

Affirmative Action and Reparations Informed by Christianity in a Country Strongly Influenced by White Privilege

Goal

The goal on this class on Affirmative Action and Reparations is to build on our studies since Juneteenth to better understand America's racial past and present, in order to recognize the importance of re-energizing Affirmative Action and instituting meaningful reparations.

Class Assignments

All of these are quite short except the first one so please read/view them all.

- **“A Christian Call for Reparations,”** by Kelly Brown Douglas. *Sojourners*, July 2020. <https://sojo.net/magazine/july-2020/christian-call-case-slavery-reparations-kelly-brown-douglas>
- **“History of affirmative action policies show how white people have benefitted,”** by Christiana Best-Giacomini. *Hartford Courant*, 8/9/20. <https://www.courant.com/opinion/op-ed/hc-op-best-reparations-0809-20200809-zepsbrrv5byzm42v4ueqdcpte-story.html>
- **“If Corporations Really Want to Address Racial Inequality, Here Are 9 Things That Actually Make a Difference,”** by Darren Walker. *Time*, 8/4/20. <https://time.com/5875304/racial-inequality-corporations/>
- **“Affirmative Action: Crash Course in Government and Politics, #32.”** Video in Crash Course series, Sep 26, 2015. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gJgQR6xiZGs>
- **“We need to Talk! Having authentic conversations about reparations.”** By Alonzo T. Johnson. *The Presbyterian Outlook*, 10/21/20. <https://pres-outlook.org/2020/10/we-need-to-talk-having-authentic-conversations-about-reparations/>

Discussion Questions

1. When did you first learn of affirmative action and what was your response? Do you feel any differently now?
2. How would you describe our country's progress in implementing various affirmative actions?
3. What roadblocks is the current Administration placing against affirmative action?
4. Reparations have already started at the local level: where were they and what were they based on?

5. Should any other groups beyond descendants of slavery be considered for reparations? If so, why?
6. Princeton Theological Seminary and individual Presbyterian churches were slaveholders. What does that mean for us in terms of reparations?
7. How does our faith and the teachings of Christ inform our actions going forward?

Song videos played in class

- **“Letter To The Free.”** By Common. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TRITnJr_7ec
- **“Glory.”** By John Legend and Common. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HUZOKvYcx_o

Additional Resources

- **“Trump executive order on diversity training roils corporate America.”** By Jessica Guynn, *USA Today*, September 25, 2020. <https://www.usatoday.com/story/money/2020/09/25/trump-executive-order-diversity-training-race-gender/3537241001/>
- **“Slavery reparations seem impossible. In many places, they’re already happening.”** By Thai Jones. *The Washington Post*, January 31, 2020. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/outlook/2020/01/31/slavery-reparations-seem-impossible-many-places-theyre-already-happening/>
- **“CEOs say they need to do more to fight racism. This is how they plan to do it,”** by Jeanne Sahadi, *CNN Business*, 10/15/20. https://www.phillytrib.com/news/business/ceos-say-they-need-to-do-more-to-fight-racism-this-is-how-they-plan/article_33cbdbac-3092-5d2f-bcd4-22ccf37707a4.html#/questions
- **“Equal Opportunity in America at The Crossroads.”** By Dennis Sanderson, Letter to the Editor, *Honolulu Star-Bulletin*, April 23, 1974. (attached)
- **“A History and Timeline of Affirmative Action,”** Infoplease, 8/10/20. <https://www.infoplease.com/history/us/affirmative-action-history>
- **“Justice Department Accuses Yale of discriminating against Asian Americans,”** by David Shortell and Taylor Romine. *CNN Politics*, August 13, 2020. <https://www.cnn.com/2020/08/13/politics/justice-department-yale-discrimination/index.html>
- **“Trump Administration targets diversity hiring by contractors,”** by Matt O’Brian and Alexandra Olson, *Associated Press, KRQE, Albuquerque*, October 9, 2020. <https://www.krqe.com/technology/trump-administration-targets-diversity-hiring-by-contractors/>

Equal Opportunity in America at the Crossroads

By Dennis Sanderson

Letter to the Editor, *Honolulu Star-Bulletin*, April 23, 1974

Our nation may well be at the most crucial point of her development. Within the next six weeks, Americans will be given perhaps the strongest indicator ever of their country's true racial intentions. That is to say, is America to realize real equality of opportunity or will it exist only rhetorically? The indicator mentioned is the decision to be reached in the case, DeFunis V. Odegaard now before the U.S. Supreme Court.

