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Analysis of Fairness in the American Education Equality Movement

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Abstract. Students for Fair Admissions v. Harvard in 2023 completely overturned the race-based affirmative admission policy of American universities that had persisted for decades, and also marked the shift of the political balance from outcome equality to procedural equality. Based on this background, this article, in the form of literature analysis, This paper explores the reasons for the core changes in the development of the educational equality system in the United States, analyzes the many problems that the educational equality movement may face after the abolition of the racial system, and then makes a certain criticism of the color blindness logic behind it from the perspective of critical race theory. It is proposed that historical compensation remains an important link in achieving fairness and justice in educational equality. From a more profound perspective of racial equality, educational equity should not be confined merely to higher education institutions. The fundamental issue that the American educational equity movement needs to consider is how to ensure the popularization of basic education, fundamentally increase the educational attainment of the majority of ethnic minorities, reduce unemployment caused by educational restrictions, and improve the quality of the ethnic minority population.

Keywords: educational equality, racial system, procedural equality, outcome equality, critical racial theory

1. Introduction

In 2023, Students for Fair Admissions v. Harvard pronounced the end of the racial education equality movement and also marked a shift in the focus of the U.S. judiciary on education equality from emphasizing the equality of the final outcome in the distribution process to outcome equity in dispute resolution and resource allocation. Emphasize the procedural fairness of the "process". In recent years, most scholars have offered interpretations of the occurrence of this case. Based on the summary of scholars' research, this article summarizes the underlying ideological core in the process of institutional transformation, focuses on discussing the satisfaction of fairness requirements in this case under the background of the real society and historical development of the United States, and in addition to discussing the enrollment policies of higher education institutions, starting from the fundamental demands of educational equity, expands the perspective of educational equity discussed beyond higher education. That is to explore what kind of educational equality system can truly promote racial and social equality. Through this research, this article aims to provide a new

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perspective for interpreting the American education equality movement and offer new solutions and content for promoting education equality and achieving racial equality.

2. The contradiction between historical evolution and the spiritual core

The movement for educational equity originated in the 1960s. According to Title VI of the Civil Rights Act passed in 1964, "discrimination based on race, color or nationality in any program or activity receiving federal financial assistance is prohibited." It aims to eliminate historical injustice and give preferential treatment to ethnic minorities in college admissions. However, in the actual implementation, educators and legal workers have found that underprivileged races (especially Asian Americans) have to make more efforts when enrolling in school. For this reason, since 1970, the United States has gradually reduced the consideration of racial factors in affirmative action admissions in multiple aspects (for instance, in the 1978 Baker case, the US Supreme Court ruled that the racial quota system was unconstitutional). This reduction was not achieved until the Harvard case in 2023, when the court's favorable ruling against the Fair Student Admission Organization declared the end of the racial system for educational equality in the United States.

Looking at the development process of educational equity in the United States, the core at the beginning was to make up for the previous injustice towards ethnic minorities (especially African Americans) in the United States, and later gradually shifted to correcting the fairness of actual admissions. In fact, the racial policies of affirmative action in the United States have the greatest impact on not the white race, but the Asian Americans who are also ethnic minorities. In the case of Students for Fair Admissions v. Harvard, the point of the lawsuit by the Students for Fair Admissions Organization was that Harvard reduced the admission ratio for Asian Americans. According to another study, the admission scores for Asians at Princeton University far exceed those for Latinos and African Americans. These pieces of evidence suggest that some universities' compensation for the historical injustice of one ethnic minority is accomplished by treating another ethnic minority unfairly. In addition, wealthy black families undoubtedly have greater advantages. While they already have more educational opportunities, racial preferential treatment undoubtedly deepens the injustice between them and other students.

Taking all the above points into consideration, the predicament that the United States faces in terms of educational equity lies in the issue of balancing race and class. After the racial policy was clearly exposed as unfair, the US courts ultimately decided to revoke the voice of race in the admission of higher education institutions and instead implement the "diversity" principle. Although this kind of behavior avoids the problem of reverse discrimination in admissions, it also evades the original intention of the affirmative action movement - to make up for historical injustice. Such evasion will undoubtedly bring many troubles and predicaments to the development of education in the United States.

