Justice Debased: The Weber Decision

Carl Cohen

A RACIAL quota in the allotment of on-the-job training opportunities among competing employees, instituted by management-union agreement, was held lawful by the Supreme Court in the recent case of *Steelworkers* v. *Weber*.* This was an important decision, and a very bad one. Its badness lies not only in the substantive result, upholding preference in employment by race, but also in the reasons given by the Court in defending that result, and in the abuse of judicial discretion manifested.

I.

THE precise question decided was this: does Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 forbid employers and unions in the private sector from adopting racially preferential employment programs like the one adopted by Kaiser Aluminum and the steelworkers union? The answer was no. The evaluation of that answer requires a brief description of the quota plan approved, and a brief review of the statute in question.

The plan, adopted as part of a collective-bargaining agreement between Kaiser Aluminum & Chemical Corporation and the United Steelworkers of America, provides that, in filling apprentice and craft jobs, "at a minimum not less than one minority employee will enter for every non-minority employee entering" until the percentage of blacks in craft jobs equals the percentage of blacks in the local work force—about 39 per cent at the Grammercy, Louisiana, plant where Brian Weber works. Seniority in the plant was the criterion on which employees competing for admission to on-the-job training vacancies were ranked. But two seniority lists were maintained pursuant to this agreement, one for whites and one for blacks; vacancies were filled alternately from the top of the two lists. Weber, a white employee with about five years' seniority in that plant at that time, was refused admission to three different training programs—although, because of the quota plan in force, some non-white employees having less seniority than Weber were admitted. Believing that he had been displaced only because he was white, Weber brought suit against Kaiser and the union, in behalf of himself and all white employees at that plant similarly situated. His target was the racial preference in that job-training scheme.

The law in question, Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, reads in pertinent part as follows:

> It shall be an unlawful employment practice for an employer—
>
> (1) to fail or refuse to hire or discharge any individual, or otherwise to discriminate against any individual with respect to his compensation, terms, conditions, or privileges of employment, because of such individual's race, color, religion, sex, or national origin; or
>
> (2) to limit, segregate, or classify his employees or applicants for employment in any way which would deprive any individual of employment opportunities or otherwise adversely affect his status as an employee, because of such individual's race, color, religion, sex, or national origin.

It seems hardly possible to deny that this statute does plainly prohibit racially preferential programs of the kind described above. Thus, as one would expect, Weber won his case in the Federal District Court, and won again, on appeal, in the Federal Circuit Court.

That result has now been reversed by the Supreme Court. The opinion of the five-member majority, delivered by Justice Brennan, is devoted almost entirely to an explanation of why, in their view, Title VII does not prohibit the plan in question. This explanation cries out for response. Response is given in two dissenting opinions, one by Chief Justice Burger which is crisp and con-

CARL COHEN is professor of philosophy at the Residential College of the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor. His earlier article on the *Weber* case, "Why Racial Preference Is Illegal & Immoral," appeared in our June issue.

* Decided June 27, 1979. Actually three cases were decided together: *United Steelworkers of America, AFL-CIO-CLC*, v. *Brian F. Weber et al.* (No. 78-432); *Kaiser Aluminum & Chemical Corporation* v. *Brian F. Weber et al.* (No. 78-435); and *United States et al.* v. *Brian F. Weber et al.* (No. 78-436). There are four opinions in all: that of the majority written by Justice Brennan; a concurring opinion of Justice Blackmun; a dissent by Justice Burger; and a second dissent by Justice Rehnquist with which Justice Burger joins. Because these opinions have not yet received their formal pagination, my references below will be to the printed sheets issued by the Court, identifying only the author and page number of that author's opinion.

demnatory, a second by Justice Rehnquist which is scathing and detailed. Justice Rehnquist's tightly woven, thirty-seven page treatise, to which I will be referring, utterly demolishes the majority position. Its cogency is acknowledged by the majority itself.

2.

ON WHAT grounds does the majority reach its result? The *intent* of Congress, say they, in enacting Title VII, was not to forbid racial preference having the wholesome purpose this program did. The key to the problem, says the majority, is not the "literal" meaning of the statute, but its "spirit." If, by studying the history of the Act, one can discover the purposes of Congress in its adoption, and if this plan advances those purposes, the plan will be, if not "within the letter of the statute," yet still "within its spirit," "within the intentions of its makers." Now the aims of Congress in passing this legislation can be readily discovered. In a nutshell, Congress aimed to counteract black unemployment, to protect and promote the opportunities of blacks to get decent jobs. In legislative debate Senators Humphrey, Clark, and others contended that, without such a bill, discrimination against blacks would become a source of social unrest and intolerable injustice. The majority's defense of their interpretation of Title VII rests principally upon the fact that the proponents of the bill repeatedly insisted upon the importance of jobs for minority groups. That having been the goal, they continue, it cannot have been the case that Congress intended to prohibit private parties "from taking effective steps to accomplish the goal that Congress designed Title VII to achieve" (Brennan, p. 8).

The argument of the majority, in effect, is this: "We know the purpose of Congress; we know the purpose of this plan; they are fully consonant. It must be, therefore, that Congress did not intend to forbid this plan. If the literal language of Congress says otherwise, we must interpret that language to mean what it did not say, while saying what it did not mean."

3.

WHAT Congress really did intend with this statute is a matter about which I shall have much to say. Before turning to that historical question, however, I want to say something about the logic of the majority's argument. The majority blunders seriously by confusing *purpose* with *intent*. That the purpose of Congress was to promote employment opportunities for blacks is beyond doubt. It certainly does not follow that any special scheme having that purpose was intended to be permitted. Different persons, or different pieces of legislation, may share the same aim yet differ greatly in what are believed the wise or the just steps properly taken to achieve that aim. This simple but important point is what underlies the common homily: "The end doesn't justify the means." The aphorism is imperfect, of course; ends do serve to justify means. But the moral point of the aphorism is sound: ends, even very good ones, don't justify *any* means that may be thought effective in achieving them. That ends are shared is no proof that there will be agreement on the justice or the desirability of particular instruments or programs for their attainment.

