

“colortocracy.” “Blacks of all hues” entered formerly white institutions as students, teachers, and workers. Corporations, universities, and government agencies became “the major arbiters and shapers of black mobility,” and class positions in the black community “became increasingly dependent on achievement and less on ascription.”

Today, the black community in Philadelphia is no longer concentrated in a single area of the city. And the social classes within that community, writes Anderson, “are qualitatively different from those of Du Bois’s time.” Members of the new black elite come from various backgrounds and in various hues,

are “largely indifferent to earlier rules of the color caste,” and live in Chestnut Hill and other predominately white and affluent neighborhoods. Members of the black middle class, often the offspring of industrious working-class parents, live mostly in Mount Airy and other racially mixed areas, though many continue to reside in the old inner-city neighborhoods.

The black working class and underclass have seen the least change, and have been hurt by the loss of manufacturing jobs. Still, says Anderson, “the legacy of past exclusion continues to haunt blacks at all levels of the class structure.”

## *Sizing Up Affirmative Action*

“Assessing Affirmative Action” by Harry Holzer and David Neumark, in *Journal of Economic Literature* (Sept. 2000), American Economic Assn., 1014 Broadway, Ste. 305, Nashville, Tenn. 37203, and “What Does Affirmative Action Do?” by the same authors, in *Industrial and Labor Relations Review* (Jan. 2000), Cornell Univ., Ithaca, N.Y. 14853–3901.

Does affirmative action in business and education, along with government “set-asides” for minority firms, result, as many critics suggest, in poorer-performing employees, students, and contract firms? In an overview of past research, and a new study of their own, Holzer and Neumark, economists at Michigan State University, answer no on most counts.

Looking at more than 3,200 employers in Atlanta, Boston, Detroit, and Los Angeles surveyed between 1992 and 1994, Holzer and Neumark found that 56 percent used affirmative action in recruiting. These firms attracted (not surprisingly) more minority and female job candidates, screened them more intensively, were more likely to ignore educational or past employment deficiencies or criminal records when they hired—and were more likely to provide training for their new hires. These actions by employers apparently paid off: Subsequent performance ratings showed that the minority and female workers did, if anything, better than white men.

Some 42 percent of the employers surveyed used affirmative action in hiring (as well as, for the most part, in recruiting). Holzer and Neumark found that these firms were more likely to hire women or minorities with lesser qualifications—but also to give them remedial training, thus erasing the differences. Overall,

affirmative action, while boosting employers’ costs, did not appear to result in weaker job performance.

Various studies have attempted to determine whether the proverbial “playing field” is level for minorities and women in the labor market. Summarizing these studies in the *Journal of Economic Literature*, Holzer and Neumark write that “while differences in educational attainment and cognitive skills account for large fractions of racial differences in wages, employer discrimination continues to play a role.” Does affirmative action help? Studies found (again, not surprisingly) that it results in employment gains for minorities and women. But on the question of its impact on the performance of employees and firms, say Holzer and Neumark, the various studies they examined yield “no definitive conclusion.” The data suggest, however, that white women in affirmative action firms are not less qualified and do not perform less competently than their male counterparts. Also, the authors observe, while “there is some evidence of lower qualifications for minorities hired under affirmative action programs,” especially when measured by test scores or formal education, “evidence of lower performance . . . appears much less consistently or convincingly.”

In universities, Holzer and Neumark note,

there is little evidence of discrimination. On the contrary, universities now give minorities preferential treatment in admissions, and though hard evidence of cause-and-effect is lacking, the overall increase in minority enrollments has been “striking.” While recent studies indicate that black college students, on average, have lower college grades and graduation rates than whites, those at more selective schools perform better than they would at less selective ones. With minority “special admits” to medical school, there is a further benefit: Minority physicians are more likely to treat patients who are minorities and poor.

As for whether minority set-asides in government contracting and procurement prop up weak companies, the evidence is mixed, the authors say. Some studies have found that minority firms that “graduate” from such programs have no worse failure rates than other firms. “On the other hand, there is some evidence that minority business enterprises deriving a large percentage of their revenue from local government are relatively more likely to go out of business.” The cause, however, may be that some of these firms are only fronts set up to exploit the programs for the benefit of large, nonminority enterprises.

## *Bowling with Uncle Sam*

“A Nation of Organizers: The Institutional Origins of Civic Voluntarism in the United States”  
by Theda Skocpol, Marshall Ganz, and Ziad Munson, in *American Political Science Review*  
(Sept. 2000), 1527 New Hampshire Ave., N.W., Washington, D.C. 20036.

To hear some conservatives and communarians tell it, big government and its “top-down” efforts to do good have sapped America’s civic health, turning a once proud land of bustling volunteers, active with friends and neighbors in multitudes of tiny local groups, into a nation of isolated, self-absorbed slackers, mindlessly clicking their remotes. Instead of “a thousand points of light,” millions of TV screens glowing in the social dark. The solution: Turn off the set, stop looking to government, and join . . . a bowling league. But wait! cry Harvard University sociologist Skocpol and her colleagues. Government can help! After all, they argue, it served in the past as a model for voluntary membership organizations.

They cite a classic 1944 article, “Biography of a Nation of Joiners,” by historian Arthur Schlesinger, Sr. Voluntary groups were few in colonial America, he wrote, but the struggle for independence and then the adoption of the Constitution taught lessons in cooperation. In the early 1800s, Americans began to organize associations along the lines of the federal political system, “with local units loosely linked together in state branches and these in turn sending representatives to a national body.” Subsequently, the Civil War heightened national feelings, giving “magnified force” to association building in the late 19th century.

Buttressing Schlesinger’s analysis, Skocpol

and her colleagues dredged up historical data on large-membership organizations from an ongoing study of the origins and development of volunteer groups, as well as from historical directories, then looked at the local groups listed in 1910 city directories for 26 cities. “In every city,” they write, “most of the groups listed in the directories were part of regional or national federations, ranging from a minimum of 63 percent in Boston to a maximum of 94.5 percent in Rome, Georgia.”

Looking further at groups listed in city directories between 1890 and 1910 in eight small cities, the authors found that religious congregations and local chapters of large federations (other than labor organizations) were “quite stable,” while strictly local groups tended to come and go. “Once founded, churches and chapters linked to the largest federations took firm root and became the enduring core of civil society in modernizing America.” The chapters flourished, they say, thanks in part to the efforts of national and state federation leaders, such as Thomas Wildey of the Odd Fellows and Frances Willard of the Woman’s Christian Temperance Union, who “were constantly on the move,” spreading ideas and recruiting members.

If large federations growing “parallel to the institutions of national republican government” first made the United States “a civic