Correcting Affirmative Action

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Affirmative action is a highly contentious public policy issue. Amongst black academics, there is
great debate regarding the effectiveness of the policy. Black scholars such as Thomas Sowell and Cornel
West have published numerous essays and books on affirmative action expressing differing views on the
policy. Sowell and West both agree the current affirmative action policy is ineffective, but their reasons
as to why are fundamentally different. Thomas Sowell thinks that eliminating affirmative action and
improving K-12 education would better target poor blacks. Sowell suggest a national voucher program
as one method to improve the quality of k-12 education. On the other hand, Cornel West believes that
implementing a class-based affirmative action policy would better benefit lower income blacks. My
thesis sets out to find a compromise between Sowell and West’s corrections to affirmative action, and
design alternative policies that meet Sowell and West’s objectives.
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Introduction

“Affirmative action is a policy or program designed to redress historic injustices committed against racial minorities and other specified groups by making special efforts to provide members of these groups with access to educational and employment opportunities.”\(^1\) In the United States, that specified group is typically thought of as blacks. Affirmative action is a highly contentious public policy issue. Amongst black academics, there is great debate regarding the effectiveness of the policy. Black scholars like Thomas Sowell and Cornel West have published numerous essays and books on affirmative action expressing differing views on the policy.\(^2\)

Thomas Sowell and Cornel West share very little in common. Thomas Sowell could be seen as very far right politically, and Cornel West could be seen as very far left politically. Thomas Sowell believes in a minimal state, whereas Cornel West is more of an interventionist state. Thomas Sowell takes an objectionist position on affirmative action, and Cornel West takes a maximalist position on affirmative action. Interestingly, Thomas Sowell and Cornel West do agree the current policy is ineffective. Specifically, they both agree the policy disproportionally benefits middle-class blacks. However, Sowell and West offer fundamentally different corrections to the policy. Thomas Sowell thinks that eliminating affirmative action and improving K-12 education would better target poor blacks. Sowell suggest a national voucher


\(^2\) Cornel West is class of 1943 University Professor at Princeton University. He graduated from Harvard and obtained his M.A. and Ph.D. in Philosophy at Princeton. He has taught at Yale, Harvard, Union Theological Seminary, and University of Paris. Thomas Sowell graduated from Harvard in 1958. He received his masters in economics from Columbia University in 1958 and a doctorate in economics from the University of Chicago in 1968. Sowell’s teaching assignments include Cornell University, Rutgers University, Amherst College, Brandeis University and the University of California at Los Angeles.
program as one method to improve the quality of k-12 education. On the other hand, Cornel West believes that implementing a class-based affirmative action policy would better benefit lower income blacks.

Thomas Sowell and Cornel West both agree affirmative action does little for poor blacks, and they seek to correct that. Sowell and West offer different solutions to affirmative action, but is there a compromise between Sowell and West’s policy corrections? If so, what would a Sowell/West policy combination look like?

**Part 1: History of Affirmative Action**

Before examining West and Sowell’s correction to affirmative action, it is important to look at the history of affirmative action. The first stage of affirmative action began as anti-discriminatory policy intended to allow blacks to enter into employment and higher education. On March 1, 1961 President John F. Kennedy introduced the term “affirmative action” in Executive Order 10925. The Order required federally funded employers to “take affirmative action to ensure that applicants are employed . . . without regard to their race, creed, color, or national origin.”

“The intent of this executive order was to affirm the government's commitment to equal opportunity for all qualified persons, and to take positive action to strengthen efforts to realize true equal opportunity for all. This executive order was superseded by Executive Order 11246 in 1965.”

