

Affirmative Action

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When certain minority high school classmates of mine were accepted at colleges that rejected me, I couldn't help but suspect affirmative action was in part to blame. But while the rejection hurts, if this was in fact due to affirmative action, I completely support the decision. To understand why, consider how I got to the top of my class in the first place.

My Jewish father went to public school in Ellenville, NY. His father was a ski instructor in the surrounding Catskill Mountains, and together with his wife owned a children's clothing store. That is, after the two of them fled Germany to avoid the Holocaust.

My mother went to public school in Edgewood, PA, just outside of Pittsburgh. Her father helped found Westinghouse's commercial nuclear power division. That is, after he peddled apples on the street to make ends meet during the Great Depression.

My father went on to attend Brown University and is now a successful engineer. My mother went on to attend the University of Pittsburgh and became a teacher. She considered engineering for herself, but was told such a profession is not suitable for women. In fact, she was even advised against attending college altogether, but insisted on doing so anyways.

I grew up benefiting from a generation or two of hard earned success that was largely unimpeded by prejudicial barriers. My sister, now at UC Berkeley, further benefited from a successful women's rights movement that now sees more women attending college than men.

Such progress has not yet been reached in civil rights, as minorities' performance in education, though improving continues to lag behind. Considering that my parents and grandparents had opportunities for advancement not available to minorities, giving me numerous advantages growing up, it's easy to see why.

So, should a possibly less qualified minority student be given a position at a job, school, etc. over me? I can't help but feel bad about such a prospect, as would anybody who cares about his or her success. But I recognize that a significant degree of my own success is derived from my own immediate ancestors' abilities to climb the social ladder. Where others are not so fortunate, something should be done.

If I, a white male, have to lose a position to an arguably less-qualified minority, so be it. At the end of the day, I will remain a well-educated, motivated person, and I will get by one way or another. If losing a position is what it takes to make up for the injustices done in the not-too-distant past, so be it. In the long run, we'll all be better off when all

members of society have equal access to resources, including successful, well-educated immediate ancestors.

Yesterday, the battle of the races was everywhere you went. Today, the battle of the races is in the courtroom, and it's over affirmative action. I hope that by tomorrow, affirmative action will have worked itself out of a job, and the only battles our immediate descendents will wage against each other will be in mock trials and science fairs.