Resolution: Affirmative Action should focus on class and wealth rather than race and ethnicity.

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Speakers: Ray Suarez, Senior Correspondent, *The NewsHour with Jim Lehrer*

Moderator

Dalton Conley, University Professor, Chair of Sociology and Acting Dean of the Social Sciences at New York University

John McWhorter, Senior Fellow at the Manhattan Institute, columnist for *The New Republic*, faculty in Columbia University’s Core Curriculum program

Julian Bond, Chairman, NAACP

Lee C. Bollinger, President, Columbia University

**RAY SUAREZ:** Welcome to the Library of Congress and another of our debates on issues of national importance produced by the Miller Center for Public Affairs at the University of Virginia. I'm Ray Suarez of *The NewsHour with Jim Lehrer*.

Tonight we debate whether affirmative action policies should be based on wealth and class rather than race and ethnicity. It's fitting that this debate be held in the great hall of the Library of Congress. It was Thomas Jefferson, founder of the University of Virginia, whose personal library was one of the early building blocks of the Library of Congress.

One of the central advocates in the history of the affirmative action issue has been the
NAACP, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. The Library of Congress holds the papers of the NAACP, one of the most widely visited collections in the Library.

We're indebted to the Library of Congress and to the librarian of Congress, Dr. James Billington, for their extraordinary service to our nation, to scholars around the world and for their gracious hospitality this evening.

Again, our debate resolution, affirmative action policies should focus on class and wealth rather than race and ethnicity and joining us are four participants with broad knowledge of the topic at hand. Arguing to emphasize class and wealth is Dalton Conley, chair of sociology and acting dean of the Social Sciences at New York University. His research includes the study of racial inequalities and focuses on how socioeconomic status is transmitted across generations.

He's joined by John McWhorter, senior fellow at the Manhattan Institute and weekly columnist for The New Republic. A linguist, McWhorter writes frequently on race and cultural issues.

Arguing to maintain the emphasis on race and ethnicity is Julian Bond, Chairman of the NAACP. He's a recipient of the Library of Congress's Living Legend award in 2008. His teammate is Lee Bollinger, President of Columbia University. When Mr. Bollinger was president of the University of Michigan he was the named defendant in the 2003 Supreme Court cases that clarified and upheld affirmative action in higher education.

Before we begin our debate, some background.

(START VIDEO)

NARRATOR: For the past half century one of the primary tools for addressing racial and ethnic inequality has been affirmative action policies. The policies attempt to improve opportunities for minorities by giving them preference in school admissions, job hiring and government contracts.

The beginning of the 1960s saw a marked increase in efforts to promote equal opportunity. President John Kennedy was the first to require federal agencies and private contractors to take affirmative action to ensure that employment and contracting were not racially discriminatory.
President Johnson went further by signing the Civil Rights Act of 1964, establishing the EEOC, the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, which in essence created quotas for hiring in government contracts. Opponents began to push back against affirmative action under President Reagan, who eliminated the requirement that federal agencies use goals and timetables.

And various states held referenda limiting affirmative action with varying degrees of success.

The courts have played an important role in determining the constitutionality of these policies. The 14th Amendment promising equal protection of the laws is the basis for many of the court arguments. In 1978 Allan Bakke, a white student, was denied admission to medical school despite having higher scores than minority applicants who were accepted.

He sued. In a controversial decision the Supreme Court ruled in his favor saying quotas were unconstitutional, but that affirmative action programs were not. What followed was a period of expansion of affirmative action in college admissions.

In a later decision involving the University of Michigan a high court majority wrote that affirmative action should be a temporary measure and expected it no longer would exist by the year 2028.

BARACK OBAMA, PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES: "To protect and defend the Constitution of the United States."

CHIEF JUSTICE JOHN ROBERTS: So help you God?

OBAMA: So help me God.

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1 Editor’s Note: The EEOC did not formally require quotas, but rather created an incentive for contractors and employers to set specific goals and timetables. For example, companies bidding on a federal government contract sometimes included in their bids the specific number of minority employees they would hire. Given the federal government’s drive to increase minority hiring, contractors often used this to get a leg up on the competition. While President Johnson opposed the idea of quotas, his policies did lead to practices that looked very much like quotas.
NARRATOR: Seeming to point to that progress was the swearing in of President Barack Obama on January 20, 2009, accompanied by his wife, Michelle, herself the great, great granddaughter of slaves.

While it is not known if the Obama's were the beneficiaries of affirmative action, the president joined the debate over affirmative action’s continued emphasis on race.

OBAMA: My daughters should probably be treated by any admission officer as folks who are pretty advantaged. I think that we should take into account white kids who have been disadvantaged and have grown up in poverty and shown themselves to have what it takes to succeed.

