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# Thoughts on Black Conservatism: A Review Essay

by  
Martin Kilson

*Reflections of an Affirmative Action Baby*, by Stephen L. Carter (New York: Basic Books, 1991), 286 pp.

In *Reflections of an Affirmative Action Baby*, Stephen L. Carter, an Afro-American law professor at Yale University, has written a wide-ranging book on affirmative action policy. Like numerous other books on the subject, Carter covers the issues of its legitimacy as policy, white opposition, impact on black mobility, and contradictions faced by universities in administering affirmative action. Carter also offers a new area of discussion—namely, the evolving division among Afro-Americans regarding affirmative action, allocating six of eleven chapters to facets of this issue. Carter uses his own experiences to frame these discussions—a mode of discourse that offers considerable rhetorical facility. This outcome suits his essential purpose, to highlight the downside rather than the upside of affirmative action policy. But unlike such openly conservative critics of affirmative action as Nathan Glazer and Thomas Sowell, Carter arrives at a negative position after having first embraced affirmative action. Hence, his characterization of himself as “an affirmative action baby.”

## Carter's Political Demeanor

The first thing that stands out about Carter's book is the author's political and ideological posture toward affirmative action. On the one hand, Carter's purpose is clearly antithetical to affirmative action policy. He wants to demonstrate, for instance, that affirmative action has run its course as acceptable public policy, to critique illegitimate extensions of affirmative action disguised as diversity policy, and above all, to warn Afro-Americans to prepare for the demise of affirmative action, a preparation he thinks requires greater civility of debate among Afro-American intellectuals and leaders—a comity of discourse rather akin to Mrs. Finch's sewing club. As Carter says, “Sometimes I . . . have childish daydreams: Thomas Sowell and Derrick Bell shaking hands across the conference table. . . .” (p. 142)



Martin Kilson

Yet, on the other hand, Carter is insistent that his opposition to affirmative action is not tantamount to a conservative demeanor. Instead, Carter craves to be seen and understood as a friend of Afro-America's civil rights agenda—and a rather special friend at that, one who happens to have the jump on other black intellectuals in spotting the conditions bringing about the collapse of affirmative action policy. As Carter puts it:

Mine is not, I hope, a position that will be thought inauthentically black. It is not, I think, evidence of that most fatal of diseases (for a black intellectual), neoconservatism; my views on many other matters are sufficiently to the left that I do not imagine the conservative movement would want me. (Neither, I think, would the left—but that is fine with me, for it is best for intellectuals to be politically unpredictable.) The argument I present in this book is generated by reason but fired by love [for blacks]. (p. 7)

Thus, Carter wants his readers—especially Afro-American readers—to see him as ideologically neuter—without a political gender, so to speak—neither fish nor fowl, just a kind of ideologically sterile dispenser of public policy and moral insights regarding the dismantling of affirmative action practices. Carter also wants us to believe that his insights are not weighted in favor of the conservative white power structures or white working-class conservatism. He wants his insights viewed as politically neutral guidelines to a postracial America in which,

Carter hopes, Americans will surrender race-linked discourse (along with gender-linked discourse) regarding individual experiences and American institutional dynamics.

This argument, presented in humanistic terms and breezy verbiage, has a curious quality: considering his background as a law and policy analyst, his discussion is strangely lacking in what might be called policy specificity. In other words, once Afro-Americans have followed Carter's advice and willingly surrendered affirmative action policy without a fuss—a policy very much the operational centerpiece of the civil rights agenda—Carter offers not one clue as to how blacks and their allies should proceed to engage both the public and private sectors to facilitate closure of the black-white mobility gap rooted in America's racist patterns.