The second stage of affirmative action was in the mid-1960s during the civil rights movements and President Lyndon B. Johnson’s War on Poverty. At the time, a movement for the

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nation to act by offering equal access to housing, education and other resources emerged. In June 1965, President Lyndon B. Johnson laid the groundwork for affirmative action in his commencement speech at Howard University. He asserted,

> You do not take a person who, for years, has been hobbled by chains and liberate him, bring him up to the starting line of a race and then say, ‘you are free to compete with all the others,’ and still justly believe that you have been completely fair… We seek not just freedom but opportunity—not just legal equity but human ability—not just equality as a right and a theory, but equality as a fact and as a result.6

President Johnson put his words into action by issuing Executive Order 11246. The executive order mandates government contractors to "take affirmative action" toward prospective minority employees in all aspects of hiring and employment. Contractors must take specific measures to ensure equality in hiring and must document these efforts.”7 Because of this mandate, “many colleges and professional schools started to recruit minority students as a part of their education mission. Ultimately, this led to these institutions initiating admission policies that took race into consideration. These policies increased admission for African Americans and Hispanics at predominately white institutions."8 President Johnson took affirmative action a step further. President Johnson was now requiring documentation from contractors to ensure there was equality in hiring. Affirmative action slowly transformed from an idea in the Kennedy administration into an actual order that intended to level the playing field for blacks.

The third stage of affirmative action occurred in President Nixon’s administration. In 1969, President Nixon issued the Philadelphia Order. It was thus far, the most aggressive

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6 Ibid, 25.

7 Ibid, 25.

measure to ensure fair hiring practices in construction jobs. Philadelphia was selected because of its craft unions and construction industries were publicly hostile in hiring African Americans.\textsuperscript{9} The Philadelphia Plan became the blueprint for federally mandated affirmative action in employment. It “required all contractors bidding on government funded construction projects to submit an affirmative action program that included goals and targets for minority manpower utilization.”\textsuperscript{10} In September 1969, the most controversial piece of the plan was finalized. It “established numerical targets, defined as percentage range of minority workers to be employed from a particular trade on each contract. Employers were required to provide statistical evidence of their compliance. Noncompliance could lead to the loss of federal contracts of litigation and legal penalties under federal civil rights laws.”\textsuperscript{11} Again, affirmative action was taken even further. The policy now mandated quotas and timetables that government contractors were required to meet in hiring blacks.

The evolution of affirmative action from an anti-discriminatory policy into a policy of quotas and timetables sparked great debate regarding the true intentions of the policy. In 1978, the landmark Supreme Court case \textit{Regents of the University of California v. Bakke}, began a series major challenges to affirmative action to come. The case imposed limitations on affirmative action to ensure that opportunities provided to minorities did not jeopardize the rights of the majority. The court ruled 5-4 that it was unconstitutional for a state school to reserve a


limited number of places for qualified minority applicants, but race could be taken into consideration in admission decisions.\textsuperscript{12}

A series of other major challenges to affirmative action followed this ruling. Affirmative action still remains a highly contentious public policy issue. It perpetuated scholars such as Thomas Sowell and Cornel West to thoroughly examine the evolution of affirmative action and seek solutions to improve the policy.

**Part 2: Sowell on Affirmative Action: General Points**

Thomas Sowell conducted a worldwide study of affirmative action policies in various countries like India, Malaysia, Nigerian and the U.S. Among the countries Sowell found, they all varied tremendously in cultural, political, economic, and other ways. Despite these differences, Sowell found common patterns among these countries. Among these patterns are the following:

1. Preferential policies defined as temporary tend to persist and expand in scope, either accepting more groups or spreading to wider realms for the same groups, or both.\textsuperscript{13}

2. Those who benefit from preferential treatment are disproportionately the members of the beneficiary group that already more fortunate.\textsuperscript{14}

3. Group polarization heightens when preferential policies are enacted. Non-preferred groups react in ways from political backlash to civil war.\textsuperscript{15}

4. There is use of fraudulent claims of belonging to the identified beneficiary groups.\textsuperscript{16}


\textsuperscript{14} Ibid, 21.

\textsuperscript{15} Ibid, 21.

