

sia, down to approximately \$3 billion in 2003 from almost \$15 billion two years earlier. Gold and currency reserves are at record levels. The country's rate of economic growth is more than respectable. These could be temporary upticks, but they could also herald a revival in national confidence, one that is occurring because of, not in spite of, Putin's illiberal tendencies.

As for the political arena, it would be foolish to expect much resemblance to our own style of rule in a land battered by decades of tyranny. But even here the last word is far from being written, with much depending on further developments both in the economy and in the realm of simple security. If the oil boom continues, and army morale ever recovers from the Chechen debacle, Meier's elegant chronicle may one day be read with nostalgia for a time when we worried about Russia's weakness rather than its renewed strength.

Groupthink

**Affirmative Action
Around the World:
An Empirical Study**
by Thomas Sowell

Yale. 231 pp. \$28.00

Reviewed by
Carl Cohen

AMONG CONTEMPORARY economists and social theorists, one of the most prolific, intellectually independent, and iconoclastic is Thomas Sowell, now a senior fellow at the Hoover Institution. In nearly a half-century's worth of books and essays, he has explored the cul-

CARL COHEN is professor of philosophy at the University of Michigan. His most recent book is a debate with James P. Sterba, *Affirmative Action and Racial Preference* (Oxford).

tures of the world and all the nooks and crannies of American society. Enormously learned, wonderfully clear-headed, he sees reality as it is, and flinches at no truth.

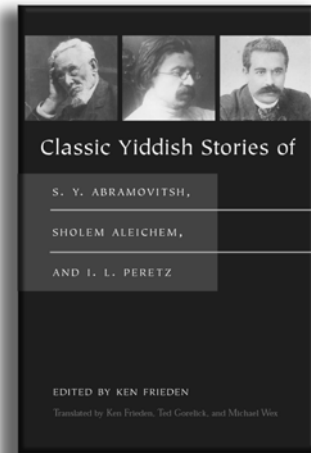
Affirmative Action Around the World is exactly what its title announces: an empirical study of what the consequences really are, and really have been, in the five major nations in which "affirmative action"—the term now commonly used to denote ethnic preferences—has been long ensconced: India, Malaysia, Sri Lanka, Nigeria, and the United States.*

In each case, Sowell's presentation of the data is instructive and illuminating—and disturbing. Some themes recur: wherever ethnic preferences have been instituted, they have led to intergroup hostility, dishonesty, and further proliferation in spite of manifest failure. Reflecting on Sowell's data, I also observe that each nation's experience offers a powerful lesson with respect to one particular aspect of the results produced. Here follow five painful lessons.

IN INDIA, ethnic preferences have been established longer than in any other nation. "Positive discrimination" goes back to British rule, and was built into the Indian constitution in 1947. Originally intended to last for only twenty years, the preferences have been extended repeatedly in time. Originally devised to benefit only "untouchables" (a now forbidden term, replaced by "scheduled castes" or "Dalits"), they have been repeatedly expanded in reach. The benefits are no longer regarded as transitory; the beneficiaries, including members of many other "backward classes," now comprise more than *three-quarters* of the Indian population.

* Although Sowell accepts this common equation of ethnic preference and affirmative action, there are many varieties of affirmative action (originally understood as efforts to *uproot* residual preference) that are morally right and not preferential. The term itself has been kidnapped by the advocates of preference, and I would not accede to the capture.

NEW FROM
SYRACUSE
UNIVERSITY PRESS



Edited by Ken Frieden

CLASSIC YIDDISH STORIES

OF S. Y. ABRAMOVITSH,
SHOLEM ALEICHEM,
AND I. L. PERETZ

Translated by
Ken Frieden, Ted Gorelick, & Michael Wex

"Ken Frieden, our contemporary authority on Yiddish literature, enriches us again with this volume of *Classic Yiddish Stories*. . .

Abramovitsh's *Fishke the Lame*, Sholem Aleichem's *Tevye* tales, and Peretz's *Hasidic Stories* have never been so well rendered into English as they are here."—Harold Bloom

Cloth \$19.95 0-8156-0760-1
xviii, 286 pages, glossary, bibliography

To order, call 1-800-365-8929

SyracuseUniversityPress.syr.edu

Preferential quotas have been limited by Indian courts to 50 percent of the available places at universities and elsewhere; but making use of those quotas requires “complementary resources” of education that the intended beneficiaries simply do not have. Therefore, the quotas for the most seriously deprived in India often go unfilled. On the other hand, quotas for “other backward classes” rarely go unfilled. Upshot: the great majority of the reserved places go to those who deserve them least.

Only deep inner change would enable members of the beneficiary groups to utilize the places preferentially reserved for them. But, as Sowell points out, there is “no political mileage to be made by telling people to change themselves.” Expedience rules; Indian politicians buy support by confirming prefer-

ences and extending them to more and more ethnic groups. Enlargement is the easiest course.