Moreover, Carter's claim that his discussion of affirmative action is free of any ideological tilt is politically naive and even intellectually disingenuous. Carter must surely be aware that such conservative organs as the *Wall Street Journal* and the *National Review* are intrinsically more attracted to his perspective than, say, the *New York Amsterdam News*, published by civil rights activist Wilbert Tatum. Nor would such mainstream organs of the new black bourgeoisie as *Black Enterprise* display an intrinsic openness to Carter's presumptively apolitical, anti-affirmative action perspective. Why? Because the owner and editor of *Black Enterprise*, Earl Graves, knows the impact that current efforts to dismantle affirmative action policies have had on black businesses—efforts like the 1989 Supreme Court decision in *Richmond v. Croson*, a decision clearly responsible for the sharp decline of Atlanta's contracts to minority firms from 43 percent in 1988 to 14.5 percent in 1990.<sup>1</sup>

### The Affirmative Action Issue

Basic to Carter's claim that affirmative action has run its course as acceptable public policy are three interrelated arguments: first, affirmative action is now opposed by most whites, especially when preferential treatment is the mechanism of affirmative action; second, affirmative action is flawed because it disproportionately benefits middle- and upper-class blacks (what I call the coping strata), not the poor, one-third of Afro-Americans; third, Carter believes that American upward mobility patterns are mediated by paradigms of pure achievement or pure merit, creating moral confusion regarding the mobility status of Afro-American beneficiaries of affirmative action—did they make it on their own or by racial preferences?

Carter attaches much significance to white attitudes for a very good reason—because the conservative Republican leadership under Bush manipulates

the race-linked anxiety of white voters by emphasizing the preferential aspect of affirmative action. Carter says he wants to take this issue away from the conservative Republicans, a seemingly liberal thrust on his part. From another vantage point, however, Carter's wish to appease the anxiety of whites regarding affirmative action represents a rather conservative posture, for the appeasing mechanism involves the surrender by blacks of a twenty-five-year policy. Carter suggests that this is the only road to liberalizing white voters on the overall policy needs of blacks—a suggestion put forth by other neoliberal critics of affirmative action including Thomas Edsall in *Chain Reaction: The Impact of Race, Rights, And Taxes On American Politics* (1991) and Jim Sleeper in *The Closest of Strangers* (1990).

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Carter's discussion of the need for blacks to appease white voters' anxiety toward affirmative action never mentions a reciprocal obligation on the part of whites, nor does he probe the possible political methodologies that might ensure this. Presumably, the injury done by affirmative action policy to whites' mobility interests and normative sensibilities—relating to presumptively pristine values of achievement and merit—negates the right of blacks to expect a reciprocal obligation. I suggest, in short, that something fundamentally conservative—and neoconservative, at that—informs Carter's critique of affirmative action, his protestations to the contrary notwithstanding.

In regard to the class bias of affirmative action toward the coping strata rather than poor Afro-Americans, Carter commences his discussion with the following observation:

What has happened in black America in the era of affirmative action is this: middle-class black people are better off and lower-class black people are worse off. Income stratification . . . in the black community has increased sharply . . . the number of black people in the higher-paying professional positions is growing faster than the number of white people. And at the elite educational institutions . . . affirmative action . . . programs are increasingly dominated by the children of the middle class. One need not argue that affirmative action is the cause of increasing income inequality in black America to understand that it is not a solution. (pp. 71–72)

Thus, Carter argues that a basic contradiction — a hypocritical dynamic — exists in the civil rights intelligentsia’s support of affirmative action. In Carter’s words, “The degree of one’s support for affirmative action in the professions bears no relation to the degree of one’s concern about the situation of the black people who are worst off, for the programs do them little good.” Because of this contradiction, Carter is willing to dismiss affirmative action as merely a sham — an ostensibly progressive policy which has been co-opted by well-to-do blacks. As Carter puts it, “All the efforts at seeking to justify racial preferences as justice or compensation mask the simple truth that among those training for business and professional careers, the benefits of affirmative action fall to those least in need of them.” (p. 72)