The case, as discussed at length in *Newsweek*, March 11, 1974, revolves around a white student named Marco DeFunis, who was refused admittance into the University of Washington Law School in 1971. DeFunis filed suit, charging he was discriminated against because of his race. Based strictly on the quantitative measure of college grades and Law School Admission Test scores, DeFunis should have been admitted before 36 minority students. By the same measure, DeFunis should have been admitted before 38 whites who were selected. Additionally, 29 whites with better scores than he were rejected. The university held that qualitative measures are only part of their evaluation process. Other factors such as where the student was from, personal recommendations and extra-curricular activities were important, too. Recognizing the acute necessity for more minority lawyers, the university also revealed that it placed minority candidates into a separate pool for special consideration for admission into the school of law.

This planned, special treatment for minorities is not the only one in evidence today. For example, the University of Hawaii has recognized that a disproportionately low percentage of the state's physicians and lawyers are of Hawaiian, Filipino and Samoan descent. Thus, special program considerations for members of these groups have been initiated by University of Hawaii School of Medicine and School of Law. Such action is the unavoidable result of the acceptance of an American truism; many policies and practices of our institutions have been biased against the minority person. Equal Opportunity Employers notwithstanding, the minority person even today must continuously overcome racism in order to stand beside a white counterpart.

Most of the current racism in America is solidly institutionalized and culturalized, therefore most difficult to identify and dislodge. Courts, though, are making progress by handing down decisions backed by stiff penalties against discriminating employers like Detroit Edison. That the

University of Washington Law School has been charged with racism in reverse, is evidence the school is dedicated toward making equal opportunity a reality for all Americans today, not sometime in the uncertain future. It is understandable why the hue and cry is sounded by whites as long-held, but seldom recognized, unfair benefits are wrested from us. However, I do not believe racism in reverse is to be inferred from efforts designed to achieve the realization of equal opportunity today or at a definitive tomorrow.

Before his death, Dr. Martin Luther King said, "Among the many vital jobs to be done, the nation must not only radically readjust its attitude toward the Negro in the compelling present, but must incorporate in its planning, some compensatory consideration for the handicaps he has inherited from the past." I see nothing in this statement about reverse racism, instead, I see implications necessitating such efforts as those undertaken by the University of Washington Law School in their selection process. We must acknowledge equal opportunity for the minority person today or tomorrow is not accomplished by a declaration that race and related items will no longer be an institutional determinant, that the only factor will be one's qualifications.

Referring again to Dr. Martin Luther King, "It is obvious that if a man is entered at the starting line in a race three hundred years after another man, the first would have to perform some impossible feat in order to catch up with his fellow runner." Historically in our country, small numbers of minority people have always performed the above mentioned feat of winning an unbalanced race. But what about the many more American minorities who have not? Barriers to equal opportunity are numerous and lingering, but they can and must be eliminated now, enabling all Americans the full chance to share in our country's many available benefits. The University of Washington Law School has attempted to eliminate such barriers which had existed within its sphere of influence. Is this university, and other progressive institutions, to be stopped in its sincere efforts to help America realize its basic creed?

I fervently hope the highest tribunal of our land will decide *DeFunis V. Odegaard* in favor of the University of Washington President, Odegaard. A decision for *DeFunis*, and its resulting influence on countless affirmative actions initiated following the 1964 Civil Rights Act, would likely have irreversible negative effects on the current trend toward racial equality.