NARRATOR: Many argue that giving preferences based on class and wealth would do more today to equalize opportunities. But with white households earning roughly 1.5 times black and Hispanic households, others still see a need for affirmative action policies that focus on race.

Which leads to our debate resolution, affirmative action should focus on class and wealth rather than race and ethnicity.

(END VIDEO)

SUAREZ: Now to our debate. Each participant will have a three-minute opening statement, starting with Dalton Conley and then alternating between the two teams. Then we’ll move to rebuttals and then a question-and-answer session which I will moderate. Then the debate will conclude with two-minute closing statements from each team.

Up first, arguing in favor of the resolution is Dalton Conley.

DALTON CONLEY: Great. Thank you. Thank you Governor Baliles. I want to begin by thanking our worthy opponents for their great, in fact, their historic work in promoting equal opportunity for all Americans.

My colleague, Dr. McWhorter and I, born in the time of the great civil rights triumphs in the 1960s, are ourselves the lucky beneficiaries of the struggles of Julian Bond and his
compatriots. Likewise, as a college student in the 1980s I benefited from a rich diverse campus as a result of the policies that Lee Bollinger so eloquently defended before the Supreme Court.

So it's quite an honor and indeed quite humbling to be among these distinguished colleagues who have fought so hard for equal opportunity and diversity. However, I'm sure all of us will agree we still have a long way to go.

There are significant racial gaps in health, in jobs and yes, in education. But as bad as those disparities are, they are dwarfed by the wealth gap. In fact, if there were one statistic that captured the legacy of racial inequality, the persistence, the legacy of slavery, it would be net worth.

The typical white family enjoys a net worth that is about 10 times that of the typical or median non-white family. What's more that gap has grown since the civil rights triumphs of the 1960s. What's more this asset gap explains many of the other disparities that I mentioned. That is when we statistically compare African Americans and whites whose parents have the same net worth, something amazing happens.

African-American children are more likely to graduate from high school than their white counterparts. They're equally likely to obtain a bachelor's degree and the wage gap between blacks and whites dribbles away. In short, the educational and economic problems of disadvantaged minorities stem primarily from nagging differences in class and wealth background.

So if race now matters indirectly through its association with class, why do we continue to use it as a factor in admissions? Wouldn't a much more effective policy entail reducing the 10-fold wealth gap? Or rather than redistribute wealth what if we made wealth and our parent's educations matter less by implementing color-blind class-based affirmative action in the areas of schooling and work?

Such an approach would lend several criticisms of affirmative action. First, because parental class is not as obvious as skin color, such a policy would be less stigmatizing. Second, under the current policy 86 percent of beneficiaries of affirmative action come from the upper classes. By contrast, under a class-based approach, poor minorities and
whites would receive a boost creating the new politics of racial unity.

Finally with respect to diversity, immigration from predominantly black countries, new citizens from across Latin America, a resurgence in Native American identification and self-identified multi-racial Americans all translate to a country whose notion of historically oppressed minorities as distinct from other minority groups is not so easy to parse out.

Finally, the evidence is that class-based policies can work. Take California where Prop 209 banned the use of race in admissions. California’s class-based policy has generated racial and ethnic diversity while being colorblind. We get to have our, quote unquote, "diversity cake and eat it, too." Thank you.

SUAREZ: Professor, thank you. Now arguing against the resolution, Julian Bond.

JULIAN BOND: Thank you. Using class as a substitute for race would mean the abandonment of affirmative action as it was intended – in the process, abandoning its promise of justice for America’s once-enslaved citizens.

Affirmative action resulted from an American consensus that a remedy for past racial injustice was required to make the promise of the Constitution real. The breadth of that consensus is confirmed in this statement: "Edicts of nondiscrimination are not enough. Justice demands that every citizen consciously adopts a personal commitment to affirmative action, which will make equal opportunity a reality." That was California Governor Ronald Reagan, speaking in 1971.

Affirmative action was intended to be a remedy for slavery, for segregation, for racial discrimination – reparations for wrongs of the past. It represented the just spoils of a righteous war, and to substitute class for the immutable characteristics of race is to make a mockery of the civil rights movement that gave birth to affirmative action.

During the height of that movement, in 1965, President Lyndon Johnson said, "You do not take a person who for years has been hobbled by chains and liberate him, bring him up to the starting line of a race and then say, ‘you’re free to compete with all the others,’ and still justly believe that you’ve been completely fair."
It’s not enough to just open the gates of opportunity. All our citizens must have the ability to walk through those gates. We seek not just equality as a right and a theory, but equality as a fact, and equality as a result.