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I agree with Carter’s characterization of the bourgeois tilt of affirmative action policy and I would like to see this tilt balanced toward the poor. However, I disagree with Carter’s implication — namely, that the bourgeois tilt is intrinsically illegitimate, an argument common among neoconservative opponents of affirmative action. Princeton University political scientist Russell Nieli wrote in a letter to the *New York Times* (24 July 1991), “Affirmative action programs . . . often benefit those who do not deserve benefits.” Such criticism lacks historical and comparative perspective. Affirmative action policy is a governmental response to the longstanding, undemocratic, racial-caste marginalization of Afro-Americans. Since middle-class blacks as well as poor blacks suffered, both sectors of Afro-Americans are legitimate potential beneficiaries of this policy. Furthermore, the bourgeois tilt of affirmative action policy is hardly unique. Other federal assistance policies for farmers, small businesses, veterans, and banks, for instance, have involved cases of those who are better off benefiting disproportionately. The bourgeois sector of white ethnic groups of Irish, Italians, and Jews also gained special benefits through what might be called defacto affirmative action — the awarding of city and state contracts, loans, and jobs through patronage since the late 19th century.<sup>2</sup>

What is the function of this argument for opponents of affirmative action like Carter? I suggest it is not to create an argument in favor of affirmative action policy to benefit poor blacks, but to create arguments detrimental to the existence of affirma-

tive assistance programs at all. This is clearly a conservative function that flows from a seemingly liberal argument, that is, a pro-poor argument. In this connection, it is interesting that professed advocates of the poor among the critics of affirmative action — like Carter — do not propose extending the definition of the poor constituency they suggest would be better served by affirmative action. In other words, why not include the over 15 million poor, white Americans as potential beneficiaries of affirmative action? I suggest that the bourgeois-tilt critics of affirmative action are not in fact intrinsically interested in the plight of the poor, but rather invoke this plight as a foil for attacking affirmative action as such.

### The Pure-Merit Fetish

Overall, Carter’s antipathy to affirmative action is closely tied to his belief that black mobility under affirmative action lacks moral quality. Throughout his book, Carter displays a fervent emotional need to have what he considers his own superior intellectual and professional achievement in law measured at par with comparable achievement by white professionals. In this, Carter joins the former Harvard University economist Glenn Loury (now at Boston University) and the Stanford University economist Thomas Sowell in blaming affirmative action policies for introducing a structure for the evaluation of black professionals that, to their minds, emphasizes the helping-hand role of public policy to the detriment of the black individual’s intrinsic capability. Carter formulates this dilemma under the heading of “best black syndrome” — a valuative mode in which whites measure high achieving blacks against each other, not against comparable high achieving whites, labelling the highest achieving black “best black.” Conservative black intellectuals, in general (including Sowell, Loury, and Shelby Steele, among others), and Carter, in particular, have shown exasperation and even bitterness toward this best black syndrome. Carter formulates his position as follows:

The *best black syndrome* creates in those of us who have benefitted from racial preferences a peculiar contradiction. We are told over and over that we are among the best black people in our professions. And in part we are flattered . . . [for] those who call us the best black lawyers or doctors or investment bankers consider it a compliment. But to professionals who have worked hard to succeed, flattery of this kind carries an unsubtle insult, for we yearn to be called *what our achievements often deserve: simply the best — no qualifiers needed!* In this [race conscious] society, however, we sooner or later must accept that being viewed as the best blacks *is part of what has led us to where we are.* . . . (p. 52) (Italics added)

At another point in his account of the best black syndrome, Carter relates the thinking of economist Glenn Loury on this issue:

A few years ago, in a panel discussion on racial preferences, the economist Glenn Loury noted that the Harvard Law School had on its faculty two black professors who are also former law clerks for Justices of the Supreme Court of the United States. . . . It isn't fair, he argued, that they should be dismissed as affirmative action appointments when they are obviously strongly qualified for the positions they hold. . . . It is no diminution of the achievements of the professors Loury had in mind to point out that there is no real way to tell whether they would have risen to the top if not for the fact that faculties are on the lookout [owing to affirmative action] for highly qualified people of color. The same is surely true for many black people rising to the top of political, economic, and educational institutions. (p. 59)