Consider this hypothetical example, also in the sphere of legislative action. Suppose funds were appropriated to explore alternative sources of energy, one of the major purposes of the appropriation being, in the minds of most members of Congress, to reduce dependence on foreign oil. By adopting some measures clearly having that objective Congress would not warrant the inference that every measure having the same tendency had thereby been permitted. Suppose the expenditure of the funds appropriated for the exploration of alternative energy sources, although having the larger aim of energy independence, were also restricted by the provision that these funds were not to be spent on the development of nuclear energy. It would not then have been rational to conclude that a plan to spend the funds on the development of nuclear energy was "within the intentions" of the legislature because (as Justice Brennan says of the racial quota in *Weber*) "the purposes of the plan mirror those of the statute" (Brennan, p. 12). To find out whether Congress intended to advance its larger purposes in that way we would have had to read the enacted statute. If they were to have said: "It shall be unlawful to expend any of these funds on the development of nuclear energy," we might or might not have thought them wise in that restriction. But it does not take great profundity to distinguish between their *purpose* in legislating and their *intent* in that law—between what they would have hoped to accomplish and what they would actually have proposed to do.

In seeking to advance employment opportunities for blacks in 1964, Congress adopted legislation forbidding *all* racial discrimination in employment. To argue, as the majority does, that they cannot have intended to forbid all discrimination because some racial discrimination might also serve their larger purposes, does not do credit to a high appellate court.

4.

WHAT opens the question of congressional intent? Under what circumstances is it appropriate for any court to inquire into the intent of a legislature in enacting the legislation being applied? When the applicability of the language of the statute is unclear, or its word-

ing is ambiguous, that inquiry may be very much in order. Such circumstances commonly arise. New conditions, unforeseen by the legislature at the time of a law's enactment, may create issues of interpretation that cannot be resolved by its language alone. A court may then be obliged to construe what the legislative intent might most reasonably have been in order to determine fairly the bearing of the statutory language upon the new conditions. Sometimes, in a different vein, legislation may be formulated in deliberately ambiguous language for assorted political reasons. Courts may later be obliged to apply that language to cases treated equivocally in the statute, having then to construe some reasonable legislative intent to guide them.

Nothing like either of these circumstances arises in the present case. The language of Title VII, as Chief Justice Burger observes, exhibits "no lack of clarity, no ambiguity" (Burger, p. 2). The Kaiser quota plan, as all agree, discriminates against individual white employees seeking admission to on-the-job training programs simply because they are white. That, under the very plain language of the statute, is "an unlawful employment practice."

Could it be, perhaps, that the operative meaning of the language of the statute is unclear because it has been sometimes construed by the Court, in past instances, to prohibit discrimination against blacks, but not discrimination against whites? No, that was put out of the question by this Supreme Court in 1976, explicitly interpreting this Title of this statute. White employees who were dismissed after being charged with misappropriating company property brought suit under Title VII because black employees, similarly charged, had not been dismissed. This Supreme Court then concluded, from the "uncontradicted legislative history," that "Title VII prohibits racial discrimination against the white petitioners in this case upon the same standards as would be applicable were they Negroes . . ." (*McDonald* v. *Santa Fe Trail Transportation Co.*, 427 U.S. 273, at 280).

So there is no doubt that Title VII does—or did!—apply equally to all races. That is what the Supreme Court has repeatedly affirmed. Title VII, they earlier insisted, "prohibits *all* racial discrimination in employment, without exception for any group of particular employees" (*ibid.*, p. 283; emphasis in original). A few years earlier, in a landmark interpretation of Title VII, the Supreme Court had agreed unanimously on a definitive account of the legislative intent of Title VII: "The objective of Congress in the enactment of Title VII is plain from the language of the statute. It was to achieve equality of employment opportunity. . . . Discriminatory preference for any group, minority or majority, is precisely and only what Congress has proscribed" (*Griggs* v. *Duke Power Co.*, 401 U.S. 424, at 429 and 431 [1971]). And just one year before *Weber* the very same point was hammered home by the same Court in the context of employment ratios. "It is clear beyond cavil that the obligation imposed by Title VII is to provide an equal opportunity for *each* applicant regardless of race, without regard to whether members of the applicant's race are already proportionately represented in the work force" (*Furnco Construction Corp.* v. *Waters*, 438 U.S. 567 [1978]; emphasis in original).

There is no vestige, no trace of ambiguity or unclarity, either in the language of the statute or in the interpretation repeatedly given to that language, respecting the question whether Title VII protects whites as well as non-whites. There is, therefore, no justification for entering the question of legislative intent. Justice Rehnquist, understandably infuriated, calls attention to the Court's oft-repeated principle applied in another case just as *Weber* was being decided: "Our duty is to construe rather than rewrite legislation" (Rehnquist, p. 3).

5.