Barack Obama’s electoral successes notwithstanding, we’re not there yet. Equality is not the fact. Race dictates where we live, how we live, how long we live. Almost every social indicator from birth to death reflects black/white disparities. Infant mortality rates for blacks are 146 percent higher. Chances of imprisonment 147 percent higher. Rate of death from homicide 521 percent higher. Lack of health insurance 42 percent more likely. The average white American will live five and a half years longer than the average black American today.

Changes in our society, not least in the election of our first African-American president, do not signal a shift in our racial temperature so significant that race-conscious affirmative action can now be discarded.

Obama’s climbing what had seemed to be an insurmountable mountain does not mean the difficulty of the climb has been erased for all others. Or, as we like to say, the initials NAACP don’t stand for the National Association for the Advancement of One Colored Person. Substituting class for race may make some people more comfortable with affirmative action, but it makes poor policy.

In his last book, written in ’67, Dr. King said, "A society that has done something special against the Negro for hundreds of years must now do something special for him." The argument against so-called undeserving middle- and upper-class blacks benefiting from affirmative action is heard in tandem with the idea that affirmative action does nothing for the presumably more deserving working-class black population. But poverty and race are not proxies for each other. Affirmative action is not a poverty program. Nobody beat Rodney King because he was poor. Middle-class status, educated parents, a college degree, a large paycheck – these have never served as a shield against racism. Maybe that’s why no one has ever made that argument about women, that the discrimination they face is based on class, not gender, or that middle-class status protects them from the glass ceiling.
Unfortunately, to be color blind in America is still being blind to the consequences to being the wrong color in America today.

SUAREZ: Now we'll hear from John McWhorter

JOHN MCWHORTER: If you ask me whether I'm in favor of affirmative action in the sense of giving people a break who've grown up hard, then I agree with it completely. If you're talking about the kind of affirmative action where you put a thumb on the scale where all qualifications are equal, then I agree with it completely.

If you're talking about the kind of affirmative action where black students and Latino students, regardless of class, are admitted to a university in particular according to lowered standards out of a sense that they are to contribute to a diversity tableau, then I disagree. I also disagree with the rationale this is something that should be done because the playing field isn't completely level in America or because racism still exists in America.

The idea of affirmative action, which when it was instituted I think was a very good idea, was not to keep it present until life was perfect because life in America will never be perfect. There will always be a certain degree of discrimination. There's absolutely nothing that we can do about that, whether we like it or not.

The reason that I disagree with that kind of affirmative action, which I take to be the reason that it's so controversial, are two. One of them is that if you set the bar low, then overall that's the kind of performance that you're going to get. That is a brutality of history. We don't like it. Nevertheless, it's still true.

When I taught at the University of California at Berkley, I watched how it was only after racial preference policies were discontinued that efforts were actually made to teach black and Latino students throughout the state to actually qualify for what the admission procedures were. Before that it hadn't happened and it wasn't going to happen. I think what's gone on in California since then therefore is better.

The second reason that I disagree with the kind of affirmative action that's often gone on particularly in universities is because there is no evidence that the presence of black
and Latino students significantly improves education, despite what’s been said. We can talk about it.

Not to mention that if you actually talk to black and Latino students, they tend not to be terribly fond of being treated as pawns in a diversity tableau. They’re in school to get an education. So that’s my reason for taking my position in this debate that affirmative action based on class is good.

I think that it would be disingenuous to pretend that there’s no such thing as the kind of affirmative action that involves lowering standards. It was certainly going on at the flagship schools in California when I taught there, specifically much lower grades, SAT scores, 300 points difference, that was considered OK. It wasn’t a good scene.

Something very similar has been shown at the undergraduate school at the University of Michigan. I was speaking at a rather elite school rather recently, which I will not name, and was told that most of the black students on campus would not be there except for the fact that on their applications they displayed spunk. I don’t think that was a good thing.

I think we should avoid the usual tart comments about how George W. Bush got quite far despite the fact that he wasn’t qualified for this, that and the other thing because I don’t think that that’s a very charitable comparison to make to black people. We’ve already been through too much.

And so if a white person says what about George W. Bush, frankly I think it’s rather racist. If a black person feels that that’s a good explanation, then I don’t think they like themselves very much.

In closing, I am right now teaching a course at Columbia. It is a very diverse class. There are black people in it. There are Latino people in it. One guy is seven feet tall. One guy isn’t. One woman runs a rhythm and blues band. The diversity helps. But everybody is equally qualified in all the ways that we all know matter and therefore the diversity is spectacular but it’s because there was not the kind of affirmative action that we consider controversial and it could be because it’s wrong.
SUAREZ: Finally, opening remarks from Lee Bollinger.

