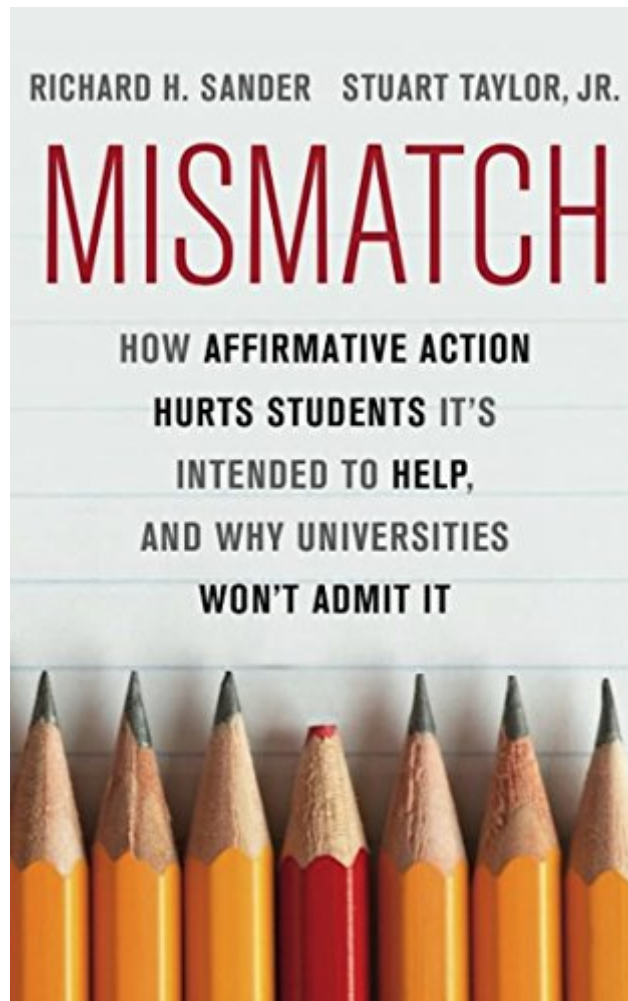


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Mismatch: How Affirmative Action Hurts Students It's Intended To Help, And Why Universities Won't Admit It



Synopsis

Affirmative action in higher education started in the late 1960s as a noble effort to jump-start racial integration in American society and create the conditions for genuine equal opportunity. Forty years later, it has evolved into a swampland of posturing, concealment, pork-barrel set-asides, and "worst of all" a preferences system so blind to its own shortcomings that it ends up hurting the very minorities educators set out to help. Over the past several years, economist, law professor and civil rights activist Richard Sander has led a national consortium of more than two dozen nonpartisan scholars to study the operation and effects of preferences in higher education. In *Mismatch*, he and journalist Stuart Taylor present a rich and data-driven picture of the way affirmative action works (and doesn't work) in this setting. Though their liberal leanings would indicate support for race-based policies, Sander and Taylor argue that the research shows that affirmative action does not in fact help minorities. Racial preferences in higher education put a great many students in educational settings where they have no hope of competing—a phenomenon that they call "mismatch." American law schools provide a particularly vivid illustration of how "mismatch" harms the educations and careers of many minority students. Compelling evidence shows that racial preferences double the rate at which black students fail bar exams and may well in the end reduce, rather than increase, the aggregate number of black lawyers. Moreover, because preferences are targeted at upper-middle class minorities, they help shut low-income students of all races out of much of higher education. If you're black and poor or white and poor, for that matter—your chances of stepping into the halls of some of the nation's most elite institutions are no greater than they were in the 1960s. Unfortunately, the academic establishment is only committed to symbolic change, and it will undermine any research that contests its reflexive political correctness and challenges its sacred cows. Sander and Taylor argue that university leaders and much of America's elite have become so deeply committed to an ideology of racial preferences, and so distrustful of broader American public opinion on these issues, that they have widely embraced regimes that ignore the law, hide data, and put out systematic misinformation on their own racial policies. Sander and Taylor conclude by looking at data on how to level the racial playing field in higher education. Existing studies, they argue, suggest that early childhood interventions are much more likely to produce success down the line.

