

YEAR IN REVIEW

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place at the time didn't adequately address the bias and prejudice inherent in the system," says Brian Murphy, who helped revise the California Higher Education Master Plan in 1987 to encourage greater diversity. "Everyone knows that public contracts were historically sweetheart deals that excluded certain groups. Everyone knows that an old-boy network systematically recruited some groups and excluded others in the academic world. That isn't a situation we should harken back to."

CUSTRED AND CCRI coauthor Tom Wood take much of their inspiration from San Jose State University Professor Shelby Steele, whom they cite as a kind of intellectual godfather to the anti-Affirmative Action movement. In his 1990 book, *The Content of Our Character*, Steele looked at Affirmative Action from his own middle-class African American perspective and likened it to slavery for its debilitating effect on society and on those the programs are supposed to help. "The essential problem with this form of Affirmative Action," Steele wrote, "is the way it leaps over the hard business of developing a formerly oppressed people to the point where they can achieve proportionate representation on their own." The result, Steele says, has been catastrophic: "Racial preferences allow society to leapfrog over the difficult problem of developing blacks into parity with whites and into a cosmetic diversity that covers the blemish of disparity." The best evidence that the system is broke, Steele notes, is its failure rate; a full six years after admission, only about 26 percent of black students graduate from college.

According to the American Council of Education, however, the number of black men and women attending college and earning undergraduate degrees has increased substantially over the last decade, although at a rate that lags behind all U.S. adults.

At UC-Berkeley, where black students had an average composite SAT score of 952 during the late 1980s, well below the Berkeley average of 1181, more than 70 percent of the black students preferentially admitted eventually failed to graduate. It's a failure rate strikingly similar to that of another group of preferentially admitted students: the children of alumni. Despite a rising number of black students admitted to Berkeley over the years, fewer graduated in 1987 than did 11 years earlier, according to research compiled by author Thomas Sowell, a vocal critic of Affirmative Action.

More worrisome to Steele is the effect preferential policies have on the intended beneficiaries, creating a culture, he says, of dependence and victimization that only prolongs their suffering. "In this way," Steele writes, "Affirmative

It is just the sort of emotional, hot-button issue that could make an already unpopular president anathema to moderate and conservative voters if he opposes it.

Action nurtures a victim-focused identity in blacks. The obvious irony here is that we become invested in the very condition we are trying to overcome. . . . creat[ing] a new class of super-victims who can feel the pea of victimization under twenty mattresses."

Steele and Sowell both argue that racism is increasing precisely because of Affirmative Action, pointing to public-opinion surveys that show heightened levels of bigotry and self-segregation on college campuses. "Racial preferences implicitly mark whites with an exaggerated superiority just as they mark blacks with an exaggerated inferiority. They not only reinforce America's oldest racial myth but, for blacks, they have the effect of stigmatizing the already stigmatized," writes Steele, who has not formally endorsed the CCRI, instead choosing to postpone public comment on the ballot measure while he meets privately with key legislators to explain his views.

Sowell's recent book, *Inside American Education*, contains an entire chapter on the "New Racism" which he says is the legacy of Affirmative Action. Comparing historical data compiled by the National Institute Against Prejudice and Violence, Sowell notes that "racial outbreaks on many campuses are both more numerous and more severe than anything witnessed in the past decades on these same campuses, even though minority students have been attending such colleges for generations."

For these reasons, the CCRI's authors bristle at the suggestion that White Rage is behind their efforts, despite the fact that most of their support will likely come from the same angry white men who recently handed the House of Representatives to Newt Gingrich and gave Proposition 187 a wide margin of victory.

"We stand squarely with Martin Luther King Jr. and Hubert Humphrey in pushing for a color-blind society," Custred maintains. "I will not cede the high ground to anyone. These are not Republican ideas and they are not Democrat ideas, they are American ideas."


Similarly, Richter goes ballistic when asked if the CCRI is Willie Horton redux, launching into stories about how his German immigrant father worked tirelessly to warn people about a then-obscure German politician named Adolph Hitler. Richter also points out that he was the only member of his par-

ty to support legislation removing liquor licenses from clubs that discriminate on the basis of race or gender and that he refused to join an all-white fraternity while in college.

"He's definitely not a racist," says *Chico News & Review* contributing editor Joe Martin, whose paper has ridden Richter hard on some environmental issues. "But he is a conservative ideologue who truly believes that liberal social policies are responsible for everything bad from government debt to illegitimacy."

Richter says he'd like to see the partisanship around the issue diffused. "I would much rather get Democrat support now than see this used as a litmus-test issue against them," he says, noting that the measure, supported by leaders of the Republican and Libertarian parties, has yet to sign on a single big-name California Democrat. However, Wood and Custred are currently talking with state leaders of the centrist Democratic Leadership Council. In addition, the two have agreed to modify their original text to allow for variances in order to prevent the state from losing any federal funding and to permit racial redress in instances where specific cases of prior racial discrimination have been demonstrated.

Leading state Democrats, however, continue to defend current Affirmative Action policies as effective. "I know a lot of white people," one Democratic state legislator and CCRI opponent says privately, "who would gladly step aside and give their slot to a member of a minority group in the interests of diversity."

Given the outcome of Proposition 187, it does not seem likely that there will be enough voters with this benevolent attitude to forestall California's Democratic Party from becoming, as Progressive Policy Institute Senior Fellow Joel Kotkin puts it, "the Whigs of the next century." Or maybe, of the next election. 

Hal Plotkin has conducted research and written articles for the Democratic Leadership Council. He helped set up talks between California DLC officials and backers of the California Civil Rights Initiative.