LEE BOLLINGER: I'm tempted to begin by saying we have a special effort to get students who are seven feet tall or taller. Glad that John is teaching at Columbia and of course Dalton is a graduate. Pleasure to be here.

I want to begin by saying that I think the question is framed incorrectly. We want both racial diversity and ethnic diversity and we want diversity based upon income and class. [It’s] very important [that] America has a deep and abiding commitment to making sure as much as we can, we don’t live up to it, but we have this principle that is good that your education should not depend upon the wealth of your parents.

But we also have a deep principle in the country beginning with Brown vs. Board of Education in 1954 to strive for greater integration in our society. So we want both racial and ethnic diversity in our higher education system. And we want income and class diversity. [It’s] very important to understand how admissions work. It’s frequently misunderstood.

Countless things are considered in the course of admitting students. Geographic diversity, athletic diversity, international diversity, students who have many different kinds of backgrounds and experiences – [it’s] very important to try to get them together in a class. It’s also extremely important to realize that you will not get racial diversity if you rely just on class and wealth.

The fact of the matter is, and this has been studied by many people, that if you use only income you will increase the proportion of white students and decrease the proportion of African-American and Hispanic students. Race matters in higher education. It’s important to consider. It’s important educationally.

It’s important for our students to be around others who may be different from them, have different experiences or may not be different. It’s important because in our society we have a history of deep discrimination that we are still suffering from. Many of the students who come to our great universities across the country, public and private, come from either all-white high schools or all-black high schools, essentially.
The first time they encounter a diverse environment is when at age 17 or 18 they become freshmen at our universities. It would be a tragedy if at this point after so much progress from Brown vs. Board of Education to today, including the election of the first African-American president, it would be a pity if after all of that we were to take that progress and to abandon it.

And that's why I think so many institutions, business, military and others supported the University of Michigan in trying to uphold affirmative action in higher education in 2003. Thank you.

SUAREZ: Thank you, Mr. President. Now we'll get rebuttals and responses from each team, starting with the team in favor of the resolution and Professor Dalton Conley.

CONLEY: Thanks. We're not arguing on our side for abandoning affirmative action, the policy that many of your generation fought so hard to implement. Nor am I trying to argue that the difference in life expectancy, in wages, in education, in infant mortality isn't important. But race can be very tricky. Race can be deceiving.

It's not so easy to see that actually those disparities are driven by the class background, the lingering class background that is itself a historical trace of many years, centuries of discrimination. And so I think ultimately it's a failure of imagination to only stick with what's worked up until 2009. We could actually achieve both of our ends – diversity and equal opportunity, and adjustment for past wrongs – through this class-based approach.

And it's interesting that President Bollinger mentioned that class-based programs based on income don't reproduce the same level of ethnic and racial diversity. But with wealth, given how unequally distributed it is by race, you get your cake and eat it too, as I mentioned, because you will get a diverse racial composition of a campus if you use wealth and not income as a basis of a class policy.

SUAREZ: Now we'll hear your team's rebuttal. Lee Bollinger.

BOLLINGER: Well, I think it's important to just emphasize and elaborate on some of the things that I have said, and Julian has said. Everybody agrees that wealth is very
important to take into account in building a class.

That is we want children of families who are at the low end of the economic spectrum to be able to have an educational experience and to contribute to it in the ways that they can. It is often said, and it has been mentioned that there is a stigma attached to those who are admitted on the basis of affirmative action.

I think it’s extremely important to go back to what I said a moment ago about how admissions work. There are many people who are the beneficiaries of special considerations other than your performance on standardized tests and grade point average.

We want students from East Asia. We want students from Europe. We want students from Africa. We want students from all over the United States. It has long been understood that higher education plays this incredibly important role of bringing people together from within this country, all different kinds of backgrounds, and from around the world.

It would not make sense to do that for all of those categories simply on the basis of wealth. And the same should be true of race.

**SUAREZ:** Now I have questions for our debaters. In general, only one member of each team needs to answer each question but teammates may jump in anytime. Mr. Bond, you heard Professor Conley say you could achieve the same ends by using wealth, and class in place of race and ethnicity. You alluded in your opening remarks to that not being so.

Why wouldn't that work? Why wouldn't you get the same admission pools in a college or the same applicants when you’re opening up the testing for the fire department or some new jobs in the accounting or the secretarial pool or whatever you’re hiring for?

**BOND:** Well, let’s stick to education, where this question is most pertinent, and the question is whether or not if drop race and use class or wealth, wouldn’t you achieve some of the same results, and all the evidence that I’ve seen, from all the studies done by innumerable scholars says no.
What would happen is that the pool would be flooded with white youth and those white youth would numerically so radically outnumber the minority youth that when a class is chosen the percentage of black youth or minority youth would just shrink enormously.

