

## Discussion 2 Reflection

This discussion was much less polarized than the last one. People seemed less willing to outwardly agree with the Briscoe piece that we had to read. That makes sense, especially because of the strong reaction that poured out of campus in response to that article. However, it did seem as though there were some subtle attempts to bolster the argument behind the article. The main reason that lay behind this was a misunderstanding of the way that affirmative action works at MIT. People had this opinion that affirmative action somehow resulted in preferential treatment being offered to students because of their race. At MIT affirmative action is restricted to recruiting activities only. This encourages minorities to apply to MIT, but it does not guarantee them a spot at the institute or special treatment during the application review.

The other argument that came out during the discussion was that there was some way that admissions numbers and percentages for each demographic would somehow disprove or prove the bias present in affirmative action. Again this seems like a moot point to me. If we accept that colleges accept only qualified applicants then wouldn't follow that everyone admitted was qualified? How would it change anything that more Black students were admitted one year than White students? Perhaps those students were simply more qualified than others. It seems to me that the issue at the heart of the argument is the fact that college admissions are such a nebulous process. After getting past the initial scores and grades, the aspects that make up a good applicant vary significantly from college to college. People are afraid and angry at this mysterious process that happened to reject them and feel the need to find a scapegoat. Attacking people who may have gotten in because of their financial situation

appears to go against the American worship of self-advancement and independence. These people deserve to be rewarded for triumphing over adversity. It is also much easier for someone to imagine that those circumstances could have applied to his own life. On the other hand, the fact that someone may have gotten in because of their race is a much easier target. Sympathizing across racial lines is much harder and race is often viewed through a lens that has been skewed by bias.

The part of this discussion that angers me most is the fact that people who fight against affirmative action have some conviction that they would be there if someone had not taken their "spot." Who told them that they were the next in line for this college? Moreover, who told them that they deserved to be admitted to this school? If a school really wanted to have you in their class, they would have offered you a place. No ifs ands or buts about it. Briscoe stated that he thinks that everyone who is here deserves to be here, but if that's true then why did he write that article? How is the institute getting worse if everyone is a deserving student? The answer is that it is not getting worse. At this point in its life, MIT is not some fragile starter institution that could easily be toppled, not that this was ever a risk posed by greater diversity. MIT attracts the best and brightest, and the differences in their skin colors, backgrounds, and outlooks on life make it all the stronger.

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