BEYOND opening the question of legislative intent where that is not proper, and beyond the muddling of congressional intent with congressional purpose, the majority has given an unbelievably obtuse reading of that legislative intent. Though it is not appropriate in this case even to ask whether Congress intended to permit some racial discrimination with Title VII, the task of answering that factual, historical question is exceedingly easy. The lengthy debates in the House and the Senate are open to us in the *Congressional Record;* majority and minority committee reports of the House on the proposed bill are also open to us; a lengthy, scholarly study of the legislative history of precisely this Title of this Act is available to us.* There can be no genuine doubt—in the mind of one who has examined these materials—about the intent of the Congress in choosing the language they did choose. Democrats and

* The congressional debates appear in Volume 110 of the *Congressional Record* of 1964, extending intermittently over exactly thirteen thousand pages (p. 1,511 to p. 14,511) of ten massive tomes. The House reports appear in *House of Representatives Reports*, No. 914, 8th Congress, First Session, 1963. With the majority and minority reports are printed additional views of particular members of the committee, and views of groups of Representatives, on the bill being reported. The Senate having decided to take up the bill directly, it was not submitted to committee there, hence there are no Senate reports beyond the actual Senate debate, which was very long. The study referred to, used both by Justice Rehnquist and myself, is by Francis J. Vaas, "Title VII: Legislative History," in Volume 7 of the *Boston College Industrial and Commercial Law Review*, pp. 431-58. Vaas records the tortuous path of the Civil Rights Act through Congress with meticulous attention to detail, and makes this striking comment: "Seldom has similar legislation been debated with greater consciousness of the need for 'legislative history,' or with greater care in the making thereof, to guide the courts in interpreting and applying the law" (p. 444).

Republicans *both*, conservatives and liberals *both*, insisted repeatedly and at great length, illustrating their explanations with detailed examples, that H. R. 7152 (which eventually became the Civil Rights Act of 1964) would forbid *all* racial preference for *any* race.

6.

IN THE House of Representatives the bill was amended by the Committee on the Judiciary to include Title VII because no compulsory provisions to deal with private discrimination in employment had been included in its original form. It was added, the committee noted, "to eliminate . . . discrimination in employment based on race, color, religion, or national origin" (*H.R. Reports*, No. 914, p. 26). That title was further amended on the floor of the House to include a Section, 703 (d), which specifically addressed the prohibition against discrimination (already formulated in 703 (a) quoted above) to on-the-job training! Section (d) of 703 reads as follows:

> It shall be an unlawful employment practice for any employer, labor organization, or joint labor-management committee controlling apprenticeship or other training or retraining, *including on-the-job training programs*, to discriminate against any individual because of his race, color, religion, sex, or national origin in admission to, or employment in, any program established to provide apprenticeship or other training [42 U.S. Codes 2000e-2 (d); emphasis added].

Included with the Report of the Judiciary Committee were the lengthy "Additional Views on H.R. 7152" of a group of its advocates, Representative McCulloch and others, which incorporated a passage referred to by Vaas as fairly stating the consensus of the civil-rights proponents as they guided the bill toward adoption. This representative passage includes these sentences:

> Internal affairs of employers and labor organizations must not be interfered with [under Title VII] except to the limited extent that correction is required in discrimination practices. Its [the Equal Opportunity Employment Commission's] primary task is to make certain that the channels of employment are open to persons regardless of their race and that jobs in companies or membership in unions are strictly filled on the basis of qualification [*H. R. Reports*, No. 914, pt. 2, p. 29; Vaas, p. 437].

The major objection faced by Title VII in the House (and again later in the Senate) was the claim that under it racial proportionality in employment might subsequently be required by some federal agency, acting under color of that law. This fear was epitomized in the Minority Report which suggested, as one serious concern, that an employer, under Title VII, "*may be forced to hire according to race*, to 'racially balance' those who work for him *in every job classification* or be in violation of Federal law" (*H.R. Reports*, No. 914, p. 69; emphasis in original). That fear had to be allayed; proponents of the bill strenuously and repeatedly reassured their colleagues that no such racial balancing was contemplated, and that none would be required or even permitted under this Title.

Representative Celler, one of the sponsors of the bill and chairman of the Committee on the Judiciary, at the opening gun of the debate in the House, made the intent of the language of 703 (a) unmistakable. The fear that it would require or permit hiring or promotion on the basis of race resulted, he said, from a description of the bill that was "entirely wrong." He continued:

> Even . . . the court could not order that any preference be given to any particular race, religion or other group, but would be limited to ordering an end to discrimination. The statement that a Federal inspector could order the employment and promotion only of members of a specific racial or religious group is therefore patently erroneous. . . .
>
> The Bill would do no more than prevent a union, as it would prevent employers, from discriminating against or in favor of workers because of their race, religion, or national origin.
>
> It is likewise not true that the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission [established by Title VII] would have power to rectify existing "racial or religious imbalance" in employment by requiring the hiring of certain people without regard to their qualifications simply because they are of a given race or religion. Only actual discrimination could be stopped [110 *Cong. Rec.*, p. 1518].

This theme was echoed repeatedly in the course of the debate in the House of Representatives. Representative Lindsay of New York, among others, took up the defense of Title VII:

> This legislation . . . does not, as has been suggested heretofore both on and off the floor, force acceptance of people in schools, jobs, housing, or public accommodations because they are Negro. It does not impose quotas or any special privileges of seniority or acceptance. There is nothing whatever in the bill about racial balance. . . . What the bill does do is prohibit discrimination because of race . . . [110 *Cong. Rec.*, p. 1540].

With that clear understanding the bill passed the House, 290 to 130, on February 10, 1964.

7.

IN THE Senate, the expression of legislative intent was voluminous and unequivocal. Again the fear of opponents was that some federal inspector might one day impose racial balance under color of this law. Again—and again and again and again—the defenders of the

bill replied with reassurance, insisting vehemently that such fears were totally unfounded. The key term, "discrimination," appearing in Sections 703 (a) and 703 (d) and elsewhere in the bill, was examined minutely on the Senate floor. Could it be taken to mean (the critics asked) only numerical imbalance? Answer: definitely not. Could it have been, for the framers of the legislation, a technical term, whose hidden meaning was "discrimination against blacks" but not "discrimination against whites"? No, definitely not. Senator Humphrey put that suggestion permanently to rest: "[T]he meaning of racial or religious discrimination is perfectly clear. . . . [I]t means a distinction in treatment given to different individuals because of their different race, religion, or national origin" (110 *Cong. Rec.*, p. 5423). The only freedom of employers that the bill limits, he emphasized, is the freedom to take action based on race, religion, sex, or national origin.