It is interesting that black conservatives should think that the question of demonstrating pure-merit mobility is a special issue confronting blacks, Hispanics, and women under affirmative action policy. Loury, Steele, Carter, and other conservatives make a fetish of it. Why do black conservatives articulate this position? They do so, I think, because America's job recruitment culture is defined at the ideal level as a *pure-merit paradigm*, and opponents of affirmative action have skillfully kept this paradigm at the forefront of popular thinking about affirmative action. But this has been unfair for affirmative action, for in reality America's job recruitment culture has been a pragmatic admixture of the pure-merit paradigm and what might be called a *modified-merit paradigm*. The term modified-merit paradigm refers to a dynamic in industry, government, education, and banking wherein job entry is surrounded by extra pure-merit processes — buddy networks of lawyers, doctors, managers, academics, and others, as well as other forms of assistance based on ethnicity, veterans status, or other conditions. Contrary to conservative criticisms of affirmative action, the modified-merit paradigm under affirmative action is not anti-pure merit. The two function together enabling newcomers to job markets from which they had previously been excluded to mount the conveyor belt of experience that will prepare them for pure-merit capability. As such, this functional interface of pure- and modified-merit paradigms under affirmative action constitutes a classic expression of American pragmatism at its best. The admixture of pure- and modified-merit paradigms in job recruitment has characterized the social mobility experience of all American ethnic groups in many job markets, and efforts

by conservatives to suggest that only affirmative action policy has used this methodology are disingenuous.<sup>3</sup>

Of course, there is no denying that affirmative action policy has depended on this methodology more explicitly and formally and for good reason. Due to the institutionally tenacious racist marginalization of Afro-Americans from the 1880s to the 1960s<sup>4</sup> (or the equally tenacious gender marginalization of women during the same era), federal public policy intervention was required to provide a framework for what I call modified-merit job recruitment (or contracts allocation) for blacks, Hispanics, and women. The experience of this methodology — that is, admixture of modified- and pure-merit paradigms — in the United States armed forces has been

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an enormous success, as demonstrated in the studies by Northwestern University sociologist Charles Moskos. Although conservative opponents of affirmative action conveniently ignore the experience of the armed forces, the data show barely 2 percent of blacks in officer ranks during the 1970s, but by the end of the 1980s some 12 percent of officers (7,000) were black, including 7 percent of generals and 11 percent of colonels. Barely 5 percent of non-commissioned officers were black during the 1970s, but by the end of the 1980s, 24 percent of master sergeants and 31 percent of sergeant majors (85,000) were black. The armed forces' affirmative action technique involves promotion boards that have the authority to set goals — "The goals for this board are to achieve a percentage of minority and female selection not less than the selection rate for all officers being considered." Professor Moskos claims that the advantage of this formula is "that if the goal is not met, the board must defend its decision [and so] the pressure to meet the goals is strong."<sup>5</sup>

Affirmative action clearly involves an element of mobility pump priming, but federal assistance policies had already used this strategy much earlier, especially for farmers, small businesses, and veterans. Preferential treatment — called reverse discrimination by Nathan Glazer — is basic to any federal affirmative assistance policy, for instance, when some citizens get tax cuts and abatements and others do not, or when some farmers (tobacco and dairy, for example) benefit from subsidies while others must live and die by market forces. The rationale underlying preferential treatment in any federal assistance policy is that it serves a higher public value.

Thus, the charge of reverse discrimination leveled at affirmative action is politically tendentious and even approximates race baiting, seeking to delegitimize in the public's eyes the preferential treatment accorded blacks.

