

RELIGIOUS PREJUDICE AND RACIAL INEQUALITY

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Racial inequality will not be solved by rigging the educational system with affirmative action. But it may be solved if school vouchers were instituted nationwide. It is as unfortunate as it is ironic that what is retarding racial equality in this country is another form of prejudice, namely anti-Catholicism. For it is anti-Catholicism that is driving the anti-voucher campaign.

The stain of slavery, followed by segregation, has left a wide achievement gap between whites and blacks. Despite obvious progress, African Americans continue to trail whites in terms of education and income. The conventional wisdom holds that prejudice and discrimination are responsible for racial inequality and that only by pursuing affirmative action will progress be made. The conventional wisdom is twice wrong: prejudice and discrimination have almost nothing to do with explaining racial inequality and affirmative action is not the answer.

It has been known for a few decades that black married college-educated couples who live in the Northeast earn slightly more than their white counterparts. The problem is that there are relatively few black married college-educated couples (the Northeast element was factored in just to compare apples with apples—approximately half of all African Americans live in the South where wages are depressed). No matter, if prejudice and discrimination cause racial inequality, why are these blacks doing so well? Though education is important, even more important is marital status.

According to a new study by the Heritage Foundation, 1.35

million children were born out-of-wedlock in 2001. This accounts for one-third of all children born, almost all of whom will fare poorly in society. Indeed, children raised by never-married mothers are seven times more likely to be poor when compared to children raised in intact married families. Regrettably, this condition affects approximately 70 percent of black children.

There will never be racial equality until the crisis in the black family is addressed. It will not be fixed by affirmative action because prejudice and discrimination are not the problem. Here's the proof: in 1950, when there was far more prejudice and discrimination against blacks, fully 85 percent of black families were intact. In other words, as racism declined, the family deteriorated.

The meltdown of the black family is due to several factors: the welfare explosion, victimhood and libertinism. In the 1960s, white intellectuals sold the idea that blacks *deserved* welfare, and in places like New York City the government allowed every person who applied for welfare to get on the dole without proving poverty status. That this happened during a time of low unemployment shows how utterly insane the welfare binge was. Victimhood—the pernicious idea that blacks are not responsible for their behavior—was sold by the establishment and accepted by young blacks. Add to this the cultural embrace of libertinism, especially the idea of sexual license, and the stage was set. The combined effect of these three factors leveled the black family.

No amount of affirmative action will ever repair the damage done to the family. Affirmative action may accelerate the pace of progress for middle-class blacks, but it can do nothing to elevate lower-class blacks into the ranks of the middle class. It's not the sons and daughters of the Oprahs and Bill Cosbys that need help (that they would actually qualify for affirmative action shows how absurd it is), it's the kids who have no father who need help. Unfortunately, such kids are

outside the reach of affirmative action programs. Fortunately, they are not outside the reach of school vouchers and parochial education.

The success story of the Catholic schools in the inner-city can no longer be denied. School vouchers have proven to be successful in Charlotte, Dayton, Milwaukee, New York and Washington. In June, two Harvard University researchers, Paul E. Peterson and William G. Howell, issued a 38-page report defending their conclusion that African-American students who entered private schools in New York scored significantly higher than their public school peers on standardized tests; this was a multi-year study of the 1,300 New York students who took advantage of vouchers. Peterson and Howell also concluded that it was Catholic schools where African-American students did best.

The fact that we have anti-Catholicism written into the constitution of 37 states—the so-called Blaine Amendments—explains why school vouchers are so hard to institute. That's too bad because African Americans, most of whom are Protestant, stand to benefit more than Catholics in a post-Blaine world.

Social policy can do little to mend the black family but it can do much to improve education. The answer is Catholic schools, not affirmative action.