When the Senate took up the substance of the Act directly, after deciding not to submit it to committee, it again became essential for the bill's advocates to answer the complaint that the bill would lead to racial preference. Not so, they insisted. Senator Humphrey again:

> That bugaboo has been brought up a dozen times; but it is nonexistent. In fact, the very opposite is true. Title VII prohibits discrimination. In effect, it says that race, religion, and national origin are not to be used as the basis for hiring and firing. Title VII is designed to encourage hiring on the basis of ability and qualifications, not race or religion.

In the same speech Senator Humphrey gives a series of examples that ". . . makes clear what is implicit throughout the whole title; namely, that employers may hire and fire, promote and refuse to promote for any reason, good or bad, provided only that individuals may not be discriminated against because of race, religion, sex, or national origin." He repeats himself so that even the deaf may hear: "The truth is that this title forbids discriminating against anyone on account of race. This is the simple and complete truth about Title VII" (110 *Cong. Rec.*, p. 6549). Humphrey was majority whip and the floor leader for the Civil Rights Act in the Senate. In his support rose Senator after Senator to give the same explanatory assurances about the intent of the legislation.

Senator Kuchel, the minority whip, emphasized that the seniority rights of workers already employed would not be affected by Title VII. He said:

> Employers and labor organizations could not discriminate in favor or against a person because of his race, his religion, or his national origin. In such matters, the Constitution, and the bill now before us drawn to conform to the Constitution, is color-blind [110 *Cong. Rec.*, p. 6564].

Senators Clark and Case were floor captains in the Senate for Title VII specifically. To them fell the task of explaining that Title, what it meant and did not mean, what it permitted and what it prohibited. Their chief task was to refute the charge that Title VII would result in preference for racial minorities. In a memorandum prepared for the Senate they expressed the intent of Title VII unequivocally:

> [A]ny deliberate attempt to maintain a racial balance, whatever such a balance may be, would involve a violation of Title VII because maintaining such a balance would require an employer to hire or to refuse to hire on the basis of race. It must be emphasized that discrimination is prohibited as to any individual [110 *Cong. Rec.*, p. 7213].

A different memorandum, prepared by the U.S. Department of Justice at Senator Clark's request, also makes the point that there is no need to fear employers' being required to maintain racial balance:

> No employer is required to maintain any ratio of Negroes to whites, Jews to Gentiles, Italians to English, or women to men. The same is true of labor organizations. On the contrary, any deliberate attempt to maintain a given balance would almost certainly run afoul of Title VII because it would involve a failure or refusal to hire some individual because of his race, color, religion, sex, or national origin. What Title VII seeks to accomplish, what the civil rights bill seeks to accomplish is equal treatment for all [110 *Cong. Rec.*, p. 7207].

Senators Smathers and Sparkman, granting that the bill did not require the use of hiring quotas, put the attack against Title VII more subtly. Under it, they suggested, employers might be *coerced*, by federal agencies, into giving preference by race. Would that not be permitted under this law? The answer, this time from Senator Williams, was an emphatic negative. Opponents, he replies,

> persist in opposing a provision which is not only not contained in the bill, but is *specifically excluded* from it. Those opposed to H.R. 7152 should realize that to hire a Negro solely because he is a Negro is racial discrimination, just as much as a "white only" employment policy. *Both forms of discrimination are prohibited by title VII of this bill.* The language of that title simply states that race is not a qualification for employment. . . . [A]ll men are to have an equal opportunity to be considered for a particular job. Some people charge that H.R. 7152 favors the Negro, at the expense of the white majority. But how can the language of equality favor one race or one religion over another? Equality can have only one meaning, and that meaning is self-evident to reasonable men. Those who say that equality means favoritism do violence to commonsense [110 *Cong. Rec.*, p. 8921; emphasis added].

Still the fear that racially preferential hiring would somehow be encouraged or permitted under Title VII would not down. Once again the floor leader, Humphrey, took up the battle:

> The title [Title VII] does not provide that any preferential treatment in employment shall be given to Negroes or to any other persons or groups. It does not provide that any quota systems may be established to maintain racial balance in employment. *In fact, the title would prohibit preferential treatment for any particular group,* and any person, whether or not a member of any minority group, would be permitted to file a complaint of discriminatory employment practices [110 *Cong. Rec.*, p. 11848; emphasis added].

8.

How could the majority of the Supreme Court, in *Weber*, escape the force of this parade of unequivocal accounts marching across the printed record of the process of its adoption? Could they contend, perhaps, that although racial preference was indeed prohibited, that prohibition did not bear upon efforts to overcome the effects of *past* discrimination upon the seniority rights of employees? At one point, conceding that it was the intent of the Senate to forbid the maintenance of racial balance, the majority grasps at a straw: this Kaiser quota plan was not introduced to maintain racial balance, they contend, but to "eliminate a manifest racial imbalance" (Brennan, p. 11 and p. 13). Can the net of clear congressional intent be thus eluded, by making the distinction between "maintaining" racial balance and "eliminating" racial imbalance, holding that Title VII forbids the former but not the latter?

Not a chance. Explicating Title VII, its most thorough congressional students, Senators Clark and Case, wrote in their joint memorandum:

> Title VII would have no effect on established seniority rights. *Its effect is prospective and not retrospective.* Thus, for example, if a business has been discriminating in the past and as a result has an all-white working force, when the title comes into effect the employer's obligation would be simply to fill future vacancies on a nondiscriminatory basis. He would not be obliged—*or indeed, permitted*—to fire whites in order to hire Negroes, or *to prefer Negroes for future vacancies,* or, *once Negroes are hired, to give them special seniority rights at the expense of the white workers hired earlier* [110 *Cong. Rec.*, p. 7213; emphasis added].

