

College Quotas

New quota systems are developing in the universities of California — and they do affect Jews as a group.

Quotas in higher education are not new to Jews. As late as the 1950s, Jews in the upper fifth of their high school graduating class had a 53 per cent chance of being accepted in Northeastern colleges, while Catholics had a 71 per cent chance and Protestants a 74 per cent chance. The situation in California had always been better, partly because of the preponderance of public institutions. But certain of the "better" schools and of the professional schools in the country had serious quota barriers against Jews for at least two generations.

The new quota systems are not developing because of anti-semitism, but rather for more benign purposes. For example, the School of Social Welfare at Fresno State College indicated that it wanted its entering class to consist of 33 percent Black students, 33 percent Chicano students, 10 percent other non-whites, and 24 percent non-Chicano Caucasion — known in today's jargon as "Other-white." The corresponding figures at the UCLA Social Work School are 24 percent Black, 24 percent Chicano, 10 percent other non-white, and 42 percent Other-white.

A different version has been emerging at places like the Boalt Hall law school of the University of California at Berkeley. There, about 25 percent of the admissions were set aside for students from "under-privileged" groups.

The purposes have been restated again and again: Blacks, Chicanos, etc., need more trained people to serve their communities as doctors, lawyers and social workers. They also need the kind of economic advancement and "models of achievement" which will result. The society owes them special action on this front, because of the past history of special oppression. And, because of the results of that long oppression, these groups need some margin of preferential treatment.

The reasons for resisting such quota systems have also been made clear. The expressed concern with "mediocrity" is not altogether convincing; There was plenty of that being produced before quota systems. Besides, the main question is not really one of "under-qualification" but of competition. It's not so much a matter of whether people are "qualified enough," but whether the "best qualified" are the ones who are accepted.

The principle of the "best qualified" is what the agencies of the Jewish community are fighting for on the employment front, in opposing quota systems. It is not that the Jewish agencies are acting as a protective "union" for Jews; that would be falling into the same trap of trying to pit group power against group power—and that's not the kind of American society we're trying to build, or one in which Jews could flourish. We're opposing quota systems in employment just because they would destroy the idea of a society in which individuals are accepted on their individual merit — not because of their ancestry or the group to which they belong.

In opposing quota systems on the employment front, Jewish agencies are, at their best, supporting "affirmative action" programs which will bring equity to the disadvantaged groups within the framework of individual merit. Such programs call for active recruitment of qualified minority workers, and special training programs for qualifiable workers, in order to make them qualified within the merit system.

But the educational field may be a little more complicated. If we're pushing "special training" in order to qualify people for the merit system, then don't the universities have to provide some of that special training? The educational institutions, after all, have some specific "social mission" which employers do not have.

On the other hand, there is similarity to the employment field in that given individuals suffer some disability as a result of quotas such as those cited above. As a religious group, at least, Jews are, ironically, more "Other-white" than anyone else — since there are many non-white Catholics and Protestants. But, more important, Jews may be disproportionately affected by such educational quotas because they are disproportionately attracted to such professional fields as law, medicine and social work. And their attraction to these fields is partly the result of the fact that Jews have been historically excluded from so many other fields.

Of course, the best solution is to expand our educational opportunities so that no one need be excluded from these institutions, if they have a chance for success. But meanwhile, we're faced with the problem of next Fall's admissions to these schools. The Jewish agencies of California are going to make a joint approach to the governing bodies of the state colleges and universities, to try to untangle the equities and arrive at some solutions which will eliminate the recrudescence of the bald and offensive quotas. They would be interested in your opinions.



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