

# GRADE 11 WRITING ARGUMENTATIVE ESSAY

College and university admission policies often require special consideration for applicants of minority status (race, gender, etc.) Some believe these admission's policies promote diversity and help compensate for past discrimination. Others believe they create a new kind of discrimination. Read the two articles and argue the case for or against the use of affirmative action. Support your argument with evidence from the texts.

## IS AFFIRMATIVE ACTION FOR ME?

Washington Post (Washington, DC) June 25, 2013

By Negassi Tesfamichael

- 1 When I apply to college this fall, I will mark the box labeled "Black or African American" on the Common Application. As the implications of the Supreme Court's ruling in *Fisher v. University of Texas* become understood and the nation examines the role race plays in achieving diversity, I wonder whether I should qualify for affirmative action.
- 2 I defy many black stereotypes. I grew up in a quiet suburb, where I have never faced a dangerous situation. My parents have been happily married for 18 years. I attend private school, and my standardized test scores rank in the 90<sup>th</sup> percentile. I never have had an encounter with the law. (My worst offenses are overdue library books.)
- 3 I also have never had to worry about where my next meal would come from or whether my family has the resources for me to even consider applying to college. But while my family is well off now, that wasn't always the case. My parents came to the United States after fleeing war in Eritrea. They had to work very hard to achieve the financial stability we now enjoy.
- 4 So, should affirmative action efforts apply to me?
- 5 In 2003, the high court ruled in *Grutter v. Bollinger* that race could play a limited role in public universities' admissions policies. Many opponents of affirmative action programs would say that I have economic advantages and that people who are well off underscore why colleges nationwide should dissolve the kind of race-based considerations that Abigail Fisher, a white student, claimed kept her out of the University of Texas.
- 6 Private and public universities seek diverse student bodies under the thinking that multiple and varied perspectives lead to a better classroom experience. Texas's Top 10 Percent program, by guaranteeing admission to state-funded schools to all who finish at the top of their high school class, helps many minority students from struggling schools gain admission to public colleges. Many top colleges have full-time minority recruitment programs. With only 5 percent of African American high school students meeting all of the ACT college readiness benchmarks in 2012, it's easy to see why a smart black kid is a rarity whom such recruiters would seek out.
- 7 Some aspects of my life are influenced by but not unique to my race. We speak multiple languages in my home, and not all college applicants get to see this country through an immigrant's lens. I have also had experiences that are only about my being black.
- 8 Affirmative action is aimed at promoting diversity, a legitimate principle whose merits are often derided or abused. Many supporters believe that affirmative action is needed for the benefit of minority students who could not otherwise move up in society or to make up for wrongs done to past generations. Yet as President Obama said in May to graduates of historically black Morehouse College, "We've got no time for excuses."

- 9 Who today really thinks that they can survive in the 21<sup>st</sup> century workforce with no ability to communicate and collaborate with people different from themselves? There should be some appreciation for the diverse backgrounds of all Americans. As a student trying to learn and grow, I appreciate views that help me see the world more clearly.
- 10 I understand that many would say that people like me don't need any sort of affirmative action. Some of us surely could get into a college without efforts to ensure diversity. But I'm glad the holistic admissions process practiced by most colleges remains in place. They give more people the opportunity to contribute and allow others to benefit from and appreciate uniqueness, regardless of whether that is based on race alone.

## THE CASE AGAINST AFFIRMATIVE ACTION

**If, after 25 years, affirmative action has not succeeded in ending discrimination perhaps it is time to try something else.**

By David Sacks & Peter Thiel

- 11 Over the past quarter of a century, Stanford has been discriminating in favor of racial minorities in admissions, hiring, tenure, contracting and financial aid. But only recently has the University been forced to rethink these policies in the face of an emerging public debate over affirmative action.
- 12 We are beginning to see why. Originally conceived as a means to redress discrimination, racial preferences have instead promoted it. And rather than fostering harmony and integration, preferences have divided the campus. In no other area of public life is there a greater disparity between the rhetoric of preferences and the reality.
- 13 Take, for instance, the claim that racial preferences help the "disadvantaged." In reality, as the Hoover Institution's Thomas Sowell has observed, preferences primarily benefit minority applicants from middle- and upper-class backgrounds. At the same time, because admissions are a zero-sum game, preferences hurt poor whites and even many Asians (who meet admissions standards in disproportionate numbers). If preferences were truly meant to remedy disadvantage, they would be given on the basis of disadvantage, not on the basis of race.
- 14 Another myth is that preferences simply give minority applicants a small "plus." In reality, the average SAT disparity between Stanford's African-American and white admittees reached 171 points in 1992, according to data compiled by the Consortium on Financing Higher Education and cited in Richard Herrnstein and Charles Murray's book, *The Bell Curve*.
- 15 The fundamental unfairness and arbitrariness of preferences -- why should the under-qualified son of a black doctor displace the qualified daughter of a Vietnamese boat refugee? -- has led supporters to shift rationales in recent years. Instead of a remedy for disadvantage, many supporters now claim that preferences promote "diversity." This same push for "diversity" also has led Stanford to create racially segregated dormitories, racially segregated freshman orientation programs, racially segregated graduation ceremonies and curricular requirements in race theory and gender studies.
- 16 But if "diversity" were really the goal, then preferences would be given on the basis of unusual characteristics, not on the basis of race. The underlying assumption -- that only minorities can add certain ideas or perspectives -- is offensive not merely because it is untrue, but also because it implies that all minorities think a certain way.

- 17 When University officials boast of "looking for racism everywhere," as multicultural educator Greg Ricks did in a 1990 *Stanford Daily* interview, then perhaps the most sensible (and certainly the most predictable) response will be for white students to avoid dealing with such quarrelsome people. In this way, the stress on "diversity" has made interracial interaction strained and superficial; multiculturalism has caused political correctness.
- 18 None of this is to deny that there are some people in America who are racist and that there are some features of American life that are legacies of a much more racist past. But racism is not everywhere, and there is very little at a place like Stanford. Certainly, no one has accused Stanford's admissions officers of being racist, so perhaps the real problem with affirmative action is that we are pretending to solve a problem that no longer exists. Moreover, there is a growing sense that if affirmative action has not succeeded in ending discrimination after 25 years of determined implementation, then perhaps it is time to try something else.
- 19 Although Stanford's admissions office cannot undo the wrongs of history, its mission is still very important -- namely, admitting the best class of students it can find. The sole criterion in finding the members of this class and in defining "merit" should be individual achievement -- not just grades and test scores, of course, but a broad range of accomplishments, in athletics, music, student government, drama, school clubs and other extracurricular efforts. But race and ethnicity (or gender or sexual preference) do not have a place on this list; these are traits, not achievements.
- 20 Perhaps the most tragic side effect of affirmative action is that very significant achievements of minority students can become compromised. It is often not possible to tell whether a given student genuinely deserved admission to Stanford, or whether he is there by virtue of fitting into some sort of diversity matrix. When people do start to suspect the worst -- that preferences have skewed the entire class -- they are accused of the very racism that justifies these preferences. It is a strange cure that generates its own disease.
- 21 A Stanford without affirmative action will be a Stanford in which the question of who belongs here will no longer need to be answered. It will no longer need to be answered because it will no longer need to be asked, not even *sotto voce* .

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