The Justice Department had earlier drawn the same conclusion: Title VII could not be used to alter seniority entitlements because of discrimination in employment before its adoption:

> Title VII would have no effect on seniority rights existing at the time it takes effect. . . . This would be true even in the case where owing to discrimination prior to the effective date of the title, white workers had more seniority than Negroes. . . . [A]ssuming that seniority rights were built up over a period of time during which Negroes were not hired, these rights would not be set aside by the taking effect of Title VII. Employers and labor organizations would simply be under a duty not to discriminate against Negroes because of their race [110 *Cong. Rec.*, p. 7207].

The distinction between "maintaining" and "achieving" racial balance was, manifestly, never part of the understanding of the legislature that adopted Title VII.

That distinction, moreover, would have been and is specious from the point of view both of advocates and critics of racial preference. If, after the achievement of racial balance through racial preference, craft jobs again were to become predominantly white, the advocates of racial preference would certainly not be content. Convinced that such imbalance is in itself wrong, they would, understandably, then insist that if racial preference be permitted for the achievement of racial balance, it must be permitted for its reachievement. The claim that such instruments are only "temporary" is a fiction. It will be of little consequence to its advocates that the majority in *Weber* leaned on a tenuous distinction which it will be in their interest to ignore. And the opponents of racial preference—including the 88th Congress of 1964—may rightly insist that if preference by race is in principle wrong, it is no less wrong in the one case than in the other. Indeed, both the Justice Department and the floor captains for Title VII in the Senate very carefully pointed out that maintaining racial balance would be forbidden "*because* it would involve a failure or refusal to hire some individual because of his race . . ." (see above, p. 47; emphasis added). The reference in these arguments is to the actual words of Section 703 (a) cited on page 43 above. Adverse effects upon an employee or applicant because of race would result whether the goal had been the maintenance of racial balance or the achieving of it.

The argument that the Congress intended Title VII to permit racial preference in achieving racial balance, but forbade it for maintaining racial balance, and that therefore once proportionality is achieved all such preference will cease, is unworthy of the Supreme Court; it is a sop designed to placate critics with unreliable assurances that the instrument approved will be only "temporary." In fact ethnic preference, once ensconced, is likely to be nearly impossible to eradicate. To mitigate its unfairness more and different ethnic preferences will be introduced—as already they are being introduced.

Those who condemn racial favoritism condemn it both for achieving and for maintaining racial balance; those who support racial favoritism will

not object to its use in either role. That distinction cannot serve to render plausible the majority's interpretation of congressional intent in enacting Title VII of the Civil Rights Act.

9.

As DEBATE over the Civil Rights Act continued in the Senate it became evident that the bill would have to be amended to make absolutely clear the fact that it could not later serve as the justification, by any federal agency, of the imposition of racial preference. Only thus might the repeated objections of its most implacable opponents be successfully met. A bipartisan coalition, made up of Senators Dirksen, Mansfield, Humphrey, and Kuchel, cooperating with leaders in the House of Representatives, devised the "Dirksen-Mansfield" amendment, ultimately adopted. Among the changes thus introduced was a clarifying addition, Section 703 (j), very specifically addressing the critics' fears of imposed racial balancing. This section provides that nothing in the entire Title shall be interpreted to require the giving of preferential treatment to any individual because of race. It reads:

> Nothing contained in this subchapter shall be interpreted to require any employer, employment agency, labor organization, or joint labor-management committee subject to this subchapter to grant preferential treatment to any individual or to any group because of the race, color, religion, sex, or national origin of such individual or group on account of an imbalance which may exist with respect to the total number or percentage of persons of any race, color, religion, sex, or national origin employed by any employer, referred or classified by any employment agency or labor organization, or admitted to, or employed in, any apprenticeship or other training program, in comparison with the total number of persons of such race, color, religion, sex, or national origin in any community, State, section, or other area, or in the available work force in any community, State, section, or other area [42 U.S.C. 2000e–2 (j)].

Now, in an ironic and extraordinary turn, the Supreme Court majority in *Weber* uses the langauge of this section to infer (relying upon what Justice Burger calls a "negative pregnant") that since it bars the requirement of racial preference, but does not specifically prohibit racial preference, it must have been the intention of Congress not to prohibit it! The majority writes:

> The section does *not* state that "nothing in Title VII shall be interpreted to *permit*" voluntary affirmative efforts to correct racial imbalances. The natural inference is that Congress chose not to forbid all voluntary race-conscious affirmative action [Brennan, p. 10; emphasis in original].

This inference is either disingenuous or obtuse. The objection this added section was designed specifically to meet was that racial preference would somehow be required. No one thought it would or could be introduced voluntarily because "voluntary" racial preference precisely had been forbidden by the plain language of the earlier key section, 703 (a), cited above on page 43. Debate in the Senate went on for almost three full months. Never in that entire period was it argued, *by either side*, that employers could, of their own accord, give preference by race. Both proponents and opponents made perfectly clear their understanding that voluntary racial preference by employers, for blacks or for whites, was entirely precluded by the flat and unambiguous wording of those earlier passages, forbidding *any* employment practice that would "discriminate against any individual" because of that individual's race. To add that prohibition yet again, in 703 (j), would have been entirely redundant—and more importantly, it might have diluted the intended force of that particular passage, aimed narrowly at the objection that racial preference would otherwise someday be imposed by government.

