



We Won't Go Back: Making the Case for Affirmative Action

Charles R. Lawrence III

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In the compassionate yet frank meditation, two of America's leading voices on affirmative action make the convincing case that it is time for a more humane understanding of this controversial policy. Told from the richly personal and occasionally diverging perspectives of an African American man and an Asian American woman, *We Won't Go Back* offers an impassioned, generous vision for the policy's expansion - one that sees affirmative action as a gain for all. Combining personal memoir, careful analysis, and the stories of those who have shaped the policy over the decades, Lawrence and Matsuda reveal what affirmative action has meant in real terms, in people's lives - from the communities that struggled for its initial passage to parents who fight today for their child's fair shot. In the process, the authors eloquently consider some of the policy's most divisive issues: How do African Americans feel about the judicial ascendancy of Clarence Thomas? Why have the majority of women remained silent on affirmative action? Do Asian Americans need the policy? How are issues of hate speech and political correctness tied to it? Perhaps most striking is the human face of affirmative action today, which emerges radiantly from the stories gathered here. We meet Anthony Romero, a Latino raised by his immigrant parents in a Bronx housing project, now director of a prominent human rights organization; Robert Demmons, a trailblazer who successfully tackled discrimination in his local fire department; LaDoris Hazzard Cordell, the first African American woman to become a Superior Court judge in her county; and Bernadette Gross, a carpenter who rose triumphantly in a male-dominated profession. Their tales and others' force the question: Which people are in the room because of affirmative action, and what would we lose if they were no longer there? They also offer a searching reminder of those who wait outside the doors of continued exclusion. At its heart, *We Won't Go Back* is a deeply spiritual book that asks what it is that we, as Americans, value. Do we really wish to live in a world where there is no sense of generosity, caring, or community? The stories of abundant hope and grace in these pages answer with a resounding no.

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