

Transactive Discussion Activity

Affirmative Action

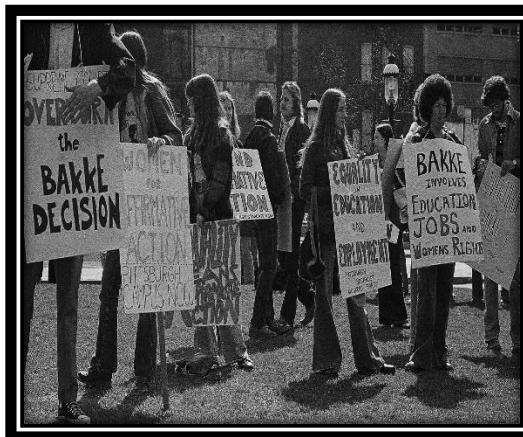
Please read the following prompt and quotes. In small groups, discuss the questions below

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Affirmative action is defined as the practice or policy of favoring individuals belonging to groups known to have been previously discriminated against.¹ It is most often instituted to ensure people of color and women can enter spaces they were previously barred from due to legalized discrimination. Many institutions, particularly colleges and universities, have relied on Affirmative Action policies to diversify its student body or work force.

Despite its widespread use, Affirmative Action has been a highly contested topic for generations. Opponents believe that giving one group priority unfairly discriminated against another group. White Americans brought the majority of legal challenges against Affirmative Action forth as they felt they were the most negatively affected. Most recently, a group of Asian Americans sued Harvard University's admission practices in the court case *Students for Fair Admissions v. Harvard*. Plaintiffs' claim Harvard's admissions specifically discriminated against Asian Americans by holding them to a higher standard than applicants from other racial groups.

While the federal court judge ruled Harvard was acting in constitutional ways, the plaintiffs have appealed and the case is likely going to head to the Supreme Court. This case reignited the conversation over the merits of Affirmative Action in hiring decisions and college admission. Advocates for affirmative action recognize the importance of diversity and the duty that employers and schools have to create a diverse cohort and explicitly recognize systemic barriers that certain historically marginalized groups face that others do not. Opponents of affirmative action often cite the importance of awarding the most qualified individuals in a meritocratic² way without favoring one historically marginalized group over another group.



¹ https://www.lexico.com/definition/affirmative_action

² Meritocratic: a society in which power is held by people selected according to merit.



“They don’t want the police to use race as a profiling tool to prevent crime. They don’t want prosecutors to use race in the makeup of a jury... Your race and your ethnicity should not be something used to help you or harm you in your life’s endeavors.”

“It falls afoul of our most basic civil rights principles, and those principles are that your race and your ethnicity should not be something to be used to harm you in life nor help you in life,” said Edward Blum, the president of Students for Fair Admissions,

Edward Blum, political legal strategist, October 15, 2018

“Race-conscious admissions for me meant acknowledging the full human dignity of my story and my achievements in context. I will never forget the diversity of perspectives and experiences that my peers bravely shared on campus and in this trial, all of which are incredible assets in this multiracial world we will go on to work and live in. Regardless of how this case is decided, the educational landscape is much bigger than just Harvard — I hope that as a society we look toward increasing educational opportunities that are accessible for all.”

-Sally Chen (Harvard Class of 2019), New York Times, October 1, 2019

Discussion Questions

1. Given what you have read, including the quotes above, which perspective on this topic do you align with more, and why?
2. Using answers from Question #1, can you integrate the two perspectives or find a compromise between the two positions?
 - a. If not, why?
 - b. If so, what would the solution look like?