It is a fascinating phenomenon that black conservatives like Carter have emerged as proponents of the delegitimation of preferential treatment under affirmative action and thus as articulators of an idealistic pure-merit paradigm, favoring the tightening-up of professional job market penetration for recently locked out groups of blacks, Hispanics, and women. Numerous and amusing contradictions surround the activities of these conservatives. For example, although Loury's above-mentioned observation has him seeking to protect two talented black professors at Harvard Law School from what he considers denigrating evaluation under the best black syndrome, the professors themselves (Christopher Edley and Randall Kennedy) are strong proponents of affirmative action. They are emotionally secure in their own intellectual and professional achievements, and they assume an essentially tough, pragmatic posture toward the presumptively affirmative-action-induced deflation of their achievements by whites (the best black syndrome). They do this, I suggest, by way of a kind of cost-benefit tradeoff with affirmative action policy. That is, whatever emotional cost they endure due to the best black syndrome, they discount in favor of the job market benefits provided by their professorships at an elite institution. Countless other Afro-Americans faced with the best black syndrome do the same (as do women faced with the best *women* syndrome). In doing so, Afro-American or women professionals are being more systematically realistic than the idealistic pure-merit proponents among black conservatives.

### Interface of Black and White Conservatism

If one single factor can be identified as the primary motivation of the opposition by black conservatives to affirmative action, it is the best black syndrome. This is especially true of the highest achievers among them, including Loury, Sowell, Alan Keyes, and Carter (really best classified as *hybrid* conservative, part liberal and conservative). These are individuals with top-level intellects and thus with certain narcissistic inclinations—not in the sense of vanity, but in terms of overweening self-worth.

So in the eyes of the high achievers among black conservatives, a mobility pump-priming policy like affirmative action—clearly beneficial to many Afro-Americans—is nonetheless expendable, particularly if the attitudinal milieu surrounding that policy induces whites to deflate the full quantum of

achievement recognition due them. Yet it must be asked why certain black high achievers turn to conservatism in order to secure a right to fair achievement recognition associated with establishmentarian status patterns? Why don't they choose liberal and progressive options that seek to egalitarianize these patterns?

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As Thorstein Veblen suggested early in this century in *Theory of the Leisure Class*, newcomers to elite roles—that is, the parvenus—in American society seem compelled to utilize conservatism to fill a vacuum in their self-worth that antedates their class mobility. Put another way, conservatism offers the parvenus a sense of *substantive status identity*, contrasted to the mercurial or *tenuous status identity* connected with the ethnic or religious groups of Irish, Italians, and Jews. Even so, given the tenacious exclusiveness of longstanding WASP elites, the migration to conservatism by the parvenus nets them only an imperfect status identity. Consequently, conservatives among the parvenus still suffer some status deficiency. This compounded status anxiety is often overcome by radicalizing their new conservatism—a process rather like the catechistic activism of the religious convert.<sup>6</sup> So the newcomers to conservatism often adopt an Americanistic demeanor, which includes ultrapatriotism, deference to establishmentarian policies and norms, and even nativistic patterns of assailing leftists, feminists, and civil rights activists.

Neoconservatism among black intellectuals and a growing number of the black intelligentsia is, then, not unlike this historical and generic American pattern. Its deviation from the generic pattern can be attributed to the unique dynamics that defined the racial-caste marginalization of Afro-Americans—a marginalization far more culturally vicious and more institutionally tenacious than that experienced by Irish, Jews, and Italians through ethnic-caste marginalization. This means, in turn, that once racial-caste segregation is formally vanquished institutionally, the psychocultural and ritualistic legacy of racist marginalization nonetheless exhibits strong vestigial capacity.

It is, then, precisely this vestigial racist dynamic in post-civil rights American society that conservative black intellectuals are battling when opposing the best black syndrome. They are correct, too, in this opposition. Yet I suggest that they err significantly

in not recognizing that the issue of the best black syndrome would exist whether or not affirmative action policies prevailed. Why? Because most whites—despite the new post-civil rights milieu—still sustain a fervent, psychocultural investment in neoracist interactions with Afro-Americans—a situation not unlike the psychocultural investment of males in neosexist interactions despite the postfeminist milieu of today's society. Furthermore, this neoracist, psychocultural crutch is politically sustained or manipulated by cynical, conservative, political elites (Reaganite and Bushite Republicans) and has been rekindled periodically during the crises that have populated the American social landscape during the past twenty years.<sup>7</sup>

