

Affirmative
Action
Around the
World

An Empirical Study

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Preface

Many—if not most—people who are for or against affirmative action are for or against the *theory* of affirmative action. The factual question of what actually happens as a result of affirmative action policies receives remarkably little attention. Assumptions, beliefs and rationales dominate controversies on this issue in countries around the world. This book addresses the empirical question of just what does and does not happen under affirmative action—and to whose benefit and whose detriment.

Even an observer highly sympathetic to affirmative action in Malaysia noted in passing, “new policies were often put forth without considering what the success or failure of past policies boded for their own prospects.”¹ This was not unique to Malaysia. It has been the rule, rather than the exception, in many countries with affirmative action policies, as well as with other policies. The purpose of this book is to consider the actual consequences of affirmative action.

The experience of more than 30 years of researching and analyzing affirmative action policies in the United States has gone into this book. A considerable part of that period has also included the study of similar policies in other countries. An international perspective on group preferences and quotas en-

ables us to examine the arguments on both sides of this issue with a much larger and more varied sample of evidence.

There are few policies more in need of evidence with which to weigh the heated assertions and counter-assertions of advocates and critics. Merely cutting through the jungle of semantics which surrounds controversies over preferential policies in many countries is a formidable challenge. If this book can contribute to clarity on that issue alone, it will have achieved one of its main goals.

In the course of gathering material for the study of affirmative action policies, under the many different names that these policies have in different countries, I have incurred many debts to scholars, officials, librarians and others in many lands — too many people to mention here by name. But I am grateful to them all. My greatest debt, however, is to the Hoover Institution at Stanford University, which paid for lengthy and costly international trips to gather the information presented here. As with my other writings over the past 15 years, my research assistant Na Liu has contributed not only dedicated efforts but also many insights.

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