That it was so aimed is made exquisitely clear by the difference in the phrasing of 703 (j) from that of the earlier, central sections of the Title. The earlier sections, prohibiting racial discrimination in employment universally, are directed specifically at the employer, and therefore begin: "It shall be an unlawful employment practice for an employer. . . ." Section 703 (j) is directed specifically *at possible federal enforcement agencies*, commissions, or courts, and therefore begins with language indicating that kind of target: "Nothing contained in this subchapter shall be interpreted. . . ." Now to infer, from the fact that this section does not repeat the prohibition already several times explicit in earlier sections, that it was the intention of Congress not to prohibit racial preference, is a transparently unsound defense of so grave a decision.*

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* The argument called a "negative pregnant" is technically described as one having the form *modus tollens:* if p entails q, and q is false, then p must be false. The form is valid, of course—but in this application of it the argument (in either of two possible reconstructions of it) is built upon a false premise.

Version A: "If Congress had intended to forbid all racial preference they would have said that explicitly. They did not say that explicitly. Hence they did not intend that." In this version the second premise is plainly false; the congressional ban against racial preference in Section 703 (a) is perfectly explicit.

Version B: "If Congress had intended to forbid all racial preference they would have expressed that intention explicitly in Section 703 (j). They did not express that intention there. Hence they did not have that intention." In this version the second premise is true but the first is false. There was no need for Congress to repeat, in Section 703 (j), the ban it had already made explicit earlier, and there was good reason not to do so.

Arguments relying upon false premises, even when valid in form, are not sound.

Lest there be any doubt, however, about the intent of the Congress *after* the addition of 703 (j), we can return to the debate itself. Senator Saltonstall, defending the Dirksen-Mansfield amendment including 703 (j), says of it, very plainly: "The legislation before us today provides no preferential treatment for any group of citizens. In fact, it specifically prohibits such treatment" (110 *Cong. Rec.*, p. 12691).

And yet again, in defending the amended bill against Senator Ervin's criticism that it "would make the members of a particular race special favorites of the laws," Senator Clark answers: "The bill does not make anyone higher than anyone else. It establishes no quotas." Employers, labor unions, employment agencies, remain free, Clark points out, to use normal judgment in their business activity—but:

> All this is subject to one qualification, and that qualification is to state: "In your activity as an employer, as a labor union, as an employment agency, you must not discriminate because of the color of a man's skin. . . ." That is all this provision does. . . . It merely says, "When you deal in interstate commerce, you must not discriminate on the basis of race. . . ."

In the event this be somehow misunderstood, he repeats himself in that speech:

> All it [Title VII] does is to say that no American, individual, labor union, or corporation, has the right to deny any other American the very basic civil right of equal job opportunity [110 *Cong. Rec.*, pp. 13079-80].

Senator Cooper, anxious to make the force of what was soon to become law unmistakably clear, also responds to Senator Ervin's concerns, saying:

> As I understand Title VII, an employer could employ the usual standards which any employer uses in employing—in dismissing, in promoting, or in assigning those who work for him. There would be only one limitation: he could not discriminate, he could not deny a person a job, or dismiss a person from a job, or promote on the sole ground of his color, or his religion, other factors being equal [110 *Cong. Rec.*, p. 13078].*

10.

But how, one asks, can the majority not have been fully aware of all this? They must have seen the draft of Justice Rehnquist's dissent, which makes the same points vividly. Did they, perhaps, find other evidence within the record of the debates in Congress, evidence that has here been left unmentioned, which might somehow permit a reading of congressional intent to permit racial preference? No, no evidence has been suppressed here. Like Vaas and Justice Rehnquist, upon whose guidance I have relied, I have scoured the pages of the *Congressional Record*; like them I have registered only a fraction of the evidence against the majority's interpretation. If, in all those pages, there were evidence that *any* Senator or Congressman had the intent that the majority ascribes to the whole Congress, we may be certain it would have been dug up and registered within the majority opinion. No such evidence appears there. Here again we may indeed rely upon a negative pregnant. In this majority opinion, in which every quotation from the congressional debates is presented that might contribute, even with arguments far-fetched or unsound, to an excessively strained interpretation of congressional intent, the absence of any passages that actually express that intent is very revealing.†

The plainest proof that the members of the majority in *Weber* cannot have been in ignorance of the actual intent of Congress, and after searching could find no evidence of contrary intent, is given by Justice Marshall himself. In a 1976 opinion, writing for the Court, he presents a careful analysis of the intent of Congress in Title VII. He quotes Representative Celler, saying Title VII was intended to "cover white men and white women and all Americans" (110 *Cong. Rec.*, p. 2578). He cites Senator Humphrey, Senator Clark, Senator Case, and Senator Williams in passages like those quoted above. Justice Marshall concludes that "Its [Title VII's] terms are not limited to discrimination against members of any particular race." He then substantiates this judgment by extended

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* That Congress intended its prohibition of racial preference expressed in 703 (a) to be general, to ban preference for minorities as well as for the white majority, is strongly confirmed by the striking fact that in the one case in which they did wish to make an exception, permitting one very special kind of preference in one very special setting, they identified that exceptional case and delimited it narrowly in Section 703 (i), with carefully chosen words: "Nothing contained in [Title VII] shall apply to any business or enterprise on or near an Indian reservation with respect to any publicly announced employment practice of such business or enterprise under which preferential treatment is given to any individual because he is an Indian living on or near a reservation."

From the specific inclusion of that one exception it is manifest that only by such specific language did Congress intend exceptions to be justified. No other such exceptions appear. Here is a negative pregnant—a valid *modus tollens* argument—worthy of respect: "Where Congress intended an exception to the general ban on racial preference it identified the excepted case explicitly. It identified no exception for private employers or unions save that regarding Indians on or near a reservation. Hence it intended no exception but this one." In this case the premises are all true and the argument is sound.

