Preferred Hiring Practices Essay, Research Paper

In recent years preferential hiring has become an issue of great interest. Preferential hiring, which was devised to create harmony between the different races and sexes, has divided the lines even more. Supporters on both sides seem fixed in their positions and often refuse to listen to the other group’s platform. In this essay, the recipients of preferential hiring will be either black or female, and the position in question will be a professorship on the university level. The hirings in question are cases that involve several candidates, all roughly equal in their qualifications (including experience, education, people skills, etc.), with the only difference being race and/or sex. What we have here is a case of predetermined preference. The two candidates in question are equal in all ways, except race. The black applicant is selected, not because of skills or qualifications (in that case the white man would have provided the same result), but for his skin color. This seems to be blatant discrimination, but many believe it is justified. Some feel retribution for years of discrimination is reason enough, but that issue will be discussed later. First, lets focus on why this is not a solution to creating an unbiased society. Martin Luther King Jr. had a dream: “I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin, but by the content of their character.” He desired a world without discrimination, without prejudice, and without stereotypes. The fundamental lesson years of discrimination should have taught is that to give anyone preference based on skin color, sex, or religious beliefs is, in one word, wrong. As Martin Luther King Jr. stated, judgment based on skin color must not exist. All preferential hiring does is keep judgments based on skin color alive. Race and sex should not be issues in today’s society, yet preferential hiring continues to make these factors issues by treating minorities as a group rather than as individuals. More importantly preferential hiring may actually fuel, rather than extinguish, feelings of racial hostility. Applying the concept of preferential hiring to another situation may help elucidate its shortcomings. A party of white men and a party of black men both arrive at a restaurant at the same time and only one table is free. The headwaiter can only seat one party and must make a decision. According to preferential hiring theory it is necessary to seat the black party first, since historically blacks have been discriminated against when seated in restaurants. In another situation, a white man and a black man are both equidistant from the last seat on the bus. Both men are the same age, have no medical problems, and are equal in all ways except skin color. Should the black man get the seat since in the past black men have been discriminated against? We could continue this practice for several centuries before the debt we owe for depriving blacks of a seat on the bus would be paid. Perhaps these examples are invalid. It could be said that jobs are a different issue. They help define social status and provide economic well-being. They might even boost self-confidence, something that discrimination has stolen. Two points must be considered before moving any further. First, blacks may learn better from a black, and women may learn better from a woman. Second, hiring women and blacks will provide role models for others. The first point Thomson quickly concedes as likely to be false. Discussion about the second point however is required, and will, in effect, serve to negate the first point as well. First, lets create a character, Bill. Bill is grossly overweight and unattractive. Studies have shown that many employers discriminate (whether subconsciously or not), against both overweight and unattractive individuals. Unfortunately for Bill, he fits into both categories. His inability to land a job reflective of his abilities, coupled with years of public humiliation through jokes made at his expense, has destroyed his self-esteem. This has caused him to accept as fact the notion that he will never be able to reach his goals. Few “Bill” success stories exist, only further plummeting his self-confidence. This example sounds strikingly similar to a common argument for preferential hiring. I have been discriminated against, which has caused my self esteem to fall, and now I am stuck, with few role models to follow. Bill’s success has probably been thwarted by more sources than the today’s average black or female, but there is no provision in preferential hiring for him. Just like no one can control their race or skin color, Bill’s obesity is caused by a medical problem beyond treatment. Selective preferential hiring won’t work. Even if one doesn’t accept the fact that preferential hiring discriminates against the white male, one must accept the fact that preferential hiring discriminates against Bill. Now let’s assume that this argumentation is invalid for one reason or another. Let’s assume the lack of self-confidence and self-respect that today’s blacks and women are suffering from may deserve some compensation. But before continuing, it seems necessary to narrow the range of who qualifies for compensation for suffering. The issue at hand concerns today’s blacks and today’s women. Today’s society is not responsible for incidents preceding its own existence. Other opinions may not coincide with this belief, but I do not feel any responsibility for the positive or negative actions of my grandfather or my father. However, as a member of society I will take responsibility for the positive or negative actions of society today. For example, today’s society is not responsible for blacks or women’s lack of voting rights years ago. If for some reason we were responsible, how could this possibly be repaid? Make a black or female vote count two or three times? No, this is preposterous. We have canceled our debts, simply by giving them a right to vote and a say in the election of their representatives. Now that is not to say that today’s society is not responsible for the discrimination of blacks and women in recent