Much, much less there would be today using race as a determinant. And so while this might be a good idea, it might make people feel better, it wouldn't work. And since it wouldn't work, it ought not be tried.

**SUAREZ:** How would it work? Answer him directly.

**CONLEY:** If you based it on income, I agree 100 percent. But if you base it on wealth, you would get a disproportionately minority entering class plain and simple those are the facts. The wealth distribution is so unequal, if you take – let's take the poor.

The typical poor white family still has $15,000 to $20,000 of net worth. The typical poor, you know, i.e., at the poverty line black family has a negative net worth, zero or below. So if you had some policy that really focused on education and wealth you would get minorities disproportionately.

And of course this is a formula. You could adjust it along with your desire for seven-foot basketball or non-basketball players and foreign students, and so forth to achieve, to tweak, to get the kind of diversity you want on campus, and really serve the promise of equal opportunity at the same time.

**SUAREZ:** I understand between having a college president, two academics, someone who's been very closely aligned with institutions of higher learning through their adult life, that everybody's comfortable talking about campus.

But certainly, what drives people around the bends who are against the affirmative action is a much broader set of ideas about how goods and how goodies are distributed in this society. Mr. McWhorter, how long does historic disadvantage follow someone?

We could argue that college is a perfect lab to talk about some of the ideas that have
been put out on the floor, but does a 50-year-old worker who comes from a background of terrible racial disadvantage from a community of historic racial discrimination have a claim on a job as a dispatcher to get the snow plows out on time or the salt spreaders or a job in the city electricity department to make sure the street lights go on at dusk.

**MCWHORTER:** The only reason that affirmative action is justified is if it’s demonstrable in a concrete way, and not as a matter of talking around things and using buzz words. That there is discrimination, that there are either discriminations or concrete obstacles that can be very clearly tied to the color of a person’s skin.

And what is the challenge with affirmative action is that what I just said is not a synonym for the playing field being completely level. It’s not that what we’re looking for is a society where there’s some miracle where people don’t make any subtle psychological distinctions in terms of skin color.

It’s not that we’re talking about a society where opportunity is absolutely equal for everyone. And the reason that I don’t think that that’s what we’re looking for is because with lowered standards, and this can be about a municipal job as well admissions into a university. The fact of the matter is that you can’t help set it up so that that is all that that group or members of that group have to achieve in order to get that fruit of society.

If you ask me whether it was something responsible to apply that to black people and Latino people in the 1960s with the idea that maybe you’d do it for a generation because of the very obvious effects of Jim Crow, and the social bigotry that was allowed and open at the time, then sure I’d say, yes.

But affirmative action is like chemotherapy. It creates all kinds of problems in society that we see that have brought us here tonight, and it does create a stigma. And it has been shown to put a cramp on the incentive or even the knowledge of exactly what one actually needs to do in order to hit the highest bar because you don’t have to.

So the idea is make sure that the discrimination or the barrier is quite concrete. When it gets to the point that we need to have debates like this and write books and talk around it in order to be convincing, then it means that a rationale is falling apart.
And that just means that America is a better, not perfect, but better place than it was in 1966. We have to move on.

SUAREZ: Lee Bollinger.

BOLLINGER: Well it’s a very important question and it’s a – I think something that is complicated to answer. But I want to say the following. I have tried to indicate that many things are considered in admissions.

You have to ask yourself the question, why is it that those who receive benefits in the admissions process not related to race, but let’s say to the fact that you’re a child of an alum of a university, or that you came from Oregon as I did, or that you came from a low income area – why is it that we don’t attribute to them the sense of stigma, that they would feel stigmatized by this.

And it may say, when you think about it, because I’m not at all sure that there is this broad sense of stigma – I don’t believe it exists actually – but let’s assume it exists. Is that more a reflection of continuing sense of racism in the society or is it something else? If it’s the former, of course, that’s all the more reason to have this.

I think it’s also critically important to realize how many institutions in the United States have embraced trying to achieve diversity in order to be successful. And the most prominent example is the military.

The military academies take race into account in order to get a diverse student body in order to get a diverse officer corps because they know that in order to have an effective military, they have to have a diverse, racially and ethnically diverse, officer corps.

So this is not only about higher education. It’s about all of society and it’s about 50 years since Brown vs. Board of Education, of a society struggling mightily and successfully in many ways, to come to terms with racial differences and ethnic differences in the United States.