What then do we learn from the Indian experience? *Race preference does not wind down; it winds up. Proliferation is the rule.*

NEXT, MALAYSIA, where Chinese laborers were first brought to the peninsula to work the rubber plantations, Indian laborers to work the tin mines. Both have become substantial ethnic minorities, with Malays remaining the great majority. The three groups are quite distinct.

The Chinese, adopting a frugal style and investing heavily in the education of their children, pulled themselves from the plantations and built businesses across the country; they have come to dominate retail establishments in Malaysia, of which they owned 85 percent by 1980.

Corporate ownership by Chinese has also soared. Chinese incomes are double those of Malays.

In 1965, Malaysians willingly divested themselves of a great mass of powerful Chinese by expelling Singapore, which became a separate country and remains very largely a Chinese city—and greatly prosperous. But, although the expulsion of Singapore made the Malay majority politically secure, and somewhat reduced its economic domination by the Chinese minority, it did not stop the intellectual advance of the Chinese who remained. In 1969, more than half the officers in the Malaysian army were ethnic Chinese; as long as university admissions were determined by examination results, only 20 percent of the places went to Malays, and most of the rest to ethnic Chinese.

The majority, competing unsuccessfully, had to be protected. The Malay government set out to achieve racial balance in employment, giving formal preferences to Malays in hiring. But there seemed no alternative to continuing reliance on the better-educated Chinese and Indian minorities in fields where their technical skills were needed. And so admission to universities was altered as well. Group membership was emphasized over individual performance, and, to increase the number of Malays yet further, the Malay language became the only medium of instruction in schools as well as in universities.

The ethnic preferences that have pervaded Malaysia in recent decades were not designed to pull an oppressed minority from the depths; their purpose was to protect the relatively less competent majority from the intellectual and economic advances of more competent ethnic minorities. What, then, do we learn from Malaysia? We learn that *the inferior performance of some ethnic groups is not always a consequence of discrimination against them.* On the contrary, even the imposition of discriminatory advantages favoring a *majority* can-

The University Press of KENTUCKY

THE SHERIFF

America's Defense of the New World Order

Colin S. Gray

“An eminently readable book that cogently sets forth, explains, and argues for an active American strategic role in the world.”—William R. Van Cleave

\$29.95 cloth

KING OF THE MOUNTAIN

The Nature of Political Leadership

Arnold M. Ludwig

“Well-written, engaging, insightful. . . . Ludwig's books makes a bona fide contribution to the study of leadership.”—*Rhetoric and Public Affairs*

\$24.95 new in paper

VOICES FROM THE KOREAN WAR

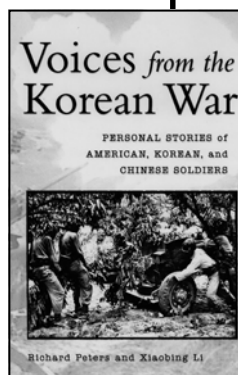
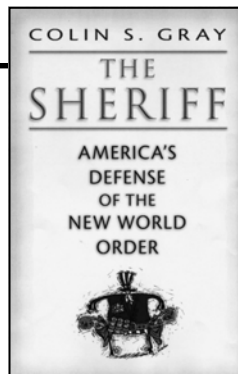
Personal Stories of American, Korean, and Chinese Soldiers

Richard Peters and Xiaobing Li

“The incredible voices of American, North and South Korean, and Communist Chinese soldiers give the book a richness seldom found in war books.”

—Col. David H. Hackworth

\$35.00 cloth



At bookstores • 800/839-6855 • www.kentuckypress.com

not obscure the fact that some groups prove less competent than others.

SRI LANKA, in the second half of the 20th century, experienced a steep social deterioration whose exact causes are difficult to specify. What began as ethnic tension between the Sinhalese majority in the south and the Tamil minority in the north became bloody slaughter. The substantial preferences given to the Sinhalese (awarded, as in Malaysia, to protect a less competent majority) certainly played a role in exacerbating these tensions.

In Sri Lanka, group rights had become a tool to win Sinhalese votes. The more recently arrived Tamils, clustered in the highlands, were flatly disenfranchised. To overcome inferior majority perfor-

mance, group preferences were introduced in university admissions. Even so, the edge of Tamils in the sciences and other intellectual endeavors remained substantial, and so preference next took the form of race-norming. University admissions were based not on actual scores but on each applicant's "standardized score," determined by his performance relative to the performance of other students in the same ethnic group. When that device proved insufficient as well, "district quotas" were introduced (a variant of what is done today in Texas), whereby admissions were allocated by geographic region. Since Sinhalese and Tamils were concentrated in different districts, this was simply a backhand method of establishing ethnic quotas.

Protests against preferences in Sri

Lanka mounted but were unsuccessful. Concluding that only in a separate nation could their success be recognized, the Tamils pressed for secession, first with militancy, and then with bloodshed. The once-tranquil island was afflicted with widespread pillage, murder, rape.

