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## ■ In my opinion

# Affirmative mis-action



CHUCK SLOTHOWER  
TAKING ISSUE

No other nation has a racial mixture quite like the United States. It provides a continuous source of faction and friction, the inevitable result of past subjugation and the equally inevitable demands by the subjugated for their rights.

America is so concerned with race that decision-makers routinely use the laudable goal of racial equality to justify employing unequal criteria to evaluate everything from job hiring to college admissions to construction bids. They call this program of unequal treatment "affirmative action."

Affirmative action constitutes American society's most significant attempt to alleviate four centuries of slavery, segregation, lynching, poll taxes, brutal child murders, rape and fear perpetrated on behalf of a morally indefensible system of racial supremacy.

Affirmative action began in the 1960s and gained momentum throughout the rest of the 20th century until it reached today's level of quiet acceptance.

The term itself bears some evaluation. It sounds great. Not only does it imply action, but it includes the positive-sounding word "affirmative." Of course, the term "affirmative action" gives no hint of what it actually means, so let's call it what it is: Race-based preferences.

Certainly, blacks could still use some help from society. On average, black Americans have dramatically lower incomes and lower levels of educational attainment, home ownership and employment than society at large, according to federal statistics. They also have higher rates of teen pregnancy, violent crime victimization, HIV infection and a lower life expectancy.

However, the black students who

gain admission to good colleges aren't the ones affected by the poverty that generates the above statistics. This is what John McWhorter, a black professor at the University of California at Berkeley, called the "... deathless lie: That most black students come from disadvantaged circumstances." Most black students at good colleges, in fact, come from solidly middle-class backgrounds.

As McWhorter wrote in The American Enterprise magazine, in the last year that Berkeley employed race-based admissions preferences, more than 65 percent of the students came from households earning at least \$40,000 per year. Similarly, a 1989 study found that among 28 selective universities, only 14 percent of the black students came from households earning \$22,000 per year or less. Clearly, race-based preferences aren't helping poor blacks.

Nothing can make up for what black Americans went through, and we should stop trying to erase the memory of their oppression by helping people who never suffered from it. No student on campus today won their freedom through the Emancipation Proclamation or suffered the humiliation of poll taxes and the three-fifths compromise.

While racism has faded dramatically from the public and private scene, the

class structure has only strengthened. In 1973, the wealthiest 20 percent of households accounted for 44 percent of total U.S. income, according to The Associated Press and U.S. Census Bureau. In 2002, their share rose to 50 percent, while the poorest 20 percent of American households lost ground.

President Bush's policies have further solidified America's class structure. His signature tax cuts, especially the elimination of the estate tax, have overwhelmingly favored the wealthiest Americans. While the wealthy enjoy their tax cuts, the poor struggle with high unemployment, and the administration does nothing to help the millions of poor Americans who lack health insurance. Given the historical trend, one can expect income inequality, and other measures of the class gap to continue to worsen.

The class gap deeply marks higher education, which should act as a leveling influence but more often perpetuates familial privileges. This is a problem of class, not race, and race-based preferences are a poor tool to address it. A white kid who grows up in an Albany trailer park has drastically less hope of getting a good education than a black kid from upper-class Lake Oswego. It's time to stop pretending that the color of one's skin is the primary barrier to getting a quality education; it's money.

The University, the federal government and especially the state legislature need to do more to help poor students break out of their circumstances. Race-based preferences aren't getting the job done.

chuckslothower@dailyemerald.com

## INBOX

a capable, intelligent, brave, strong leader like John Kerry.

Jared Mason-Gere  
Eugene

### U.S. troops pay the price for Iraq's realities

The Bush administration has had a year to train Iraqis to assist our troops. Bush misled the American people in a national debate when he said 100,000 Iraqi security forces have been trained. Deputy Secretary of State Richard Armitage testified to a House Appropriations subcommittee that many trainees have received nothing more than a three-week course in police procedures — what Armitage referred to as "shake-and-bake" forces. Only 8,000 of the total are police who have received a full eight-week course of training.

Because of the lack of trained replacements, Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld told senators it might not be possible to conduct elections in some parts of Iraq. In a more shocking assessment, Jordan's King Abdullah has said it will be impossible to hold fair elections in the current state of chaos.

President Bush has failed to acknowledge the realities in Iraq, and now our service men and women

are paying the ultimate price.

Major Robert Tormey  
U.S. Air Force, Ret.  
Escondido, Calif.

### The Bush administration has planned for a draft

When Howard Dean tells Oregon students that a draft is "likely" if the current administration retains power, he enjoys a tremendous amount of evidentiary support.

The degree of preparations that our government has taken for a draft since the election of 2000 is breathtaking. From tightening the border with Canada to a provision in the No Child Left Behind Act requiring schools to give the federal government contact information about individual students, the infrastructure for a draft is now in place starting in June 2005.

Recently, The Atlanta Journal-Constitution published an article questioning how Bush's military strategy of preemptive regime change can be sustained without a draft. A growing legion now sees a fundamental inconsistency between Bush's foreign policy rhetoric and his claim that a draft is not needed. Any more regime changes must entail conscription, as the troops will not fall from the sky.

Steve Ramirez  
Topeka, Kan.

## ■ Editorial

# Foreign aid should come in the form of forgiveness

The Bush administration renewed its call this weekend for the world to forgive Iraq's \$120 billion in foreign debt, during a three-day meeting of the World Bank. United States officials were met with opposition from France, which is advocating only 50 percent debt relief for Iraq this year.

We support the President's effort to free the people of Iraq from under the crippling weight of debt payments. But we remind him and the other members of the G7 that Iraq is not the only country in need of forgiveness.

Between 1970 and 2002, African nations received \$540 billion in loans from global lending institutions such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund. Despite servicing their debt to the tune of \$550 billion in interest payments, these African nations still owe \$295 billion, according to a United Nations report entitled "Debt Sustainability: Oasis or Mirage?" released Thursday.

The report concludes that there is an urgent need for a total cancellation of Africa's debt to foreign investors. The Bush administration seems to agree.

"We are prepared to go to debt forgiveness of up to 100 percent," Treasury Secretary John Snow told the World Bank.

Despite this pledge, the meetings disbanded on Sunday without an agreement. Rather than wait while the international community lumbers towards consensus — which won't happen until next year at the earliest — we believe a wise first step would be to place a moratorium on future debt servicing for the poorest and most heavily indebted countries in Africa, Asia and Latin America.

This is hardly a new idea. We know it will work because it has worked in the past. Cancellation of international debts under the Marshall Plan helped to rebuild post-war Europe and Japan. More recently, debt relief in Mozambique and Uganda produced good, if incomplete, results.

We are aware that debt forgiveness alone will not solve the problems of worldwide poverty and disease. But tying even partial debt relief to health services could save hundreds of thousands, if not millions, of lives by freeing up resources necessary in the fight against, for example, the AIDS epidemic.

We often hear about the religious virtue of forgiveness in our country. Debt forgiveness is also an issue of virtue. Are we a virtuous people? If so, then we need to stop talking about debt forgiveness and do what it takes to make it happen for those in the world that need it most.

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