SUAREZ: Diversity is a desirable institutional goal. It was affirmed by the Supreme
Court in its judgments after the cases over the academy and the use of affirmative action for admission to higher education. But that’s a social goal. Don’t we normally see the benefits of affirmative action accruing to individuals rather than to classes of people? Mr. Bond?

**BOND:** No, I don’t think so. I think we see them as accruing to groups of people because it’s groups of people who've received disparate treatment in the country, and it’s groups of people who are – for whom this program was designed. So no, I don’t think that’s so at all.

**SUAREZ:** So it’s not individuals that benefit from affirmative action?

**BOND:** Oh, it is individuals that benefit from it but it's groups that it's aimed at, like seven-foot tall basketball players of which there are a number.

**SUAREZ:** But diversity as a desirable social goal is something that benefits the white majority in the institution in question. Does it also benefit the minority who's conferring this desirable diversity on an institution by being there, just by the act of showing up on campus?

**BOND:** Well if all they do is show up I'm not sure. But if they attend and go through the normal curriculum and study, well of course it benefits everyone. It benefits all of the students to be in a society that is as diverse as the society they will enter when they leave this university and go out in the work-a-day world.

It benefits them when they meet people differently than they are, when they meet people whose family experiences are not the same as theirs, when they learn that people come from different parts of the country, different parts of the world, have had different experiences as they grow up. This is part of the learning experience, too and that’s what diversity in education does for them.

**SUAREZ:** Earlier in the program Mr. Bond said that one of the goals of affirmative action was to neutralize the impact of slavery. But the Supreme Court in its rulings gave a very different rationale for the continued existence of affirmative action. So which is it? Professor, tease that apart a little bit.
CONLEY: It’s very simple. We all know as university administrators that diversity is really not the main goal. Diversity is the legal fig leaf that we have to live with because that’s what the Supreme Court allows. And – but we really are doing because we could focus on any number of dimensions that we’ve talked about, about diversity of life experience and so forth.

What we’re really doing is something that America keeps on doing, is trying to make social policy and economic policy through schools. And we tried to – instead of getting integrated neighborhoods, we bus kids to school thinking if they’re together from 9 to 3 that’s going to solve the problem even though they have to go home to very disparate environments.

At college, if we can just get them all into the dorms together, that’s going to solve the problem of racial equality. I’m arguing for a more radical approach that addresses housing segregation, that addresses the wealth disparity through redistribution or policies that encourage minorities to catch up to whites in their wealth accumulation.

If we want to make social policy it’s a failure of imagination to do it over and over again through the school system, which we’ve known since 1966, since James Coleman’s famous report. The Coleman Report that schooling – where you go to school matters very little in the end. And actually, your home environment and your class background matters a lot more.

SUAREZ: Lee Bollinger, you were the president of a public institution and now you’re the president of a private institution. Some of the landmark cases involving affirmative action have had to do with the government and the government’s role in distributing goods and creating these diverse institutions.

And what rubs people about affirmative action seems to be very heavily focused on public rather than private institutions. Is there any difference when you talk about socially purchased goods, like a seat in a public university compared to an accounting job at a Fortune 500 company? Is there a different standard to be used when the taxpayer is paying?
BOLLINGER: Well, I think the answer to that is yes. And the answer is that way because the Constitution, the 14th Amendment in particular, but all of the Bill of Rights applies only to state action, and therefore to actions of public universities and so on.

So as soon as you say the state is involved, then it becomes a matter of the fundamental law of the land. Private actions are not governed by the constitutions, except in so far as they – people would like to embrace them.

So it's a different world. In the United States we've divided up the world in that kind of way and I think that explains why, when public institutions and public universities act it's a much more, you know, it's a deeper sense of public values at stake.

I would say two things very quickly, one is all universities across the United States, private and public, for 30, 40 years have been trying to build integrated classes for educational value and also to try to correct for the historic discrimination; have been doing this consistently and with great positive effects. So this is not just a matter of public or private.

And the second thing I would say, is that other institutions of government have, as well, and I will just mention the military again.

SUAREZ: Are you loosed or bound in different ways now that you're at a private institution rather than a public one?

BOLLINGER: Well, you're asking legal questions which I'm happy to answer, and the answer is yes, because, under the 14th Amendment it's been held that, as you know, that diversity can include race. If the case had gone the other way and we had lost, then private universities, through Title VI, part of the act in 1964, Civil Rights Act, applied the 14th Amendment to private universities.

So if the case had come out differently, private universities like Columbia would have been bound and would not have been able to engage in using race as a factor. Having gone the other way, private universities have a choice, but that's the way it plays out legally.
SUAREZ: John McWhorter, do I have a different kind of plea to make, if I'm seeking a job in the national sales force of a Fortune 500 company that's never had a black salesman versus seeking a job as a teacher or a place as a student in a publicly financed institution?