\textsuperscript{16} Ibid, 21.
According to Sowell, “such vast disparities in settings and people make it all the more striking that there are common patterns among these countries—patterns with serious implications for affirmative action policies in the United States.” Sowell believes that no other issue has been more submerged with dishonesty than affirmative action. He asserts, “virtually every argument in favor of affirmative action is demonstrably false. It is the grand fraud of our time.” Sowell writes, “Americans need only look back to the beginning of the twentieth century to see what enormous social and economic progress has been made by some of the poorest and apparently least promising segments of the population.” He argues that Jews, Blacks, and Chinese Americans all made tremendous progress over the next half-century before affirmative action was enacted. According to Sowell,

Even for blacks, at the center of current controversies about affirmative action, the decline in their poverty and their rise in the professions were both more dramatic before the federal government created affirmative action in the 1970s. With all these American ethnic groups—and others—what happened was not a transfer of benefits from the rest of the population, but a rising contribution from these minorities to the growing prosperity of American society as a whole, from which both they and the larger society benefited, as the less educated became more educated, as farm laborers and domestic servants acquired the skills and experience to take on more challenging work.

Sowell argues that political misrepresentation by black leaders and “friends of blacks” has completely hidden the clear evidence of most blacks getting themselves out of poverty in the decades preceding the civil rights movement and the beginning of affirmative action, despite

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20 Thomas Sowell, “Affirmative Action around the World.”
overt discrimination. Sowell explains, “instead of gaining the respect that other groups have gained by lifting themselves out of poverty, blacks are widely seen, by friends and critics alike, as owing their advancement to government beneficence.”

Sowell does believe that racial discrimination has contributed historically to blacks having lower income than whites. Nonetheless, he feels that is very different from expressing how much or in what ways racial discrimination contributed to blacks having lower income. He asserts, “it cannot be simply assumed that blacks would have had the same income as whites in the absence of racial discrimination; given the various groups of American whites have had very different incomes from one another at various periods of history.” Sowell argues that evidence from other countries around the world and throughout history show that statistical disparities are the rule not the exception. This even includes situations where discrimination is virtually impossible.

Sowell also takes issue with affirmative action’s intention in creating diversity. Proponents of affirmative action stress a need for role models of the same race or sex, which is a key argument in hiring black or female professors. However, Sowell counters this argument. He writes, “a recent study titled “Increasing Faculty Diversity” found no empirical evidence to support the belief that same-sex, same-ethnicity role models are any more effective than white male role models.” Sowell goes even further in his argument of diversity by countering the belief in the benefits of diversity. According to Sowell,
A recent study by respected academic scholars found that ‘college diversity programs fail to raise standards’ and that ‘a majority of faculty members and administrators recognize this when speaking anonymously…’ This study by Stanley Rothman, Seymour Martin Lipset, and Neil Neivitte found that ‘of those who think that preferences have some impact on academic standards those believing it negative exceed those believing it positive by 15 to 1’.  

Sowell contends that various polls over the years show that most faculty members and students oppose double standards in college admission, but most professors will not come out publicly and say what they answer in private polls. Sowell writes, “one of the big barriers to any rational discussion of affirmative action is that many of those who are for or against it are for or against the theory or the rationales behind group preferences and quotas. Sowell does not feel the arguments made in favor or opposition are based on the actual results of affirmative action. The empirical evidence Sowell found illustrate that affirmative action fails to meet it intentions, especially in meeting the needs of lower income blacks.

**Part 3: West on Affirmative Action: General Points**

As with Thomas Sowell, Cornel West finds flaws in the current affirmative action policy. He agrees with Sowell that it disproportionately benefits middle-class blacks, but unlike Sowell West takes a maximalist position on affirmative action. West wants affirmative action to do more than what is currently doing for blacks. Cornel West feels the problem with affirmative action is its failure in redressing the historical injustices of the past. He sees the policy as a fundamentally weak response to the legacy of white supremacy in the United States. His main argument behind his statement is affirmative action’s failure in reducing black poverty.

