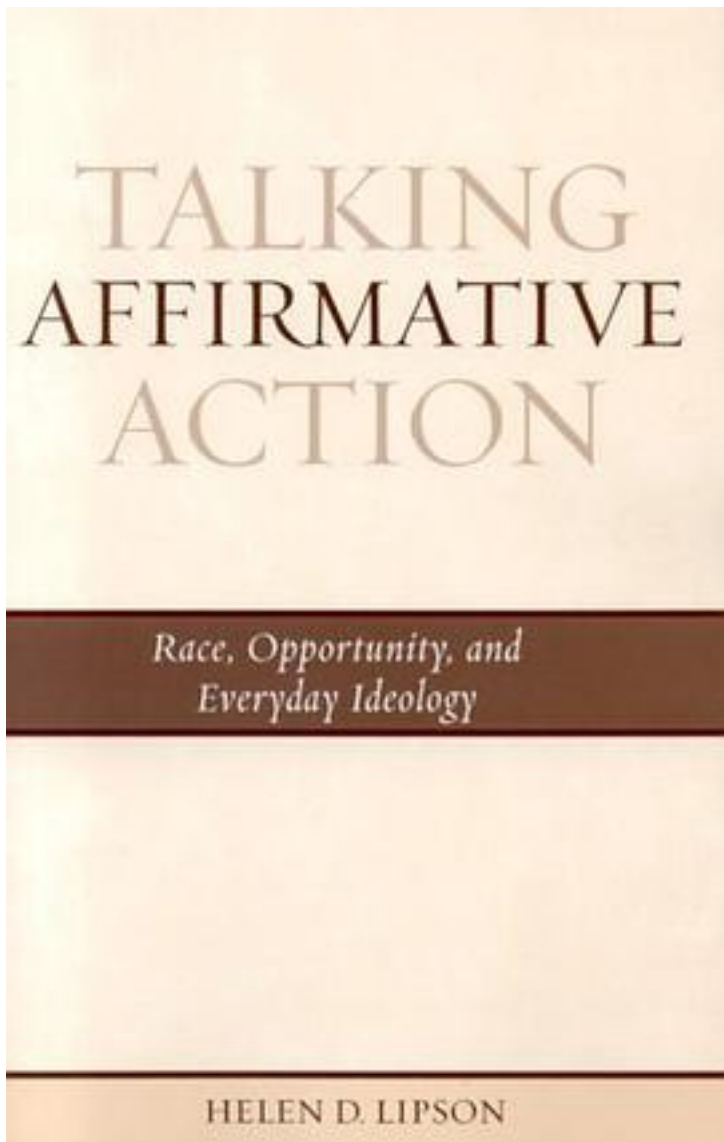


Talking Affirmative Action



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Talking Affirmative Action takes a fresh look at race-conscious admissions policies, offering an exceptionally vivid, grass-roots rendering of how whites on both sides of the issue come to terms with the ethical and political dilemmas these policies pose, especially in the context of high-stakes competitions for places in graduate professional schools. The book is based on in-depth interviews of undergraduate men attending an inner-city, public university that has always drawn an especially diverse mix of students with respect to economic background as well as race and ethnicity. Those men's arguments for and against quotas and targets, expanded criteria, and 'prime-the-pump' programming or outreach are explored in relation to several larger questions: What precisely do we mean by 'merit,' and what's the best way to measure it? Just how important, really, is ethnic diversity, either in the classroom or among top-level professionals and executives? How distinctive is the history of discrimination against blacks and Latinos, and to what extent can this explain present-day inequalities? How much equality of opportunity is enough, and how far must white America go to ensure it? In a nuanced analysis of how advocates' and opponents' perspectives on these issues diverge and overlap, the author challenges the widespread assumption that opposition to race-conscious policies is simply an expression of racism-as well as the allegation that champions of these and other liberal policies have simply forsworn 'traditional values.' Resistance, endorsement, and ambivalence are traced instead to the paradoxical dictates of a common ethos, with respect to both individual autonomy and communal accountability. The book concludes with some provocative commentary on the future of affirmative action in the wake of the Supreme Court's 2003 decisions in favor of 'holistic assessment.'

作者介绍:

目录:

[Talking Affirmative Action_下载链接1_](#)

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评论

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