MCWHORTER: I'd have to give a monotonous answer, Ray. It depends on whether or not there has been discrimination. And what this comes down to is a question that I think we're not asking about affirmative action of any kind and it's something I've always been quite unclear on.

Exactly who decides? Who has told us what the proportion of, for example, is supposed to be in a given institution and why? Where's the number. And it seems to me in general, if we don't talk about that, then we're not talking about the students in question.

We seem to miss this, when we talk about creating diversity and it's holistic and all of these ways of talking around something that's often a little bit more mundane. I want to toss something out.

This is the sort of thing that you don't hear about and that is absolutely crucial to evaluating this notion of racial preferences and how long you continue it.

[At] UC San Diego, before the ban on racial preferences, there were one out of 3,268 black students who were making honors. This is one out of 3,268 on the campus. So this was partly because students were being put into the flagship schools. So this is Berkeley and this is UCLA.

That changed, there was a hue and cry; people used certain words. Now, right after the ban, one year after the ban, when students who would have been going to Berkeley and UCLA went to UC San Diego, then 20 percent of the black freshman were making honors. Twenty-two percent of the white ones were, 20 percent of the black freshman. So that was an experience that they were having. UC San Diego is not a shabby school.

I think that the people who are at UC San Diego would be very unhappy, if they were told that black students who went there, instead of to Berkeley, were being segregated
and given substandard education.

And I could – I will not, but I could give you several stories like that. And so what about the students or what about the beneficiaries of affirmative action we're talking about, what experiences will they have?

**BOLLINGER:** Well, let me probe a little further, because you asked who knows what the number is. I think a lot of the litigation, certainly in the private sector, has started from the premise that zero is not the number.

And that when you look at a company based in New York City, which includes the largest black county and two of the largest Latino counties in the country, and there have been applicants for jobs and you’ve never seen fit to hire any of them over the lifetime of your company, when you take that into court, they fight and say – and I think they, by agreement, zero is not the number.

**MCWHORTER:** Sure, and in a situation like that I think we can be pretty sure that it can be shown, by clear and rather easy argument there had been some kind of discrimination, because it does happen. There are such cases.

But the fact is that that sort of thing, nowadays, is no longer the norm. And, if it's a matter there was 8 percent of brown-skinned people in the sales force and it’s decided that somehow it needs to be 13 or 14, that it's just not quite enough, who decides? Where does it stop?

And so, obviously, if discrimination is demonstrable, go get them. We have to persecute racism, that’s fine, but what about when it barely is? And then it seems to me that we’re doing kind of social engineering which actually has done harm to students in cases such as the one I mentioned.

**BOLLINGER:** Those cases usually don't get the kind of heated and emotional attention as a set of suits over a fire department and there have been many of those because in many cities in the country, cities with sizable black populations, where men could see a job in the fire department as a ladder into the middle class for their families, there was historic discrimination.
And I'll ask you again whether privately financed goods, social goods, are different from publicly funded goods?

**MCWHORTER:** Well, if you're going to put it in those terms then, for example, in terms of the fire department cases where it seems that the tests do not work out well for the black applicants and so the solution is to get rid of the test.

My personal feeling would be an effort to help the black applicants be better at the tests because those things can be done and I'm not sure what our complete lack of faith is in the possibility of that being done.

But getting rid of the tests and doing the sorts of things that we've seen and then calling the white applicants who don't get the job, the racism not understanding, I think we could advance beyond that, in our society.

**SUAREZ:** Julian Bond?

**BOND:** I've got to say, Dr. McWhorter, it's wrong to think that people don't talk about the number. Sandra Day O'Connor famously said, in her decision in the most recent cases that affirmative action ought to have a 25-year life.

But in her autobiography she asked the rhetorical question, how will we know when women have reach equality in America? And she said we'll know when women have reached a percentage, in the professions equal to their percentage in the population.

So let's say women are 50 percent of the country, but when women are 50 percent of the lawyers, then we'll know that's OK. Let's say that firemen are 2 percent of the public employees in the country; when women are 2 percent – or 1 percent of the public employees or they're an equal percent of the employees, then we'll know.

So people do talk about that, and I just found it interesting that Justice O'Connor set a time standard for race-based affirmative action, but a numerical standard and a quota for women.
MCWHORTER: I disagree, Professor Bond. I actually think that we also have to take cultural factors in mind, even when they’re due to racism in the past. And so, for example, the reason that you might not have 13 percent of black students at an elite school might not be that the people in the admissions department are racists, which I think is vanishingly rare in modern society.