years. But, even prior to the lifetime of those that would be most affected by preferential hiring: both blacks and women have had the right to vote; discrimination based on race, color, religion, or sex has been illegal; segregation has ended; and the civil rights movement has taken place. Clearly, we live in a different United States than out predecessors. Today’s blacks and women may still experience some repercussions of discrimination, but for decades laws have been enforced prohibiting discrimination. If someone discriminates against a black today, charges could be filed against that person and that person will be punished. That is the bottom line. Preferential treatment cannot be given to victims of all crimes. It would become chaotic trying pin the level of preference a victim should get for different crimes. For a moment let’s digress to the case of Judy. Judy was raped. All society can offer her is the punishment of her rapist, if her rapist is found guilty. Sure, Judy will probably suffer for the rest of her life believing that it was her fault; she will lose self-respect and self-confidence. But is Judy going to receive preferential treatment when she walks into an office and applies for a job? There is no space on a job application for Judy to say: “I should receive special consideration, because several years ago I was raped. This rape has caused me years of anguish, and now I lack the self-confidence I once had. All this has cause me to underachieve in school and in life. Please consider this when you review my application.” If Judy, who lost her self-confidence and self-respect through the violation of her rights by a member of society, is given no compensation for her trauma, why should blacks or women? All society owes the victim of a crime is that the criminal be punished if in fact a law was breached. Possibly their case is more powerful. Not all women (or men) are raped each year, but most blacks and women have been discriminated against at some point in their life. Could we possibly owe the victims of discrimination something? If, as Thomson claims, all blacks and females have, as a consequence of their past lack of rights, suffered a lack of self-confidence and self-respect, then why preferentially give them jobs? Jobs have no direct correlation to a lack of self-respect and self-confidence. Indirectly, yes, maybe many blacks and women have not been able to achieve their highest goals due to this lack of self-confidence and are therefore handicapped when they enter the job market. But it seems to me that if we were to solve the problem and provide repayment with the loosening of qualifications necessary, or even not the loosening but the offering of preferential treatment when hiring blacks and women, this does not solve the problem. It seems to make more sense to dig deeper; to find the root of the problem and change it. Since we can’t go back and change history, eliminating the poor treatment blacks and women of the past, then the next best thing seems to be to reverse the effects of discrimination in the present. The lack of presence in the upper levels of the job market is not a direct effect of discrimination. It is, as Thomson states, a lack of self-confidence and self-respect that has kept toady’s blacks and women down. So the logical solution would be to renew their self-respect, and to restore their self-confidence. It seems like too superficial of a solution to simply give blacks and women preference when it comes to hiring. Certainly it would not bolster my self-confidence to know that I received a job over another equally qualified individual, simply due to my skin color or sex. I would feel as if again race and sex were dominating decisions. Wasn’t the original goal to eliminate the issue of skin color and sex from all decisions? Thomson, in her essay on preferential hiring, tells us that she is not happy with the solution of preferential hiring in its entirety: “If there were some appropriate way in which the community could make amends to its blacks and women, some way which did not require depriving anyone of anything he has a right to, then that would be the best course to take.” There must be a better way. Psychological treatment would help give the victims of poor treatment renewed self-confidence, providing them the confidence to go out and try to earn a job, rather than get handed a job. The feeling of accomplishment that results from earning a job would help improve self-confidence. But now another issue arises. We would owe all victims of crime some sort of compensation. Maybe there is another way to elevate the status of minorities without bringing the issue of race or sex into the arena. If what is desired by preferential hiring is a jump-start to promote diversity in the workplace and in society, where race and sex are irrelevant, why not enact a plan where preferential hiring is not based on these factors? Instead, why not give preference to underrepresented towns or areas of town (possibly by zip code), to those that are financially burdened, and to those with handicaps. This would help relieve the pressure of race and sex in these issues. The underprivileged will still be given a jump-start, and diversity will still be promoted. However, this solution breaches another point that any form of categorization of people should not occur. The solutions presented are more acceptable than preferential hiring, though they still have their defects. Why not bury the issue of race? Discrimination is waning. It has become a crime to discriminate. Soon blacks and women will become full members of the job world. There are plenty of role model success stories available. There is no reason to believe that anyone, in today’s society, cannot achieve whatever they wish. Hard work and diligence will pay off and eventually race and sex will no longer be issues. The goal is to make race and sex irrelevant, and preferential hiring only keeps these issues alive. Let’s try to live in a society modeled after Martin Luther King Jr.’s dream, and I believe the issues of race and sex will disappear, leaving people to be judged solely on their character.