

FACE OFF

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AFFIRMATIVE

Affirmative action policies have made it mandatory for businesses and schools to actively recruit from all areas of society. In addition to recruiting, these policies have also required that all qualified applicants be given the same courtesies regarding hiring and selection.

At the university level these programs are more necessary now than they ever have been in the past. It is a growing trend to think that the Civil Rights Struggle and similar movements have reached their goals of equal opportunity for all. People do not realize that the issues of the past remain with us today.

It must be realized that all applicants to this University do not start off at equal footing. It is affirmative action that requires the child, regardless of his education background, which almost always reflects his ethnic background, to be considered for admission to the University. Without such consideration, it is quite possible that UNC could set its admissions policy to only admit students who have taken three or more AP classes. In the absence of affirmative action, those students who do not qualify simply because they were not given the opportunity to take AP courses would not have a chance. The harsh reality is that many of these students are of color. This is the major reason that the University supports, and should continue to support programs such as North Carolina Renaissance and Summer Bridge, which attempt to close the gap in educational resources potential Carolina students face.

Unequal primary and secondary education is a prime example used by affirmative action critics to state the ineffectiveness of these policies. The underlying implication is that affirmative action is exploited by well-to-do and middle-class Blacks (as well as other minorities), but not by those who need it. I assert that this is not true at all. The Head Start program readily comes to mind as an affirmative action effort. Furthermore what Affirmative Action has done is to expand and strengthen the black middle class by allowing many disenfranchised people to receive higher education.

What happens right now is that Boards of Education across the nation historically and systematically under-fund schools

with large minority populations. These boards, which are usually made up of Whites who like the theoretical admissions department, may not intend to bypass Blacks, but by focusing on those like themselves instead of the common good for everyone, they deprive minority children of their opportunity under the law.

By expanding the strength of the black middle class, the opportunity now presents itself that Boards of Education will have a black voice that will advocate for the needs of the disenfranchised black child. This child may never have to attend a Summer Bridge program to establish himself on par with the child who has had AP classes at the school heretofore favored by the Board.

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This is the real power of affirmative action. It is not a handicap that people can lean on to ensure that there is a place for them, rather it is an insurance policy that

states that all qualified applicants will be considered for admission. The student helped by affirmative action, once admitted, attends and graduates and is able to return to his community. He then indirectly benefits the next generation by affording his children the opportunities he was denied because of his race and socio-economic standing. He could also directly benefit the next generation by being a teacher or the Board member that advocates for the black child. He could even excel beyond our expectations by becoming the next Nobel Prize winner.

Regardless of his outcome, his success is part of a snowball that affects his community exponentially. Without affirmative action, there is no way of knowing that the disenfranchised child, although qualified and willing, would even be considered for admission. If he is not considered, he cannot be admitted.

The ultimate goal of Affirmative Action is to produce a society that takes merit and capabilities at face value without underlying biases. The equality of opportunity and fairness are for some people a reality. It is for those who those qualities are not a reality that affirmative action exists.