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Cornel West feels that affirmative action should not be viewed as “as neither a major solution to poverty nor a sufficient means to equality.” Instead, he feels that affirmative action is a small piece of a larger redistributive strategy that is needed to progress poor blacks. Though it may be a small piece of a larger redistributive chain, West feels it is a very important piece that needs to remain intact. According to West, affirmative action would be unnecessary, “if there were social democratic redistributive measures that wiped out black poverty, and if racial and sexual discrimination could be abated through good will and meritorious judgments of those in power.” However, those social redistributive measures do not exist, moreover West is skeptical of racial discrimination being abated through goodwill because of the “United States’ historically weak will towards racial justice and substantive redistributive measures.”

West questions those who view affirmative action as a redistributive measure that is no longer needed or worth keeping because of the firm continuance of discriminatory practices against blacks, and the justified doubt that good will and fair judgment among those in power is not largely geared at women and people of color. He argues that the disappearance of affirmative action in the U.S. would send a lethal signal to the country—“that white supremacy has one less constraint and black people have one more reason to lose trust in the promise of American democracy.”

Despite Cornel West’s strong position in keeping affirmative action, he does feel the policy needs to be fundamentally mended as a redistributive strategy for blacks. West does not view affirmative action as a panacea because it does not speak to the deeper crises of black

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28 West, *Race matters*, 64.
30 Ibid, 64.
31 Ibid, 65.
America—“problems concerning the family, the churches, mosques, synagogues, and temples, the schools, and economic deprivation especially.”

Nonetheless, West asserts that measures far beyond weak policies like affirmative action are needed to confront legacies of white supremacy—“legacies visible in unemployment and underemployment, unaffordable health care and inadequate child care, dilapidated housing and decrepit schools for millions of Americans, disproportionately people of color, women, and children.”

According to West, “any progressive discussion about the future of racial equality must speak to black poverty.”

West feels affirmative action policies “will never ameliorate the plight and predicament of poor people of color. He thus feels more drastic and redistributive measures are needed in order to address their situations, “measures that challenge the maldistribution of wealth and power and that will trigger cultural renewal and personal hope.”

**Part 4: Sowell’s Solution to Affirmative Action**

Thomas Sowell believes preferential policies are politically successful because they allow politicians to make big promises about the future with little immediate cost. He asserts, “preferential policies highlight the political difficulties of alternative policies designed to enable genuinely unfortunate people to advance.” Sowell asks his readers to consider a program that sincerely intends to aid the advancement of the poor by improving those people’s education, skills, and habits. He argues that “such a program must take far more time, probably cost far more money, and… cannot produce as dramatic results as a doubling or tripling of group

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Ibid, 40.
members in a few elite positions within a few years under preferential policies.”

According to Sowell, if thousand more minority women who would have potentially become maids become secretaries instead, that is not as impressive as having three minorities become cabinet members, even though far more people needing help would have benefited from the former. “Preferential policies deliver that better and faster than any policy of helping less fortunate masses advance. Most important of all, it can deliver before the next election.”

According to Sowell, countries around the world tend to focus on educational efforts at the visible, high-level end of education like colleges, universities, and postgraduate education. It is seldom that the genuinely less fortunate make it to higher levels of education. Sowell contends that, “if they are to be helped, that help must come much earlier in the educational process and the task will be infinitely more difficult than lowering admissions standards in higher education to achieve statistical representation.”

Moreover, the struggle that will not be the kind of struggle between groups, or between good and evil, that the media can dramatize but instead a harder, slower, and less glamorous struggle between the inherent requirements of quality education and the habits, attitudes, and beliefs of people who have not had to deal with such requirements.

According to Sowell, under a new educational system “they [high-quality students] will not emerge from the high school for another twelve years, from college for sixteen years, or from postgraduate education and professional apprenticeship levels for twenty years.” Sowell argues that these time spans are “simply beyond horizon of politicians whose focus is the next

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39 Ibid, 40.
40 Ibid, 41.
42 Ibid, 41.
43 Ibid, 40.
44 Ibid, 41.
 Preferential policies thus offer a “quick fix” that puts sincere educational improvement at a disadvantage politically. Moreover, signs like rising test scores in an inner city elementary are not as politically dramatic as appointing minorities in high level positions or raising the number of minority students to colleges and universities.

