

# **Realities of Affirmative Action in Employment**

Barbara F. Reskin



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A book that brings social science knowledge to bear on issues of affirmative action is long overdue. Just a cursory reading of any newspaper or listening to radio or television commentary makes clear that this is a public policy topic more frequently charged with "heat" than "light." The Realities of Affirmative Action in Employment seeks to diffuse the rhetoric by adding the perspective of systematic empirical study.

As the title implies, The Realities of Affirmative Action in Employment is a project grounded in what we know about affirmative action. The book is about how affirmative action works and what impact it has had on employees, employers, and the public. Early on in the book, we learn that affirmative action is formally mandated for only a small proportion of employers and firms. The book, however, goes beyond where affirmative action may be technically required and considers more generally the impact of affirmative action in setting norms and sta! ndards of practice throughout the workplace.

In keeping with the goals of this project, The Realities of Affirmative Action in Employment was produced with an assiduous dedication to empirical research. The project sought to take the commonplace assumptions of proponents and opponents of affirmative action and ferret out myth from reality based strictly on scientific data and research. Also, it is comprehensive in its scope: The book takes into consideration the experiences and perspectives of employees who are the targets of affirmative action, other employees, all employers, and the public. It also examines the costs and benefits to organizations and firms.

As discussions and debate continue about how best to reap the benefits of a diverse workforce, The Realities of Affirmative Action in Employment is worth reading and rereading.

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