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Book Reviews

*Edited by
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Unequal By Chance, by Eliezer D. Jaffe.
Gefen Publishing House, Jerusalem, Israel,
1988, 73 pp.

Any society needs educated people to survive. The United States has difficulty providing access to higher education to those who are qualified and want it. Among the variables important for understanding this problem are preparation, prejudice, and resources. In real time they are always confounded. Unfortunately, it takes courage to sort them out for this problem of access has become politicized. The current name for this intellectual cesspool is affirmative action.

Such a "juicy" mess excites the penchant some Israelis have for importing American problems to Israel. *Unequal By Chance* describes an experiment in affir-

admitted to the school; 38 of these received tutorial and financial aid and 28 did not. The cut-off point is variable and is determined by the number of students who are to be admitted each year.

The findings were that experimental and control students graduated in roughly the same proportions and with little difference in grade averages. Contrary to expectations, the disadvantaged group did not do better in field work than in their academic studies, and providing tutoring and financial aid was not of significant help to them. Arab students fared worst of all.

This study established that students who score slightly below admission criteria can make it in school, although at a slightly lower level than other students. Does this finding add anything to our knowledge about affirmative action? Absolutely not. The students seldom scored more than 10% below the cut-off point. In another year with a different cut-off point, some of them would even have been admitted as regular students.

The study design was flawed in other ways. Students were not included who scored below the admission minimum but who were not from disadvantaged backgrounds. Therefore, the opportunity to assess the effects of social class was lost. In fact, such an assessment was not done even with the available data. In general, there is little evidence of thorough data analysis.

In addition, a most interesting datum is misinterpreted. Almost all the disadvantaged students who left did so because they failed. Only about half of the nondisadvantaged students left for this reason. The others left for "personal nonacademic reasons." From this reviewer's experience, such students usually do not leave school, but transfer to other departments, often because they are dissatisfied with the quality of their social work education. Is it possible that special programs trap students so

that, when they find the program is not for them, they have no option but to fail? If a university takes in special students, should it not then also see that they have the same right of choice as other students? In this case, these students should have had the option of tutoring and support if they wanted to transfer to another department.

The absence of firm data on which to base recommendations does not prevent the author from concluding that social work education should be restructured. Among his recommendations are that affirmative action should be institutionalized. Because this poorly designed study did not analyze the relative weight of variables important in determining access to higher education, nothing in this project supports this recommendation.

The author also recommends that an interview be part of the admission process. Every attempt to demonstrate the validity of interviewing as a predictor has failed, although at the extremes of doubt, it has some utility.

The author makes several references about the need of the faculty to be concerned about the personality of the student. Predictions of social performance based on estimates of personality or value system have also always failed. For instance, the first 100 Peace Corps volunteers were given a battery of psychological tests, yet their ability to predict behavior in the field was nil. This reviewer always shudders when social work faculty start talking about the "kind" of professional they want to turn out. Such discussions always end by judging people in terms of whether they follow the "party line" and not on the basis of what they can do.

In sum, this book should be widely read, but for none of the reasons the author intended. It contributes nothing to understanding affirmative action either in Israel or the United States. It is neither a well-designed nor executed project. It is a prime example of what happens when the guise of science is used to advance social ends within a particular ideological framework. This can threaten necessary educational ex-

perimentation, including accepting students who do not meet all the technical requirements for admission.

Whatever the merits of affirmative action in the United States the concept has no place in Israel. Pluralism is of debatable value in the United States, and the attempt to import it to Israel is a disaster. Democratic societies must make opportunity available for all citizens. This requires applying universal principles of justice. Shimon Peres said, "Those who believe in equality of opportunity as opposed to equality of outcome have done better by the latter than those who believe only in the latter." It is to be hoped that Professor Jaffe learns this lesson.

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