3. The predicament faced by american education in the post-affirmative action era

3.1. The solidification of racial classes

In recent years, the United States has been promoting the abolition of racial considerations in affirmative action in many states. Although this shift theoretically emphasizes procedural fairness and reduces possible unfairness towards non-privileged groups such as Asian or white applicants, it has essentially undermined the racial equality achievements promoted by affirmative action

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movements over the past decades. The impact is particularly significant for historically disadvantaged groups such as African Americans and Latinos [1].

Specifically, after the elimination of racial factors, the admission rates of African American students in many higher education institutions have dropped significantly. This phenomenon not only reflects the contraction of access opportunities, but also reveals that structural inequality is still ongoing. As higher education is an important channel for social mobility, the reduction in admission opportunities directly leads to a significant decrease in the possibility for these groups to enter high-level fields such as government, corporate executives, academic institutions and finance in the future. If this continues for a long time, it will further solidify the class gap among races [2]. Furthermore, the weakening of representativeness and discourse power cannot be ignored. If the proportion of ethnic minorities in higher education continues to decline, it will directly affect the diverse voices on racial issues in future public policy-making, cultural narratives, and public opinion. Without elite representatives and authoritative voices from these groups, discussions on racial equality may be monopolized by mainstream discourse, which in turn leads to a lack of inclusiveness and practical responsiveness in policy design.

3.2. The overlooked original intention of development

As the policy focus of educational equity gradually shifts to "diversity", its core goal of compensating for historical racial injustice has instead been blurred and marginalized. In fact, the historical injustice of the African American community in American society - from slavery, racial segregation to systemic discrimination - has not been truly remedied to this day, and even the current structural inequality is still evolving [3]. The frequent violent law enforcement incidents by American police against African Americans in recent years are a cruel manifestation of this reality, reflecting the persistence of racial oppression in new forms.

In a society where racial conflicts remain profound, if one blindly denies the corrective significance of racial factors in policies and merely emphasizes "diversity" one-sidedly, it may actually mask the inequality of power in resource distribution. This so-called "color-blind" approach to equality often tacitly acknowledges the structural advantages held by the white mainstream group and regards them as natural and legitimate [4]. At the judicial level, in some Supreme Court cases, the interpretation of "diversity" often falls into the predicament of instrumenting ethnic minorities - for instance, merely regarding them as a "resource" to enrich campus culture, while avoiding acknowledging the responsibilities and privileges of white people in historical oppression [5]. This kind of discourse, in an intangible way, reinforces the narrative of "white innocence" and further consolidates the racial hierarchy [6].

Therefore, once the original intention of compensatory justice is deviated from, the so-called "diversity" policy will not only fail to truly promote racial equality but may also degenerate into a discourse decoration for maintaining the status quo. It neither responds to the accumulated racial harm in history nor, under the guise of "equality", legitimizes the white people's control over social, economic and symbolic resources, and even provides institutional cover for the continuation of racial discrimination.

4. The issue of the continuation of the racial system

Regarding whether racial factors should continue to play a role in educational equity, it is first necessary to clarify one of the core missions of higher education in the equity movement - that is, to promote social equity in the selection of high-level talents. As Chief Justice John Roberts of the

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United States once pointed out, "Affirmative action often becomes a shortcut for wealthy black families to enter prestigious schools," a criticism that has resonated widely. In fact, many studies have shown that Affirmative Action in higher education has not significantly changed the class structure within the campus. Students from high-income families among ethnic minorities still account for a large proportion of resources. Once they enter the elite system, they tend to be more inclined to safeguard the interests of their own economic class. On the contrary, those families that are truly in poverty - regardless of their ethnicity - have long been excluded from the core beneficiaries of such policies.

This phenomenon is no accident. Research on the education system shows that in the design and implementation of affirmative action policies in the United States, there is a lack of effective connection between basic education and higher education. The inequality in resource distribution enables high-income families to provide more opportunities for their children with economic and cultural capital, including quality basic education, after-school tutoring and college counseling, thereby further widening the class gap. Therefore, many people advocate that colleges and universities should place greater emphasis on class background when recruiting students and take economic conditions as the main basis for providing support.

