Affirmative action is a policy put in place by the government to help make employment, educational, and business opportunities more attainable to those historically disadvantaged due to their race, religion, or gender, among other factors. It was first created by President John F. Kennedy in 1961 to prevent discrimination and promote social equality. The policy has not been without controversy as many people have claimed it makes people assume that members of protected classes are not as qualified and are given preferential treatment, losing the respect of their peers (HG.org, n.d.).

Since it was expanded in 1967 by President Johnson to include protection for women, the group that has overwhelmingly received the most benefits from affirmative action is white women. According to the Department of Labor, six million white women are employed in more leadership positions than they would have been had they not received protection from affirmative action. Other groups have also seen gains in the same fields; for example, the number of executives of color at IBM, among other companies, has grown over the last ten years, but these numbers are nowhere close to how white women have benefited (Daniels, 2014).

In general, affirmative action is used to benefit members of protected classes as a tie-breaker between two equally-qualified candidates for a job or a seat in a classroom. According to Mike Reilly, the executive director of the American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers, institutions should first use race-neutral options, such as merit-based qualifications like grades and then can add race as a factor to ensure that the workplace or student body “represents a broad range of characteristics” (Rozen, 2018).

Affirmative action is not without controversy or opposition. Despite a lack of negative effect on their group, affirmative action is most vehemently opposed by white Americans. Instead they favor “colorblind” policies to minimize the historical exclusion of other groups and how that affects continuing inequality in today’s American society (Byrd, 2018). While elite schools such as Harvard are known to consider race in their admissions processes, white families are still recipients of “legacy” benefits, some of the biggest advantages in the college admissions process. White students are far more likely to hold “legacy” status because, as Byrd states in *The Washington Post*, “you cannot have a legacy at an institution if your parents or grandparents were never allowed to enroll in the first place.” Byrd goes on to argue that whites’ support of colorblind allows them to blame bias for their own problems, instead of recognizing that historical racial exclusion has affected who wins and who loses in society today. In her essay on how affirmative action has affected her, Jessie Davis recounts losing a job to an equally-qualified Latina candidate. When she was told the news, the interviewer made a point to say that they “had to give the job to [the Latina woman]”, basically blaming affirmative action for her loss. This anecdote affirms how whites believe they should be entitled to jobs, education, and opportunities.

I personally am not against affirmative action. I know that as a white woman myself I receive preferential treatment in a variety of situations. I believe that this privilege is unfair and should be corrected so that we can even the playing field for members of protected classes. I think it is very important that as a society we include as many diverse voices and ideas at the decision-making tables, including businesses, governments, and education institutions. Historical discrimination has prevented minorities from obtaining the qualifications to be able to sit at those tables, so we need to do our best to make sure that those who are driven to work for these opportunities are able to have their voices heard. Our society cannot function properly and progress forward without representation of everyone who lives in the society.

An interesting alternative to race-based affirmative action policies was proposed by Sheryll Cashin. She argues that instead of considering race, we should consider class barriers that students have overcome (Roach, 2014). Poor communities are largely made up of racial minorities, specifically Black and Latino families and their educational opportunities are limited by funding for their schools, inexperienced teachers, fewer high-achieving students to set the bar higher, and exposure to violence in their communities. Students who overcome these challenges to achieve the best education available to them should be able to continue their hard work in higher education to stop the cycle of poverty that traps racial minorities.

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