

OPINION

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Discrimination Leaves Lasting Marks

Justice Thomas and his colleagues should remember our history

BY MARTHA BURK

The Supreme Court recently revisited the issue of affirmative action, on a date marking the end of Women's History Month. Linking these is important because both point to our society's remarkable ability to forget or ignore historical context.

America has a racist and sexist past, which translates into a racist and sexist present, although admittedly less so with each passing year. But we have not yet achieved a race- and gender-blind society, and we should not pretend that we have.

Historical discrimination leaves lasting marks. The culture created by its legacy continues to keep women and minorities out of positions of education, wealth and power.

Forgetting historical context is what leads Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas to question the admissions policies of historically black colleges. With regard to en-



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—Martha Burk, Center for Advancement of Public Policy

couraging diversity in predominantly white institutions, Justice Thomas asked, "Would the same arguments apply to [historically black colleges]?"

Justice Thomas' question implied that these colleges were created to keep whites out. In fact, the opposite is true—they were created to offer opportunity where none existed. Having been denied admission to the "regular" colleges, women and minorities were forced to start their own schools to network, exchange strategies and create support systems. As race and sex barriers came down in main-

stream institutions, these schools were less and less necessary. That's why we now have the term "historically black" (meaning whites are admitted) and why most "women's" schools actually admit men, while continuing to serve their traditional audience.

We must strive for a society where this "separate but equal" segregation is no longer necessary—that's why affirmative action is still so crucial.

Each year when Women's History Month is over, it presumably gives way to the next 11 months of Men's History, just as the end of

Black History Month allows us to resume with White History Year. Our historical forgetfulness is more easily accomplished when we ignore the inequalities faced by women and people of color for 11 months of the year.

Justice Thomas and his colleagues on the court should remember our history of racism when deciding the future of affirmative action policies.

We all look forward to the day when we have overcome our history, and reached a level of equality in our society that makes tweaking of admissions policies to achieve fairness no longer necessary. But we still need affirmative action to get there.

Martha Burk is a political psychologist who heads the Center for Advancement of Public Policy in Washington, D.C., a think tank focusing on the wisdom of providing for more equal treatment of women in society.

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Affirmative Action Builds Strong Military

BY CONGRESSMAN EARL BLUMENAUER

Washington D.C. was electrically charged as arguments began at the Supreme Court over the critical case on the future of affirmative action.

Even more conservative voices are being heard as newspaper editorials and leaders from all over the country share their support for existing affirmative action policies of colleges and universities. Particularly energizing are the masses of supporters of all ages who have descended on the nation's Capitol. As our nation continues to

struggle with the vestiges of systemic bigotry, we should not underestimate the critical importance of affirmative action efforts for minorities and women. We are not talking about quotas. We are talking about efforts to address the egregious inequities of the past and to make sure that our institutions reflect the communities that they serve.

In this time of war, it is also important to note the importance that affirmative action has played in promoting diversity in our Armed Forces. We simply wouldn't have credible leadership today without

aggressive affirmative action policies. Today, minorities make up about 40 percent of the U.S. military. We need officers that reflect this reality.

While the Bush Administration is out of touch on the importance of affirmative action, the Armed Forces have reaffirmed their support.

I am impressed by the amount of support we've seen in Washington, D.C. I hope the Supreme Court will understand what is at stake. A decision striking down current affirmative action policies would be a step backwards for

America.

U.S. Rep. Earl Blumenauer, D-Ore., represents Portland in Oregon's Third Congressional District.

New Vision of Criminal Justice Applauded

BY DAVID M. BAKER

Last week marked a new direction for the dialogue in Oregon around criminal justice issues when Commissioner Serena Cruz successfully introduced a proclamation declaring Restorative Justice Week in Multnomah County.

The proclamation reflects a growing awareness of, and demand for, this new paradigm of criminal justice policy.

Unlike the costly revenge-based "tough on crime" approach favored by policy makers, restorative justice promotes the values of responsibility, restoration and healing for victims, communities and offenders by emphasizing policies that do more than simply warehouse offenders.

Not only are restorative approaches more cost-effective (a significant advantage in cash-strapped states like Oregon), they are also more effective and typically enjoy much lower recidivism rates.

Examples include restitution for communities and survivors of crime, alternative sentencing and community service, victim-offender mediation and crime prevention through well-funded social programs like education, substance abuse treatment and job training.

"Despite a significant investment of dollars and time, the current criminal justice system—characterized by idea that we can punish our way out of crime—is

simply not delivering on its promise of justice for crime survivors," said SAFES co-founder and director Arwen Bird. "This is a small but significant step forward for Oregon. The more we confront the failure of our system with forward thinking, compassionate, and effective criminal justice, the better off we'll all be. Quite simply, it's time to abandon the costly and failed policies of the past and to move forward with a more sensible paradigm for criminal justice."

David M. Baker is a spokesperson for Survivors Advocating for an Effective System, a statewide organization of crime survivors who advocate a restorative criminal justice system.

Letter to the Editor

Bill Attacks Constitutional Rights

Oregon Sen. John Minnis and those who set a hearing for Senate Bill 742, a blatantly unconstitutional bill, are clearly unfit for office.

This bill threatens anti-war protesters and labor strikers with life sentences for broadly defined crimes of "terrorism". The bill also overrides laws that forbid the police from spying on people who are not committing crimes, and from working with the FBI to target immi-

gration violations.

Anti-war activists, unionists and immigrants have the right to organize against this profit-driven war on Iraq, to fight George Bush's attempt to smash unions under the guise of fighting terrorism and to live free from police persecution. SB 742 is a major building block in the police state that we are supposed to be protected from by the Bill of Rights.

The dictionary defines patriotism as devotion to one's country.

What country are Minnis, U.S. Attorney General John Ashcroft, Bush and company devoted to? I think they are patriots of big busi-

ness and corporate ruthlessness.

For them, war is necessary and unions are an obstacle to their inhuman greed. Meanwhile the rest of the country is left to fend for itself. We are doing that by standing up for the wages and working conditions of ordinary people, organizing to stop this war from forcing us to kill and be killed for mega CEOs' profits and exposing the racist round up of immigrants.

Stop SB 742. Stop John Minnis and his cronies from savaging our state and federal constitutional rights.

Adrienne Weller
Freedom Socialist Party



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