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Customer Reviews

"They were doing badly, it turns out, because the law schools were killing them with kindness by extending admissions preferences (and often scholarships to boot) that systematically catapulted blacks into schools where they were very likely not only to get bad grades but also actually have trouble learning." In a nutshell, this is the major thesis of *Mismatch* by Sander and Taylor. This incredibly timely book is a scholarly presentation of the relevant studies on affirmative action and racial preferences; both of which are defined clearly in the book. With the Fisher case decision looming at the end of the current Supreme Court term, I cannot think of a more important and timely book for both educators and the general public. It should be noted that the authors do NOT blame race for the cause of the poor black performance. They make it abundantly clear that their thesis is not racist or demeaning to minorities. Their claim is simpler. Racial preferences at the college and post-graduate level do more harm than good because minority students come unprepared in terms of skill level to compete with their fellow classmates. The book is not easy reading. If you are looking for a book with only anecdotal evidence and interesting personal stories, this is not the tome for you. You will have to wade through a good deal of technical data, charts, studies, and some mathematic understanding of concepts such as percentiles and academic indexes. However, this is a cogently argued book that presents a difficult subject with grace and compassion. I highly recommend this book to all interested in a fair, factual approach to a "hot" topic. Written in a scholarly manner, the

book, however, is accessible to all those willing to keep an open mind on the issue of racial preferences.

Mismatch was an eye-opening read. Although the book is based on affirmative action, I saw the take-aways as being much broader: 1. Success in college (and beyond) is directly related to the quality of education and parental support in childhood. 2. Students thrown into academic environments above the level they are prepared for (the academic index mentioned in the book) ends with many of those students to not only dropping out of the university but also dropping out of the higher education system in debt and feeling defeated. 3. When any "group" of students do poorly, the higher performing students and faculty tend to view the whole group as inferior. 4. Students who are better matched (via academic index) to the university they attend are more likely to succeed and go on to productive careers, as well as being seen as equals by their peers and faculty. The UT lawsuit has been mentioned; Texas is a great example of mismatch at work without the affirmative action component. Texas has the Top 10% rule (where the top 10% of all high school graduates are automatically admitted to state universities). Students who attend small, average performing high schools are admitted to Texas universities automatically over students who attend high schools with very high test scores and low numbers of free/reduced lunches like Highland Park HS in Dallas; Westwood in Austin; Friendswood HS or Clear Lake HS in the NASA area; etc. The students from the more average HS are admitted with lower GPAs, less rigorous coursework, and fewer learning opportunities outside of the classroom. The competition for student rank is fierce in the higher performing schools, to be in the top 10% requires a 3.8 GPA or higher.

Most selective colleges, universities, and professional schools use large racial preferences in admissions. The rationale for doing so has been dominated by fairness considerations. This book by Sander and Taylor shifts the focus from 'is it fair?' to 'does it work?' They argue that the evidence is overwhelming that mismatches often harm those they are trying to help because race-based admissions preferences for minority students create a 'mismatch' between students and universities. Students get admitted to more selective colleges and universities than they otherwise would be and then fall behind and are less likely to graduate. Thus, we have fewer minority college professors, lawyers, engineers, etc. Abigail Fisher's current Supreme Court case against the University of Texas' minority preferences that denied her admission is supported by 2009 data that show the average SAT score of black freshmen admitted outside Texas' 'top 10%' law was 390 points (out of 2400) below the average white score and 467 points below the average Asian score.

Similarly, the average Hispanic score was 120 points below the average white score. The authors contend such large mismatches create serious problems for those admitted under racial preferences. Sander and Taylor contend that if the top schools practiced 'strict racial neutrality,' lower tiered schools would incur less pressure to achieve racial diversity, possibly affording a relatively simple resolution. A key 'Mismatch' point - that students who attend higher-level law schools than they otherwise would have been admitted to have lower bar-exam passage rates than those at lower-level schools who did not receive any preferences and thus had an easier time learning.

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