Thomas Sowell believes improving education for the less fortunate would benefit them more than affirmative action. He suggests allowing parents to have the choice to where to send their children to school through a voucher scheme. Sowell feels that giving parents this type of power will force the school systems to be more responsive to the parents. Currently, only 12 states and Washington D.C have voucher programs. Under a voucher program, parents have the ability to redirect tax money that would have gone to public schools to support private school education for their children. The state would set a dollar amount for the voucher that is usually a percentage of the cost to educate a child in a public school. Private schools are required to meet minimum standards established by state legislatures to be eligible to accept voucher recipients. In this plan, most voucher programs are limited to lower income families or students with specials needs. Eligibility requirements are set by the state for these certain types of families. A national voucher program would expand voucher programs to all 50 states and federal money would be

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46 Ibid, 41.
provided to low income families and those with special needs. These families would then have the decision to select the public or private school of their choice.  

According to Sowell, “we have all heard the old saying that giving a man a fish feeds him only for a day, while teaching him to fish feeds him for a lifetime. Redistributionists give him a fish and leave him dependent on the government for more fish in the future”. Sowell believes improving the education of the less fortunate gives them the ability to fish, and be productive in other ways in life.

**Part 5: West’s Solution to Affirmative Action**

In *Race Matters*, Cornel West suggests that a class-based affirmative action policy would better benefit poor blacks. A class-based affirmative action would be structured similarly to race and gendered based affirmative action, but preferences in education, entry-level employment, and government contracting would be based on economic status, rather than race. In higher education, “preferences could be given to students who are disadvantaged by what sociologists say are the three major determinants of life chances: parental income, education, and occupation.” That is, students from low income families, whose parents did not receive a college education, and whose parents work in lower end jobs should be given preferences.

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50 Bearch, “Programs Offer Parents Tax Funds to Send Children to Private Schools.”


52 West, *Race matters*, 64.


54 Ibid.
Other factors college admissions boards could take into account include a “family's net worth, the quality of secondary education, neighborhood influences, and family structure.” Net worth would provide admission boards with a family’s economic history, which goes beyond a family’s annual income. The quality of secondary education can be measured based on graduation rates and standardized test scores. Neighborhood influences can be measured by looking at unemployment rates, poverty rates, and average level of education in the community. “This factor reflects strong sociological evidence that it is a disadvantage to be born into a poor family, but it is doubly disadvantageous to be born into a poor family living in concentrated poverty. This factor will, in the aggregate, tend to benefit people of color, who are generally more likely to live in concentrated poverty than whites.” Lastly, schools should take into account whether an applicant was raised in a single parent household. “Numerous studies show that even after controlling for income, growing up without two parents presents an independent obstacle to success.”

Because a great portion of underprivileged youth are unable to attend college, preferences for entry-level jobs could be provided for students directly from high school. Just as federal contractors are required to take race into account in hiring now, federal contractors could be mandated to offer entry level opportunities to disadvantaged youth as a part of terms for receiving federal funds.

“In government contracting, preferences can be provided to small firms (irrespective of the owner's race) which agree to employ individuals from high poverty census tracts.” Examples of this type of program include President Clinton’s 1996 executive order, which

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55 Ibid.
56 Richard D. Kahlenberg “Class-Based Affirmative Action: A Natural for Labor.”
57 Ibid.
58 Ibid.
directed “the Commerce Department to provide preferences to government contractors employing significant numbers of residents from census tracts with poverty rates of 20% or more.”59 In the 1980’s, Mayor Ed Koch implemented a similar program in New York City. “The program set aside contracts for small firms that did at least 25% of their business in depressed areas or employed economically disadvantaged workers as 25% of their workforce…All these types of affirmative action will disproportionately benefit people of color, but will do so on the unifying basis of class rather than the dividing basis of race.”60