† Again the valid argument is in the form of *modus tollens*, and again its premises are true: "If Congress had intended to permit private racial preference in employment there would have been clear expression of that intention by at least some defenders of the Act in the course of lengthy debate. No such expressions appear. Hence Congress cannot be supposed to have had that intent." There is nothing wrong with *modus tollens;* its effectiveness in argument, however, depends upon the truth of the premises relied upon.

reference to the interpretation of Title VII given by the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission:

> The EEOC, whose interpretations are entitled to great deference, . . . *has consistently interpreted Title VII to proscribe racial discrimination in private employment against whites on the same terms as racial discrimination against non-whites,* holding that to proceed otherwise would "constitute a derogation of the Commission's Congressional mandate to eliminate all practices which operate to disadvantage the employment opportunities of any group protected by Title VII, including Caucasians.

Justice Marshall explains, representing the Court, that the history of legislative intent in adopting Title VII is *"uncontradicted"* (*McDonald* v. *Santa Fe Trail Transportation Co.*, 427 U.S. 273, at 278-80, 283; emphasis added).

Members of the House and Senate are quoted by the majority, to be sure. But the quotations serve to establish matters only tenuously related to the central point at issue. Repeated citations from the debates are given to establish that it was the larger purpose of Congress, in tackling this legislation, to promote employment opportunities for blacks. That, as we have seen, is not at issue, and does not speak to the question of what prohibitions were intended. Several citations are given to show, correctly, that one major concern in the Senate when introducing Section 703 (j), which precludes the requirement of racial preference by the enforcers, was to reduce the likelihood of federal interference with private business. That was an aim of many Senators; but showing that does not prove, or even tend to confirm the thesis, that Title VII as a whole was designed to permit nongovernmental racial preference.

One other citation by the majority deserves attention. To give credence to the claim that the distinction between private racial favoritism and federally required racial favoritism was before the congressional mind, the majority quotes from the House Committee report favoring the original bill. The passage says that "the enactment of Federal legislation dealing with the most troublesome problems [of social discrimination] will create an atmosphere conducive to voluntary or local resolution of other forms of discrimination." The majority fastens on this sentence, even adds emphasis to the final phrase, suggesting that it proves that a voluntary racial quota in employment is one of those "other forms" for which the Civil Rights Act had created the atmosphere (Brennan, p. 8).

Fallacious would be the gentlest way to describe this argument—in view of the failure, not likely to be accidental, to quote the lines immediately following the cited passage. An explanation is given there of the distinction between "the most serious types of discrimination" and those other varieties for which voluntary attention might be encouraged. The serious types, types this House report there suggests *will* be dealt with by this bill, specifically include voting, public accommodation, *and employment*. The omitted passage reads:

> It is, however, possible and necessary for the Congress to enact legislation which prohibits and provides the means of terminating the most serious types of discrimination. This H.R. 7152, as amended, would achieve in a number of related areas. . . . It would prohibit discrimination in employment [*H. R. Reports,* No. 914, p. 18].

The forms of discrimination it was hoped might yield to voluntary action were those *other* than discrimination in employment, voting, and the like. Indeed, employment discrimination is mentioned repeatedly in the report as being of the most serious kind, the kind for whose prevention this legislation was specifically designed.

There is not a shred of evidence in this passage that the report actually envisaged voluntary racial *preference* of any kind, or that would have suggested to the House that such preference—especially in employment—was permissible under this Act.

II.

ONE HATES to flog a dead horse. But this horse came to life in an extraordinary opinion of a Supreme Court majority—so I report, finally, the understanding of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 as that understanding was registered in the final hours of debate on the Senate floor—after which it was returned to the House and approved as amended. The legislative decision was at hand. The advocates of the bill, now under cloture, had to give their final defenses and interpretations. On the point at issue here their remarks were unmistakably clear.

Senator Muskie:

> It has been said that the bill discriminates in favor of the Negro at the expense of the rest of us. It seeks to do nothing more than to lift the Negro from the status of inequality to one of equality of treatment [110 *Cong. Rec.*, p. 14328].

Senator Moss:

> The bill does not accord to any citizen advantage or preference—it does not fix quotas of employment or school population—it does not force personal association. What it does is to prohibit public officials and those who invite the public generally to patronize their businesses or to apply for employment, to utilize the offensive, humiliating, and cruel practice of discrimination on the basis of race. In short, the bill does not accord special consideration; it establishes equality [110 *Cong. Rec.*, p. 14484].

Very self-consciously, aware that it was making history, the Senate passed the amended Civil Rights Act on June 19, 1964, by 73 to 27, every member voting. The struggle in that body, as Vaas

describes it, had been "titanic and protracted." The meaning and force of every line, every phrase in the bill had been intensely scrutinized and explained with scrupulous care. The legislators knew precisely what they were prohibiting with this legislation, and we know exactly what they understood themselves to be doing because they took care, very deliberately, to put their explanatory accounts on record.

No impartial judge, properly attentive to the abundant evidence that establishes dispositively the true intent of Congress, could honestly conclude that its intent was to permit private racial preference in employment. Yet that is what the majority has concluded, in a decision that is, taken all in all, simply shocking.

12.

ARE THERE no redeeming features of the majority's decision? Yes, there are several—all respects in which the impact of the decision is explicitly limited. "We emphasize at the outset," writes the majority, "the narrowness of our inquiry" (Brennan, p. 4).

Although the impact of the decision will prove very substantial, it is, indeed, narrow in a technical sense. Its narrowness is a consequence of the explicit intention of the majority to decide the case entirely as one of statutory interpretation. What the majority decided about the Kaiser quota plan, it will be recalled, is no more than that Title VII of the Civil Rights Act does not forbid it. Restricting themselves to an interpretation of the statute was possible for the majority because, they said, "this case does not present an alleged violation of the Equal Protection Clause of the Constitution." It does not, they explain, because the racially preferential quota in question was entirely within "the private sector." The plan did not involve "state action" [*ibid.*].