### Concluding Note: The Emperor's Clothes

It is the major limitation of *Reflections of an Affirmative Action Baby* that Carter, a talented legal scholar, displays virtually no awareness of the systemic sources of those features of affirmative action policy he so abhors, especially the best black syndrome. He, therefore, lacks an understanding of American conservatism, as do the other black conservative intellectuals I have already mentioned. Carter virtually assumes that American conservatism is little more than an innocent refuge for ostracized black intellectuals (ostracized, that is, by emotionalistic solidarity processes among Afro-Americans). Carter calls these intellectuals “black dissenters” thereby seeking to egalitarianize their image. Carter's discussion of these so-called black dissenters—covering more than four chapters and in many ways comprising the heart of the book—will strike most serious analysts of dissenting dynamics in American history as rather bizarre.

I say bizarre for good reason. Carter packages this discussion by way of a rather curious (perhaps laughable) comparison of today's black dissenters with such historical giants among black dissenting intellectuals as W. E. B. Du Bois, Paul Robeson, Martin Luther King, Jr., and Benjamin Davis. But, this is just too clever by half, so to speak. Note how Carter formulates this spurious comparison—“Looking at the deep rift between the [neoconservative black] dissenters and the [black leadership] mainstream, I cannot help but think back on the Niagara Movement, a forerunner of the NAACP, organized in 1905 by Du Bois and other opponents of Booker T. Washington in order to provide a platform for their dissenting ideas and a base for their burgeoning efforts to thwart Washington's ascendancy.” (pp. 139–140)

The simplistic logic here is that since A and B wear the same suit—dissenters' garb, let's say—A and B are politically the same, with the same message and purpose. Well, it just isn't so. Basically, what Carter

is talking about is two different genre of Afro-American dissenters—*activist dissenters* and *ritualistic dissenters*. While the former seek to activate popular forces—the weak, left-outs, and marginals—against greed, privilege, and oppression, the latter seek, above all, obfuscation, manipulating the dissident tradition and modalities of rhetoric, demeanor, and allusions to support established patterns of power. In short, Carter must know that Du Bois and his contemporaries were dissenting against the very grain of authoritarian, capitalist power (in the form of antitrade unionism) and racism, not just against the autocratic, black, establishment puppet Washington. Therefore, Carter surely must know that black conservative dissenters—as he refers to Steele, Loury, and Sowell—are dissenting merely in the ritualistic sense, not in the substantive, antisystemic sense of activist dissenters.

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After all, the mainstream civil rights leadership (including Benjamin Hooks, Jesse Jackson, and Coretta King, for example) or black congressional leaders are not the all-powerful network that Carter cleverly characterizes them as being. They are an influential interest group, that is all. They have not, therefore, been capable of preventing neoconservative blacks, including Carter, from circulating their ideas—whether among blacks or whites—from gaining jobs comparable to their talents, or from penetrating major, local and national power networks, private or governmental. Thus, the ritualistic dissenting of Carter's black dissenters is little more than a facade or mask, behind which a small group of talented Afro-American intellectuals have fashioned a national platform for themselves and penetrated a range of establishmentarian capitalist networks (including, of course, obtaining lucrative rewards in the form of fellowships and honorariums) to a degree unprecedented for Afro-American intellectuals.

Moreover, black conservative intellectuals do not yet have an operational constituency among Afro-Americans—as, for instance, neoconservative Jewish intellectuals have had since the emergence in the early 1970s of the pro-Israel lobby, Jewish businesses and bureaucrats. Interestingly enough, the trail to establishmentarian power that black conservatives have followed was first blazed by neoconservative Jewish intellectuals who, like black conservatives, evolved out of an historically margin-

alized ethnic background. Jewish neoconservatives have also been the primary patrons of Carter's black dissenters putting such influential organs at their disposal as *Commentary*, the *Public Interest*, the *New Republic*, the *National Interest*, and the *American Scholar*, to name just a few.