However, the consideration of completely replacing race with class also seems overly simplistic. Although poverty exists among both white people and ethnic minorities, the historical and social causes leading to poverty are fundamentally different. Systemic racism - especially during the period before the middle of the 20th century when laws openly supported discrimination - has had a profound negative impact on groups such as African Americans and Latinos. These groups face more structural obstacles in employment, housing, education and the judicial system. Even at the same economic level, it is often more difficult for them to move up than for white people. Therefore, racial factors should still be regarded as one of the important dimensions in affirmative action policies.

In other words, educational equity should not only focus on whether individuals are poor, but also respond to the collective trauma and opportunity gap left by historical injustice. Race-oriented policy compensation is not aimed at "reverse discrimination", but rather attempts to make up for the additional resistance endured by ethnic minorities due to historical and institutional reasons in a system that has not yet been fully fair. True fairness requires both providing economic assistance from the perspective of class and deconstructing structural inequality from the perspective of race. Only in this way can affirmative action get closer to its original intention: not only to achieve formal diversity, but also to pursue substantive justice.

5. Future development

5.1. Introduction and application of emerging algorithms

To ensure the realization of fairness in college admissions, multiple factors such as students' family income and educational background should be incorporated into a comprehensive consideration system. In recent years, the emerging OCA Algorithm (Opportunity-centered Allocation Algorithm) has provided a feasible analytical tool for this goal. This algorithm can help admissions institutions scientifically determine the weights of each variable by quantifying the impact of different factors on educational opportunities, thereby more accurately identifying and compensating for structural inequalities in admission decisions. Colleges and universities can make use of the OCA algorithm to establish a dynamic adjustment mechanism in the enrollment process, not only focusing on academic performance but also incorporating social and economic background into the assessment

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framework for opportunity fairness, thereby promoting the admission process to develop in a more transparent and fair direction.

5.2. Strengthening the connection of resources and the fairness of opportunities in the educational stage

Wealthy families usually can mobilize more resources for their children's education, thus gaining a significant advantage in the competition for student recruitment. Therefore, affirmative action policies should not only play a role in higher education but also be extended to the field of basic education, focusing on improving the supply of educational resources for disadvantaged groups, such as poor and ethnic minority students. Its core objective is not to add luster to the strengths of the privileged groups, but to offer timely assistance to those lacking resources. By enhancing the quality of basic education, expanding the coverage of support programs, and providing more guidance on further education and social support, it aims to truly break the intergenerational cycle of poverty and lack of opportunities. Only in this way can the further intensification of class solidification in higher education enrollment be prevented, and thus the social significance of the affirmative action movement be truly realized.

6. Conclusion

This paper primarily explored the implications of the 2023 Students for Fair Admissions v. Harvard decision, which overturned race-conscious affirmative action in US university admissions and shifted the focus towards procedural equality. It analyzed the resulting predicaments, critiqued the underlying colorblind logic, and argued for the continued necessity of historical redress within educational equity.

The key conclusions are that abolishing explicit racial considerations exacerbates structural inequality by significantly reducing minority enrollment rates, particularly for African American and Latino students. This neglects the core goal of compensating for historical racial injustice and risks solidifying racial class divides. True educational equity requires addressing foundational resource disparities in basic education, not just procedural fairness in elite university admissions.

A limitation of this paper is its primary reliance on literature analysis, lacking in-depth quantitative examination of the specific impact on K-12 educational disparities or rigorous empirical testing of alternative allocation models like the OCA algorithm. Furthermore, the analysis did not incorporate a comprehensive comparative study of affirmative action policies or historical compensation mechanisms in other multi-ethnic societies.

Future research should focus on rigorously evaluating the effectiveness and equity of emerging race-neutral algorithms (like OCA) in actual admissions practices. Crucially, studies must quantify the impact of targeted interventions aimed at equalizing K-12 educational resources and opportunities for disadvantaged minority communities, as this is identified as the fundamental path towards sustainable racial equity in education.

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