This view of the Kaiser plan is at once reasonable and ironic. It is ironic because although this racial quota surfaced only in a labor-management agreement, it had been introduced there as a result of threats of contract cancellation by a federal enforcement agency. Threats why? Because Kaiser's work force was not racially balanced. In the language of the Office of Federal Contract Compliance, minorities were being "underutilized" by Kaiser. By devising job-training racial quotas in submission to that threat, Kaiser and the union showed how well-grounded were the fears of those who had wished to preclude not only the federal requirement of racial preference, but the federal coercion of it. The addition of Section 703 (j) sought to guard against the first of these dangers. Now its very language is used to realize the second, accomplishing indirectly what that language was designed to prevent directly.

In a historical aside that would be amusing if it did not reflect upon the highest court in the land, Justice Rehnquist cites a remark by Senator Sparkman in projecting the uses to which Title VII may one day be put: "Certainly the suggestion will be made to a small business that may have a small government contract . . . that if it does not carry out the suggestion that has been made to the company by an inspector, its government contract will not be renewed" (110 *Cong. Rec.*, p. 8618).

Yet the Court's distinction between state action and private action remains reasonable. However pernicious racial discrimination may be, it is right to distinguish between immoral acts done by private parties (even when arguably coerced) and the same acts done directly by a representative government. To accept that distinction is not to suggest that the majority is correct in holding this private racism lawful. Under any plausible reading of the Civil Rights Act, it is not. But not all private nastiness is public business, and we are wise to agree that, where state action *is* clearly involved in racial preference, the problem rises to a different and higher level of gravity.

Because the majority puts substantial emphasis on the distinction, introducing it at several points in its opinion, it is reasonable to conclude not only that the majority opinion does not cover public employers, but that public employers—government agencies, public universities, etc.—cannot rely in any way upon the permission here being given to a private employer.

Private employers also, as a matter of morality, might reasonably refrain from engaging in practices believed to be forbidden to public employers. There is an odious quality in conduct narrowly held lawful but which, if pursued by government, would create at least a serious question of constitutional right. Sooner or later the fundamental question will arise again in a context obliging a full-blooded constitutional response by the full Court. When that happens we may hope for a wiser result.

What is the likelihood of an eventual constitutional reversal of *Weber*? No one can say with confidence. The present Court is deeply divided on this cluster of issues. *Weber* was decided by a vote of 5 to 2. Justice Stevens, author of the opinion in support of Allan Bakke in that analogous case, excused himself because he had once served as an attorney for Kaiser. Justice Powell was kept from presence at the oral argument by illness, and also took no part in *Weber*. In any later constitutional resolution in which Justices Stevens and Powell participate it is exceedingly likely that both would find racial preference of every kind unacceptable. Powell has vigorously expressed his condemnation of racial preference, rejecting any "two-class" theory of the Equal Protection Clause. Justices Marshall and Brennan, the most vigorous defenders of racial preference on the present Court, are not in good health. When this matter is faced afresh, in the context of the Fourteenth Amendment's demand that no state "deny to any person

under its jurisdiction the equal protection of the laws," the complexion of the Court may well have changed.

The majority opinion is narrow in the further sense that it gives almost no guidance to those who might wish to expand racial preference. No principles of acceptability for racial preference are advanced. The majority explicitly refrains from defining in detail "the line of demarcation between permissible and impermissible affirmative-action plans." It holds only that this plan, which gives preference to blacks over whites for job-training opportunities but not for employment itself, "falls on the permissible side of the line" (Brennan, p. 12). Any racially preferential program, therefore, that goes in any way beyond this one might immediately lose the support of one or more of the five members of the majority, thus failing on subsequent test. What is learned in *Weber* is that the Supreme Court now holds this precise plan not to be forbidden by Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964—no more than that.

13.

FINALLY, there will be political repercussions from *Weber,* partly because they have been invited by the Court, and partly because the decision of the Court is very likely to provoke them.

Political response is invited by the fact that the majority opinion hangs entirely on its interpretation of the intent of Congress. It remains open to Congress to register its true intent so clearly that even this majority could not fail to perceive it. Justice Blackmun, exhibiting troubled reluctance in his concurring opinion, and reiterating his hopes for an early end to racial preference he had himself (in his *Bakke* opinion) called "ugly," concludes his opinion with an explicit invitation to the Congress: "And if the Court has misperceived the political will, it has the assurance that because the question is statutory Congress may set a different course if it so chooses" (Blackmun, p. 8).

That the intent of Congress to forbid all racial preference in employment already appears in the unambiguous words of Title VII, Section 703 (a), quoted above (p. 43) is indisputable. Yet it is possible that formal congressional reemphasis of its intent would cause the Court to desist in its efforts to rewrite the legislation to its taste. Congressional efforts to accomplish just this objective are likely to be undertaken, but the success of any such legislative shoring-up of Title VII is doubtful.

There is a provocative aspect of the majority opinion in *Weber,* however, that may actually drive the Congress to underscore its earlier demand for equal treatment of the races. This is a feature of the decision which, upon reflection, appears even more insensitive than the misreading of congressional intent. I refer to the callousness, manifest in the majority opinion, toward the interests of ordinary working-class people. Allan Bakke was ordered admitted to the medical school at Davis; blatant racial discrimination against him was not tolerated. Brian Weber, a working man without skills or influence, and without the organized support of the intellectuals, can be left to bear the burden, even though his rights may be infringed upon. The majority is explicit on this point. To advance the racial balancing they think good it may be necessary, they say, to "*trammel the interests of the white employees*" (Brennan, p. 12; emphasis added).

Five members of the Supreme Court may find this a comfortable position in which to rest; most elected legislators will not. It may be that by egregiously misreporting the intent of Congress, and then boldly expressing their own willingness to sacrifice the interests of one race to advance the interests of another, the majority in *Weber* has taken those provocative steps that will lead eventually to more emphatic legislative insistence upon the equal protection of the laws.