the book, his son said.

He served in Europe in World War II, was wounded, and discharged in 1945, according to a 1971 biography. He played defensive end for the Baltimore Colts and the Los Angeles Rams before returning to Kansas and beginning his career in politics, his son said.

At his talk in Peoria in 2001, Mr. Fletcher told listeners that he suspected that President Nixon appointed him because of his race, an opportunity he said he took gladly.

"The purpose of affirmative action is so that you can do what God intended you to do and be what he intended you to be," he said.

In his later years, he admonished corporations to help keep affirmative action alive. "For years business leaders screamed for less government: 'Get out of our way. Let us show you how to get things done,' " he told Fortune Magazine in 2000. "So Congress redirected money from Washington to cities to states and to the private sector. O.K., corporate America, the ball's in your court, the reins are in your hands."

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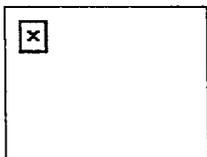
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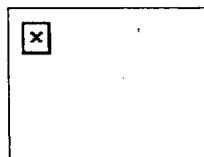
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