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The diversity con game

On the affirmative action debate at the University of Michigan.

the false theory of progress, which maintains that we alter the test instead of trying to pass the test.

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Last month, the Bush administration announced that it was filing legal briefs to challenge the University of Michigan's policy of using race as a factor in deciding who gets admitted to its undergraduate program and its law school. President Bush described Michigan's policy as a disguised quota system which violated the Constitutional right to equal protection.

Predictably, the administration's initiative sparked an orgy of hand-wringing in the liberal establishment. ©The Bush administration sacrificed truth for political gain© and sought to ©appease its right-wing supporters,© thundered an editorial in *The New York Times*. ©The administration should start leveling with the American people about race, and it should stop trying to turn back the clock.©

It seemed to us the Bush Administration was being admirably straightforward. In its admissions policy, the University of Michigan employed the Orwellian principle that all applicants are equal, but some are more equal than others; it did this to be sure of admitting a predetermined proportion of black students. It looks like a quota system; it acts like a quota system; it is, in fact, a quota system.

But according to the editors of the *Times*, Bush used the term ©quota© to scare people and achieve its nefarious ends. ©The administration has fixed on the word ©quota© because it has long been political kryptonite. Pollsters know that many Americans who say they favor ©affirmative action© flip sides when asked about ©racial quotas.©©

Let's suppose that ©many Americans© do respond to these phrases the way that ~~the~~ *Times* suggests they do. What does that tell us? We think it is a testament to the mendacious cleverness of the phrase ©affirmative action.© Pollsters discovered people didn't like that practice when it went under the name of quotas, so the politically correct establishment came up with a more pleasing euphemism. What, after all, does ©affirmative action© really mean? It means ©discrimination on the basis of race, sex, or some other agreed-upon attribute.© What do you suppose

the pollsters would discover if, instead of asking whether people favored “affirmative action,” they asked “Do you favor discrimination on the basis of race?” That is the issue here, and, adopting the high dudgeon of our Paper of Record, we believe that the *Times* should stop sacrificing truth to political expediency and attempting to appease its left-wing supporters and “start leveling with the American people about race.” The *Times* wants a certain percentage of its favorite minorities (or, in the case of women, its favorite majorities) installed well, everywhere. If that doesn’t happen naturally, through the meritocratic process of competition, the *Times* wants it imposed by fiat.

And as for “turning back the clock,” we believe that the racist assumptions behind “affirmative action” belong to the ash-heap of discredited efforts at social engineering. For the last decade or so, the racist juggernaut of affirmative action has proceeded under the aegis of “diversity.”

We offer two observations about this contemporary mantra. In the first place—although it seems decidedly heterodox to admit this—it is by no means clear that “diversity” is always and everywhere a good to which we should aspire. If diversity is in some situations a desideratum, in other situations unanimity or oneness is worth pursuing. In *Liberty, Equality, Fraternity*, his devastating answer to John Stuart Mill’s *On Liberty*, James Fitzjames Stephen noted that by confounding the proposition that “variety is good” with the proposition that goodness is various, Mill’s teaching tended to encourage a shallow worship of mere variety, diversity for its own sake with no regard for value of the specific “diversities” being celebrated. That same shallowness is fostered by the cult of “affirmative action.”

Secondly, if diversity is sometimes and in some circumstances a quality worth cultivating, it should be responsible *intellectual* diversity, real diversity of opinion and outlook, not the spurious diversity of skin color. The last time we looked, many of the court houses in the United States featured statues of Justice, blindfolded and holding a pair of scales. The idea—need we say it?—was that true justice is impartial: it is blind to the accidents of individual status, social or ethnic origin, sex, and wealth. True justice begins not by awarding extra points to someone because he is black, or rich, or socially prominent. It judges the case according to its merits—how novel that sounds to our ears!—by attempting to apply the law equally to all who come before it. By making a fetish of spurious diversity, the partisans of affirmative action help perpetuate the double standard they pretend to oppose. Isn’t it time that liberals woke up to this fact?

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