**Part 8: Sowell Implications**

It is important to look at the implications in enacting a national voucher program or a class-based affirmative action policy. There is currently only one federally funded voucher program. The D.C. Opportunity Scholarship Program is a federally sponsored school voucher program that was established in 2004, and provides vouchers worth up to $7,500 for an estimated 1,800 to 2,000 students in the District of Columbia.61 Lower income students have the ability to use the scholarships to pay tuition at private schools in the District of Columbia.62 In 2008, the U.S. Department of Education published an academic evaluation of the program. It found that students who received vouchers noticed slightly higher academic achievement than students not

59 Ibid.
60 Ibid.
62 African American and Hispanic students make up 98 percent of the students enrolled in the D.C. Opportunity Scholarship Program.
awarded a voucher.\textsuperscript{63} In December of 2009, University of Arkansas released an evaluation entitled “Family Reflections on the District of Columbia Opportunity Scholarship Program”. Their study revealed parents and students are extremely satisfied with the program. Families see a change for the better in their children’s attitude towards school, and they feel their children are safer. The study also showed parents becoming more involved in their children’s academic lives. Finally, the study found “it appears that parent satisfaction stems more from the opportunity to make a choice for their child’s education and participate in program rather than from concrete academic test results or grades or other outcomes”.\textsuperscript{64}

Other implications in implementing a national voucher program probably include political objections. Teachers unions in broken public school systems would object in fear of low funding and job loss because their school is unable to compete with better quality private schools. A national voucher program threatens these teacher’s bread and butter. Another objection could come from taxpayers that do not support funding religious schooling, which is the foundation of teaching in most private schools across the nation. Additionally, parents that do not qualify to receive vouchers may find it unfair that they are paying for their child’s private education and children that are receiving the same education have to pay nothing. Implementing a national voucher program would completely transform our educational system and any great adjustment to a society poses the risk of opposition.


\textsuperscript{64} Lindsey M. Burke, “D.C. Opportunity Scholarship Program: Study Supports Expansion,” 2.
Part 7: West Implications

In 2008, the University of Colorado at Boulder used statistical approaches to test the effects of implementing class-conscious admissions. The University of Colorado designed its approach intending to maintain the acceptance rate of minority students without the presence of race-based affirmative action, and increase the number of socioeconomically disadvantaged but deserving applicants.  

Two experiments were used to evaluate the effects of implementing class-based affirmative action on the socioeconomic and racial diversity of accepted classes. Additionally, historical data was studied to measure the probability of college success for those benefiting from class-based affirmative action. The experimental results found that minority and low-income and minority students are more likely to be admitted to the University of Colorado when socioeconomic factors are taken into consideration. And, investigation of historical data suggest that it is possible, but not guaranteed that students admitted under class-based affirmative action will succeed.

The study did find implementing class-based affirmative action would be much more complex than race-based affirmative action. “Race-based affirmative action relies on an observable binary indicator-minority/non-minority-to confer additional consideration in admission.” On the other hand, class-based affirmative action requires careful consideration in establishing thresholds of disadvantage. These thresholds include factors like a family’s net worth, quality in education, family structure, and neighborhood influences. These thresholds must carefully be defined and justified. Finally, the study found, “building this class-based

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66 Gaertner, and Research Association for Institutional, "Assessing a New Approach to Class-Based Affirmative Action."
67 Ibid.
system required access to multiple large-scale datasets, not only for the estimation of the statistic models that underpin the approach, but also for testing, refining, and assessing the method once it has been put to use. 68

Other implications in implementing a class-based affirmative action policy include political objections. Middle-class blacks may object to a class-based affirmative action policy because they will no longer benefit from the policy. They may argue that affirmative action was intended to rectify the injustices of the past against blacks, not lower income whites or other lower income races. Other objections may come from higher institutions of education that fear a class-based affirmative action policy may threaten their goal of diversity. As with any policy change, a class-based affirmative action policy will bring up objections from various groups that feel impacted from the policy change.

