

Why We're Wrong About Affirmative Action: Stereotypes, Testing and the 'Soft Bigotry of Low Expectations'

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The Huffington Post:

Earlier this month a divided Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals upheld the University of Texas' right to use race amongst its criteria for undergraduate admissions, however limited that right may be. While the decision will be viewed as a small victory for supporters of race-based affirmative action, there is little reason to believe that the widely held claim that black and Latino students enter selective universities as comparatively inferior students will not cease to rear its ugly head. It is a pervasive stereotype that minority students must face from matriculation to graduation, a stigma with undoubted adverse psychological and economic consequence that follows them well beyond higher education and into the labor market.

This claim, reasserted in a study published in 2012 in the *Journal of Labor Economics* by two Duke faculty members and a graduate student (Peter Arcidiacono, Esteban Aucejo, and Kenneth Spenner), anchors on a combination of black students' relative standardized-test scores and the authors' prior beliefs about the operation of affirmative action in admissions. It also should be noted that Arcidiacono has been a member of the research team for Project SEAPHE, a collective led by one of the chief architects of the war against affirmative action waged in California, UCLA Law School professor Richard Sander.

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Experimental studies undertaken nearly 20 years ago by social psychologists Claude Steele and Joshua Aronson found that black students at Stanford University under the stereotype-threat condition had scores 13-percent lower than comparable black students in the no-threat condition. This is a nontrivial effect; a 13-percent reduction means that a student who might have scored 1200 under non-threat conditions would score only 1044 under threat conditions. Steele argues that stereotype threat is necessarily activated under high-stakes testing conditions like taking the SAT, a test that influences college admissions.

Read the whole story: [*The Huffington Post*](#)