Considering the patronage of such powerful, neo-conservative, Jewish intellectuals—linked as they have been for nearly twenty years to the establishmentarian, right-wing, WASP, corporate, and institutional networks—it is a clear distortion of the term *dissenter* to apply it as Carter does to black conservative intellectuals. Intrinsically, dissenting groups and individuals assail overweening, establishmentarian power and authority (as in Luther vs. the Vatican, Soviet dissidents vs. Stalinism, and Du Bois vs. American racism). Above all, such dissenters risk life, limbs, family safety, professional opportunities, and comfort—a pattern of risks and insecurity that black conservative intellectuals would never be forced to experience under the patronage of powerful white conservatives. In short, Carter's black dissenters are *client dissenters*, akin to client or satellite states.

Overall, Carter's argument about black dissenters (one of two central arguments in his book) is riddled with distortion—clever distortion sometimes, but distortion nonetheless. It will not, I think, survive rigorous evaluation. Carter, I believe, senses this problem of exaggerated characterization and formulation, and so he resorts to a back-up strategy of what might be called *deceptive nuance*. For instance, one chapter criticizes American conservatives for their nearly zero track record in behalf of Afro-American freedom and equality. But this criticism is more an afterthought than an intrinsic discussion. It is, in short, window dressing. In reality, *Reflections of an Affirmative Action Baby* is an apology for American conservatism, in general, and for black conservatism, in particular. But it is not good apology—the dialectical kind, that is, in which the author, though tendentious, discovers self-limitations and moral discrepancies.

In *Reflections of an Affirmative Action Baby*, Stephen Carter gives us two rather self-serving observations: first, that black conservative intellectuals are heroic and flawless—at least compared to the emotionalistic, solidarity-minded elements of the Afro-American mainstream; and second, that he too approaches a certain perfection as a black intellectual. Alas, he doesn't even have an ideological or political pigeonhole—“. . . it is best for intellectuals to be politically unpredictable," as he says. Carter practices an open-door policy, or so he tells us, and it is presumably merely accidental that those who enter his favor in *Reflections of an Affirmative Action Baby* are establishmentarians, conservatives, and the best and brightest. To believe this is to believe in tooth fairies.

Martin Kilson teaches political science at Harvard University and is the author of *Political Change in a West African State* (1966) and *Neither Insiders Nor Outsiders: Blacks in White America* (forthcoming).

### Notes

1. See Rhonda Richards, "Set-Aside Plan Cutbacks Are Key Blow," *USA Today*.
2. See Steven P. Erie, *Rainbow's End: Irish-Americans and the Dilemmas of Urban Machine Politics, 1840–1985* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989).
3. On extra pure-merit dynamics in American social mobility, see Erie, *Rainbow's End*; Harold Zink, *Twenty Municipal Bosses* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1930); C. Wright Mills, *The Power Elite* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1956); Adolf A. Berle, Jr. and Gardiner C. Means, *The Modern Corporation and Private Property* (New York: Macmillan, 1934); Christopher Jencks, *Who Gets Ahead?: The Determinants of Economic Success in America* (New York: Basic Books, 1979).
4. See, for example, Gunnar Myrdal, *An American Dilemma: The Negro Problem and Modern Democracy* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1944). See also Herbert Shapiro, *White Violence and Black Response: From Reconstruction to Montgomery* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1988), and John Gunther, *Inside the U.S.A.* (New York: Harper, 1947) especially chapter 41, "Negro in the Woodpile."
5. See Charles Moskos, "How Do They Do It?: The Army's Racial Success Story," *The New Republic* (August 5, 1991), 16–20.
6. See Seymour Martin Lipset and Earl Rabb, *Politics of Unreason: Right-Wing Extremism in America, 1790–1970* (New York: Harper & Row, 1970).
7. See Martin Kilson and Clement Cottingham, "Thinking About Race Relations," *Dissent* (Fall 1991).