Supporters have offered many reasons why affirmative action is necessary and important. Some common reasons are given here.

1. **Affirmative action is needed to overcome past injustices or eliminate the effects of those injustices.** Proponents of affirmative action believe it is necessary because of the historical inequities that have existed in the United States. In particular, women and racial minorities have long been subjected to unfair employment treatment by being relegated to lower positions (such as clerical and low-paying jobs), not being considered qualified, and being discriminated against for promotions. Without affirmative action, the inequities will continue to exist for individuals who are not white males.

2. **Women and minorities have taken the brunt of the inequality in the past; but now more equality can be created, even if temporary injustice to some may result.** White males in particular may be disadvantaged temporarily in order for affirmative action to create broader opportunities for all—the greatest good. Proponents argue that there must be programs to ensure that women and minorities be considered for employment opportunities so that they can be competitive with males and nonminorities. An often-cited example is that in a running contest, someone running against a well-trained athlete starts at a disadvantage. Women and minorities have had such a disadvantage. Consequently, for a period of time, they should be given a head start in order to ensure that a truly competitive contest occurs.

3. **Raising the employment level of women and minorities will benefit U.S. society in the long run.** Statistics consistently indicate that the greatest percentage of those in lower socioeconomic groups belong to minority groups. If affirmative action assists these minorities, then it is a means to address socioeconomic disparities. Without affirmative action, proponents believe that a larger percentage of the U.S. population will be consigned to being permanently economically disadvantaged. When economic levels are low, other social ills proliferate, such as single-parent families, crime, drug use, and educational disparities. Ultimately, then, a vicious circle of desperation will continue unless special efforts are made to provide access to better jobs for all individuals.

4. **Property used, affirmative action does not discriminate against males or nonminorities.** An affirmative action plan should help remedy a situation in which disproportionately few women and minorities are employed compared with their numbers in the labor markets from which they are drawn. The plan should have a deadline for accomplishing its long-term goals. All individuals must meet the basic qualifications for jobs. Once all of these job criteria are established, qualified women or minorities should be chosen. In this way, those not selected are discriminated against only in the sense that they did not get the jobs.

Proponents of affirmative action also stress that affirmative action involves not quotas but goals. The difference is that quotas are specific, required numbers, whereas goals are targets for "good faith" efforts to ensure that protected-class individuals truly are given consideration when employment-related decisions are made.

5. **Affirmative action promotes longterm civility and tolerance through forced interaction.** The United States is a diverse country facing social integration issues, and change is occurring rapidly. In order to staff their jobs, employers will have to tap the talents of the diverse members of the U.S. labor force and to find ways for all inhabitants to work together effectively. When women and minorities are placed in widely varying work environments and males and nonminorities interact and work with them, there will be greater understanding among the diverse peoples in the United States. Additionally, women and minorities who are given opportunities can become role models who will make preferences in the future unnecessary. Thus, if successful, affirmative action ultimately may no longer be necessary.