Deliberately exacerbating racial tensions for the sake of political gain—we learn from the case of Sri Lanka—promotes hatred of a kind and of a degree almost impossible to reverse. What begins with race preference ends with race riots.

AND THEN there is Nigeria, a nation encompassing a vast array of diverse ethnic groups and regions—largely Islamic in the north, largely Christian in the south. Before colonial rule it was never a country; af-

Work and Other Sins

Life in New York City and Thereabouts
CHARLIE LEDUFF

"Charlie LeDuff is a worthy successor to the great line of memorialists of the New York streets. He's a mensch and a straight shooter, and his writing has a hard swing to it that sounds like the city. These stories will likely be even more valuable in the future than they are to us today."—Luc Sante.

The Penguin Press 384 pp. 1-59420-002-5 \$24.95

Good Morning Midnight

Life and Death in the Wild
CHIP BROWN

From an award-winning literary journalist—"A deep exploration of a life lived as close to nature as humanly possible" (*The Washington Post Book World*). "Searching, intelligent."—*The New York Times Book Review*.

Riverhead 368 pp. 1-57322-379-4 \$15.00



Backstory

Inside the Business of News
KEN AULETTA

"Ken Auletta is the thinking man's press critic, press historian, press guru. He brings his great knowledge, energy and authority to bear in *Backstory*. He is the best in the business. Period!"—Ben Bradlee.

The Penguin Press 320 pp. 1-59420-000-9 \$24.95

An Air That Kills

How the Asbestos Poisoning of Libby, Montana, Uncovered a National Scandal
ANDREW SCHNEIDER
and DAVID MCCUMBER

Told by the Pulitzer Prize-winning journalists who broke the story. "This book...will not reclaim the lives of innocent Americans who succumbed to asbestos poisoning, but in clear, compelling prose and unyielding facts it will serve as a potent antidote to a company that treated its workers and their families like lab rats."—Ken Auletta.

Putnam 448 pp. 0-399-15095-1 \$25.95

This Just In

What I Couldn't Tell You on TV
BOB SCHIEFFER

"A terrific read."—Larry King. "A particularly smart, well-written, funny, and unprepossessing memoir of a distinguished forty-year career."—*Newsday*.

Berkley 464 pp. 0-425-19433-7 \$14.00



PENGUIN GROUP (USA) Academic Marketing Department 375 Hudson St., NY, NY 10014 www.penguin.com/academic

ter colonial rule, the changing governments of Nigeria have regularly practiced favoritism toward one or another of the scores upon scores of tribes and ethnic groups.

Preferences and quotas are justified in Nigeria by the demand, expressly formulated in the constitution of 1979, that national activities should “reflect the federal character of the country.” This “federal character” principle has been extended to school admissions, to promotions in school, and even to membership on the national soccer team. Every activity must “look like Nigeria.” Intergroup tensions have become very sharp; almost every policy issue becomes a matter of racial dispute accompanied by charges of ethnic corruption. These disputes often turn bitter, and become fights.

Whence the rancor? Economic disparities do not account for it. Sowell points out that in the 1990’s, when the Katsinas, formerly lagging behind the Hausa, closed the gap between the two groups, relations became more polarized, not less. The slightest disagreement has

tended to explode into violence, and the same sensitivity appears among other groups as well. Violence is produced, it seems, by the politicization of ethnic differences; and that politicization commonly takes the form of preferential treatment.

One byproduct of this strife has been the creation of more states within the country. To reduce discord, separate ethnic enclaves have been carved out and given formal status. Thus, having given rise to a deadly spoils system, ethnic heterogeneity is mitigated by a gerrymandered homogeneity. The lesson from Nigeria? *When racial balance is advanced by granting preferences that are deeply resented, diversity produces not greater racial harmony but greater racial conflict.*

ONE THREAD runs through all four of these case histories. We are often invited to suppose, almost as an axiom, that every ethnic group is possessed of equal talent with every other and will therefore, if given equal chances, perform with equivalent competence. Disparate num-

bers by group (in employment or education) are taken to be a sure sign of oppression, and proportionality thus becomes the unquestioned standard of fair play. This thinking is the product of an egalitarianism ungrounded in empirical inquiry.

The reality, driven home by Sowell’s excruciating reports, is very different. In fact, for a host of reasons, some of which we know and some of which we do not know, some of which spring from malign oppression and many of which do not, ethnic and racial groups behave differently, perform differently, learn differently, and exhibit greatly different talents and temperaments. That is not crude stereotyping; it is plain fact. Justice will not be done if this fact is denied or goes unrecognized. In giving us this great lesson with the aid of overwhelming evidence and a scrupulously dispassionate mind, Thomas Sowell is our finest teacher.

The fifth of the five great nations dealt with in this book is the United States of America. The appropriate lesson(s) here? *All of the above.*