



Written by [Thomas Sowell](#) on February 25, 2014

The “Fairness” Fraud

It seems as if, everywhere you turn these days, there are studies claiming to show that America has lost its upward mobility for people born in the lower socioeconomic levels. But there is a sharp difference between upward “mobility,” defined as an opportunity to rise, and mobility defined as actually having risen.

That distinction is seldom even mentioned in most of the studies. It is as if everybody is chomping at the bit to get ahead, and the ones that don’t rise have been stopped by “barriers” created by “society.”

When statistics show that sons of high school dropouts don’t become doctors or scientists nearly as often as the sons of Ph.D.s, that is taken as a sign that American society is not “fair.”

If equal probabilities of achieving some goal is your definition of fairness, then we should all get together — people of every race, color, creed, national origin, political ideology and sexual preference — and stipulate that life has never been fair, anywhere or any time in all the millennia of recorded history.

Then we can begin at last to talk sense.

I know that I never had an equal chance to become a great ballet dancer like Rudolph Nureyev. The thought of becoming a ballet dancer never once crossed my mind in all the years when I was growing up in Harlem. I suspect that the same thought never crossed the minds of most of the guys growing up on New York’s lower east side.

Does that mean that there were unfair barriers keeping us from following in the footsteps of Rudolph Nureyev?

A very distinguished scholar once mentioned at a social gathering that, as a young man, he was not thinking of going to college until someone else, who recognized his ability, urged him to do so.

Another very distinguished scholar told me that, although his parents were anti-Semitic, it was the fact that he went to a school with many Jewish children that got him interested in intellectual matters and led him into an academic career.

All groups, families and cultures are not even trying to do the same things, so the fact that they do not all end up equally represented everywhere can hardly be automatically attributed to “barriers” created by “society.”

Barriers are external obstacles, as distinguished from internal values and aspirations — unless you are going to play the kind of word games that redefine achievements as “privileges” and treat an absence of evidence of discrimination as only proof of how diabolically clever and covert the discrimination is.

The front page of a local newspaper in northern California featured the headline “The Promise Denied,” lamenting the under-representation of women in computer engineering. The continuation of this long





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article on an inside page had the headline, “Who is to blame for this?”

In other words, the fact that reality does not match the preconceptions of the intelligentsia shows that there is something wrong with reality, for which somebody must be blamed. Apparently their preconceptions cannot be wrong.

Women, like so many other groups, seem not to be dedicated to fulfilling the prevailing fetish among the intelligentsia that every demographic group should be equally represented in all sorts of places.

Women have their own agendas, and if these agendas do not usually include computer engineering, what is to be done? Draft women into engineering schools to satisfy the preconceptions of our self-anointed saviors? Or will a propaganda campaign be sufficient to satisfy those who think that they should be making other people’s choices for them?

That kind of thinking is how we got ObamaCare.

At least one of the recent celebrated statistical studies of social mobility leaves out Asian Americans. Immigrants from Asia are among a number of groups, including American-born Mormons, whose achievements totally undermine the notion that upward mobility can seldom be realized in America.

Those who preach this counterproductive message will probably never think that the envy, resentment and hopelessness they preach, and the welfare state they promote, are among the factors keeping people down.

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