Part 8: Sowell and West Policy Options

In Cornel West’s perfect world, a class-based affirmative action policy would be enacted. West believes this policy would better benefit poor blacks. His policy correction seeks to mend the current affirmative action policy rather than completely eliminating it. In Thomas Sowell’s perfect world, affirmative action would be eliminated and measures like a national voucher program would be enacted to improve the quality of education in K-12. Sowell believes improving the quality of education better benefits lower income individuals. Sowell’s policy seeks to radically change our educational system and completely end affirmative action. Between Sowell and West’s policy corrections is there common ground? This work proposes four policy options based on West and Sowell’s corrections to affirmative action. These policy options do

68 Gaertner, and Research Association for Institutional, "Assessing a New Approach to Class-Based Affirmative Action."
not meet all of West and Sowell’s objections to affirmative action, but they do seek common
ground between the two scholars.

Option A would be to target failing schools in lower-income neighborhoods and make
drastic changes to the schools to improve the quality of the schools. These changes would
include bringing in high quality teachers. One way to attract great teachers is increasing their
salaries and providing bonuses based on their student’s achievements. Another change would be
requiring parents to be involved in their child’s education. This can be accomplished by
mandating parents to have individual meetings with the child’s teacher four times each school
year. Parents that fail to meet this requirement would be fined. However, special arrangements
like parent teacher home visits would be made for single-parent households. Implementing this
type of mandate will hold parents accountable for their children’s education, which would
improve their education. Another change in these failing schools would be to implement an after
school program that struggling students are mandated to attend until they bring their grades up.

This policy is a potential compromise between Sowell and West. West would like that
this program is targeting lower income blacks, but he would probably object that this policy
would not do enough to reduce black poverty. I think this policy aligns closely with Sowell’s
national voucher program. It is intended to improve the educational system and provide lower
income students the abilities to succeed.

Option B is a pilot program that would implement a national voucher program in select
states and implement a class-based affirmative action policy in select states. The states will be
evenly split as either class-based affirmative action or voucher program based on socioeconomic
factors to ensure neither policy has an advantage. Both policies would be implemented for
sixteen years. While these policies are implemented, annual evaluations will be reported on the
progression of lower-income individuals. At the conclusion of sixteen years, each policy will be analyzed and reviewed. The policy that better improves the lives of lower-income individuals will be gradually implemented in all fifty states of the U.S. This policy option puts West and Sowell’s policy options head-to-head against each other and it lets the results select the best policy.

Option C would be creating rigorous career centers in lower income neighborhoods for high school juniors and seniors. These career centers will provide these students with practical skills and training for college or the workplace. These courses include areas of architecture and construction, education and training, manufacturing, public safety, and health services. Because lower-income students’ chances to making it to college are much lower than middle-class students, giving them practical skills in high school will ensure that these students are able to enter into the workforce right out of high school or potentially go on to college. Sowell would agree this policy provides lower income individuals the foundation they need to improve their lives. West would object to this policy because it is not redistributing resources to poor blacks. Although it is targeting poor blacks, it is not the extensive redistributive measures West seeks.

Option D would be to implement a national voucher program in K-12 education and implement a class-based affirmative action policy in higher education. This option would create competition and choice in our educational system, which Sowell feels will improve the quality of education and provide lower-income individuals the tools and skills needed to better their lives. It will also produce students that are more qualified to be admitted to higher institutions, which Sowell feels the current affirmative action policy fails to do. Finally, by implementing a class-based affirmative action policy in higher education, lower income students will better benefit from the policy, which both West and Sowell feel the current affirmative policy does not do.
Conclusion

Although options A, B, C, and D do not perfectly meet West and Sowell’s objections to affirmative action, these options are a combination of West and Sowell’s policy corrections. A perfect scenario for Thomas Sowell would be one where affirmative action is eliminated and improvements in our educational system are made through a type of voucher scheme. An ideal West society would consist of a class-based affirmative action policy that targets poor black.

There are grounds for compromise with Sowell and West’s policy solutions because they both seek to target lower income blacks, which options A, B, C, and D all intend to do. Just as Sowell and West’s policy corrections have implications so do policy options A, B, C, and D. Obviously, further research is needed to look into the implications and cost of these policy hybrids. Nonetheless, it is worth looking into because these possible alternatives could better meet the needs of poor blacks more than our current policy does now.
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