

Affirmative Action Myths

Washington, DC — The Rainbow Coalition convened a broad coalition of supporters to hold a press conference affirming affirmative action. The National Organization for Woman (NOW), Congressman Kweisi Mfume (D-MD), former chairman of the Congressional Black Caucus, Katherine Spiller of the Feminist Majority Foundation and others sounded the warning that the Republicans are using affirmative action as a 1996 "wedge" issue to divide Americans, and too many Democrats, including President Clinton, are providing a weak defense.

Recently on the Sunday news shows, both House Majority Leader Richard "Dick" Armey (R-TX) and imminent presidential candidate Pat Buchanan said affirmative action is unnecessary and should be done away with. Newly announced Republican presidential candidate, Senator Phil Gramm (R-TX), said his first act as president would be to issue an executive order ending affirmative action. Senate Majority Leader and unofficial presidential candidate, Senator Robert Dole (R-KS), called for a "review" of all affirmative action programs — only to be joined in that call by President Bill Clinton.

That is like Johnnie Cochran and Bob Shapiro saying to O.J. Simpson, in the middle of his trial, that they are going to "review" his case. In the heat of the battle, Mr. Simpson does not need someone to review his case, he *needs to be defended by strong defense attorneys*.

Obviously, as a general principal, no one is against reviewing public policies and programs. Government programs should be reviewing public policies and programs. Government programs should be reviewed from time to time. But for President Clinton to suggest reviewing affirmative action *in the middle of this political climate and at the start of the 1996 political season* — with this president's lack of a moral center and a demonstrated record of political wishy-washiness, especially on this issue — it is a little unsettling. It is like O.J. Simpson's defense attorneys calling for a public review of his case in the middle of the trial.

There are those who say, "You have to understand, the president is under a lot of political pressure. What do you want him to do?" That's simple — **STAND FOR PRINCIPLE, TEACH AND LEAD!!**

MYTH #1: White males are being hurt and discriminated against because of affirmative action. White males are 33 percent of the population, but 80 percent of tenured professors; 80 percent of the U.S. House; 90 percent of the U.S. Senate; 92 percent of the Forbes 400; 97 percent of school superintendents; 99.9 percent of professional athletic team owners; and 100 percent of U.S. Presidents.

Since the inception of this nation, white males were given preferential treatment — the right to vote, the right to own land, apply for loans and enter institutions of higher learning. In the late 1800s, white males were given millions of acres of mineral and soil-rich land under the Homestead Act as a bonus to go west and replace Native Americans. Such preferential treatment has carried over to 1995. White males are still the most educated, the most highly paid, the wealthiest, the most politically powerful and occupy the most prestigious positions.

MYTH #2: Affirmative action creates preferences for women and people of color. After 250 years of slavery, 100 years of apartheid and 40 years of discrimination, this unbroken record of race and sex discrimination has warranted a **conservative remedy** — affirmative action (**reparations are truer to America's history** — e.g., **Western Europe, Japan and Israel**). Those who have been locked out through negative action need affirmative action laws to protect them from both a **discriminatory legacy** and **continuing discrimination**. We need not be race neutral, but racially inclusive. We need not be color and gender blind, but color and gender caring.

MYTH #3: Affirmative action has hurt people of color, women and the nation. Affirmative action has benefited the entire nation. It has benefited corporations — we have the strongest and most diversified work force in the world. It has benefited families — allowing two-wage earner households. It has benefited minorities (African Americans, Latinos/Hispanics, Asians and Native Americans), older Americans and the disabled. It has helped to create a new middle class.

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MYTH #4: Affirmative action is no longer needed. We cannot fall to prey to the inane notion that discrimination is an evil of the past. It is a very painful reality today. While affirmative action has diversified and improved the American workforce and its centers of higher learning, as a nation we still have a long way to go.

If the president conducts a **FULL** public review, he and the country will find empirical proof that when the law is removed or not enforced, we return to our old ways and our old habits. Since the **Croson** decision, minority contracting in the City of Richmond, Virginia has gone from 35 percent to 1 percent, i.e., to pre-affirmative action levels.

When the president reviews lending practices, he will find that access to capital and credit are denied to women and people of color because lending decisions are private, subjective and arbitrary. Unless there are laws that are strongly enforced, with a plan that includes goals and timetables, the traditionally locked-out will never gain access to capital.

Upon completion of his review, we urge the president to renew his commitment to affirmative action and strong enforcement of the law. We hope he will make the EEOC and the OFCC visible agencies and forces for good. The falsely accused need protection, hope and opportunity; not scapegoating, divisiveness and undue blame.

