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# Agenda Melding

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The first test of affirmative action as reverse discrimination to reach the Supreme Court was *DeFunis v. Odegaard* (1974), involving law school admissions, but the court declared the case moot without deciding the issue because DeFunis (having been admitted to law school pending the appeals) effectively would have graduated from law school before the case was decided. Affirmative action programs were first tested on the merits in the Supreme Court in the case of *The Regents of the University of California v. Bakke* (1978). Allan Bakke was a white man who had applied for two consecutive years to medical school at University of California at Davis. Both years lesser qualified minority applicants were admitted while his application was denied. The Supreme Court ruled in Bakke's favor (5–4) stating that UC Davis had inflexible quotas that were unacceptable. Later Supreme Court decisions regarding affirmative action stated that “moderate” quotas were acceptable.

Another landmark Supreme Court case was *Wygant v. Jackson Board of Education* (1986). In this case, nonminority teachers with seniority were laid off in order to retain minority teachers. Ultimately the Supreme Court ruled that the harm inflicted on the nonminority teachers was greater than the benefits to the minority teachers that were retained.

Beginning in 1997, states began passing legislation banning affirmative action. California was the first followed by the state of Washington. In 2000, Florida banned the use of affirmative action in college admissions.

Additional Supreme Court cases brought about rulings regarding local, state, and federal affirmative action guidelines. In 2003, several Supreme Court rulings regarding the affirmative action policies at The University of Michigan set guidelines about the use of affirmative action in the admissions process. In one case, *Gratz v. Bollinger* (2000), the Supreme Court ruled that the university's undergraduate admissions process was unconstitutional because minority students were given additional credits in their application score for being a “minority.”

However, in a similar case against the University of Michigan's law school, *Grutter v. Bollinger* (2001), the Supreme Court ruled that race can be a factor in the admissions process because a diverse student body adds to the educational experiences of all students. The difference between this case and the undergraduate admissions case is that the law school took race into consideration, while students seeking admissions

to the undergraduate programs were given credits for being minorities.

Despite the many Supreme Court rulings and Executive Orders, affirmative action continues to be debatable in both its inception and its effects.

*Kristin K. Froemling*

### Further Readings

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## AFL-CIO

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*See* UNIONS, POLITICAL ACTIVITY

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## AGENDA BUILDING

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*See* AGENDA SETTING

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## AGENDA MELDING

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Agenda melding can be defined as the process by which audience members seek out and blend media agendas from various communication sources to fit their individual preferences and cognitions. Where the media can set the public agenda by influencing the salience of key issues, along with details or attributes about those issues, agenda melding argues that the already established values and attitudes of audience members play a role in how those issues and attributes are sought out and mixed—or melded—into a coherent individual picture of events. Agenda setting focuses on the power of media to set agendas; agenda melding concentrates on the ability of audience members to select among media, issues, and elements of

messages. The latter is important because the study of audience interests and needs in acquiring media agendas is a necessary element of true understanding of public opinion formation of all groups.

With agenda melding audiences are not passive but actively select messages from the plethora of those available. More developed countries offer more choices, but there are nearly always informational options, even in controlled states. Individual agenda melding involves individuals expressing, and perhaps reinforcing, their personal values and attitudes through the messages selected. This idea dates back to Leon Festinger's theory of cognitive dissonance in which he posited that individuals seek out information that supports their views while disregarding or avoiding information that does not. Even ancient observers, however, noted that birds of a feather flock together, which individuals can do today via the Web without leaving their homes.

Agenda melding argues that we are attracted to agenda groups, even if we have to find and mix them ourselves. According to Donald L. Shaw and his colleagues, membership may not be formal, such as paying dues and attending meetings, but instead can be informal and exist only in the person's mind, such as if one subscribes to a belief in environmentalism or a particular social theory. Shaw and his colleagues tested David Weaver's argument that audiences exercise more interest in seeking information if there is a need for orientation to a public issue. The authors explain that agenda melding is an ongoing social process in which individuals choose a variety of media, both mass and interpersonal, to relate to other people and meld their own group agenda of issues. In a sense, many chat-group monitors choose to belong to an agenda group, even if secretly. Many groups are organized around social issue agendas. Some examples include Mothers Against Drunk Driving (MADD) and the progressive political group MoveOn.org. If organized and determined enough, these individuals may organize into groups that may have the power to influence public agendas either with or without the use of traditional mass media.

*Donald L. Shaw and Rita F. Colistra*

*See also* Agenda Setting

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## AGENDA SETTING

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Agenda setting is a theory of mass communication effects which holds that news media, through the editorial selection process, transmit to the public the salience of political objects, which affects the relative importance of these objects to the public. According to agenda-setting theory, the news media may not tell the public *what to think* (for example, what position to take on a political issue or what candidate to support in an election), but they tell the public *what to think about* (for example, what issues are important or what candidates are viable).

One of the primary services the news media provide to their audiences is their surveillance of the environment to determine what events are occurring in the world that the press believes their audiences should know. Journalists use professional norms called news values, such as proximity, timeliness, conflict, celebrity and human interest, to decide what is newsworthy. News media also prioritize the news, such as giving a banner headline on the newspaper's front page or the lead position on a newscast to signal importance. Agenda-setting theory conceptualizes this ordering of political objects by the news media as the "media agenda." The news media's selection and presentation of news provides an indexing function that helps readers decide where to place their attention. Through this exercise of editorial judgment, newspapers and newscasts make political objects stand out in relief from others. The media agenda directs the public's attention to certain political objects. In this way, the news media change the salience of political issues, persons, or topics. News media tell the public what is important. Agenda-setting theory conceptualizes this ordering of