It might be because of the legacy of slavery in the past, the legacy of various things that happened in the ‘50s, as has been documented exhaustively, even by social scientists who don’t want to find it, there is a problem with misidentification with school, as a white thing among black students, and in a sharper and more decisive sense than just the ordinary proportion of white nerds. That’s there, it's unfortunate. It's changing. It's being worked on by black communities across the country, but that could be the reason.

And that the way that you address that misidentification for example is not to have lowered standards of admission because it would seem that that would only encourage the cultural legacy that we're talking about.

SUAREZ: At several points during the argument and rebuttal, the mutability of these statuses, race and class has been talked about and the immutability of them. Does race and ethnicity end up being not as mutable as class and able to confer disadvantage in a different way over a broader chunk of a person’s life? Professor Conley?

CONLEY: I think that depends on what outcome you’re talking about. There’s certainly plenty of evidence that stereotypes, there's been actual experimentation about stereotype threat. And if you prime white or black students or Asian students with the stereotypes about test performance and academic achievement before they take a test, you can drive down black scores and drive up white and Asian scores for example.

Or if you juxtapose whites against Asians you drive whites down and Asians up. Stereotypes matter. There's other evidence that there is discrimination out there in the world. No one’s arguing there's not.

But I'm a pragmatist. And I think that the passions around this issue, the plebiscites across the nation, by state by state, suggest that we need to try something new. Maybe
in 25 years, maybe now, maybe in 50 years, but we need to try something new.

We need to get rid of the legacy admissions policy at Columbia. I would challenge Lee to do that but the donors won't like it. But we need to get rid of the – you know, a lot of these policies that don’t – that unlevel the playing field.

SUAREZ: But you’re a sociologist. Isn't class and part of the way we understand class a set of learned behaviors, gestures, social norms that one can learn and transfer from one class to another, while race follows you around and has an impact on your life that's just different?

CONLEY: Again, that's the failure of – race does that now. But what if we had a different American society where there were no huge class differences by race. Then slowly, certainly for sure, race would become more like ethnicity.

We’d be more like a difference between being Polish and Italian. It would be a cultural heritage. It would be something that we want to preserve, something that's important to people themselves but it would not determine your life chances. And that's ultimately what we're talking about.

SUAREZ: Answer him.

BOLLINGER: Well, I find what Dalton has – I find the spirit in which it says it very appealing, that is if you could eliminate wealth differences or reduce them significantly, that would lead to elimination of perceived and felt differences based on race generally in the society.

I think – my own personal feeling is that that just would not happen. But it wouldn't happen in 25 years with Sandra Day O'Connor said in the Michigan cases was very unusual to have a kind of time limit put on a constitutional decision.

I think underlying that was her wish that in 25 years there would be no felt need to have any kind of efforts on integration because all the sense of difference would have vanished, meaningful difference. And I think that's naïve as well.
I just want to say one thing though, you know, we just need to focus not only on race and ethnicity in admissions but all the other things that are taken into account. So if one wants to criticize universities for social engineering, then let’s also talk about geographic diversity.

From the very early part of this country there was a sense that universities and colleges could play a role of bringing citizens from all different parts of the country together to create a more unified democratic polity. That is something we all I think accept as extremely important. I would say the same is true with respect to integration and race since Brown.

SUAREZ: Now we'll have two minutes for a closing statement from one member of each team. Julian Bond will speak for the team arguing against the resolution.

BOND: The truth is there are no nonracial remedies for racial discrimination. If you want to get beyond race, you have to go to race. To suggest racial neutrality as a remedy for racial discrimination is sophistry of the highest order.

And the argument that race based affirmative action and engenders hostility from whites and places a stigma on blacks, deserves contempt. It's as if black Americans never faced a stigma before the words affirmative action were ever uttered.

As for stigma, there's no evidence that white Americans suffer any guilt or any remorse for having benefited from white supremacy since the nation was founded. Indeed, most seem fairly happy with the present day status. And the proposition we're debating would actually make us go backward.

Would a black student rather be at Princeton and thought less competent or be thought less competent and not be at Princeton? At Harvard, about nine out every 10 applicants are denied admission, 15 percent of the student body is black or Hispanic.

If every one of these students was forced to give up his place to a white or an Asian student, acceptance rates for whites and Asians would increase only by one or two percentage points. Federal Judge Frank M. Johnson understood this. He told a Boston University School of Law commencement some years ago, religious differences, race
differences, sex differences, age differences, political differences are not the same. It is no mark of intellectual soundness to treat them as if they were.

Moreover, if the life of the law has been experienced, then the law should be realistic enough to treat certain issues as special as racism is special in American history. To substitute class for race and affirmative action is to deny history, deny reality and deny justice.

SUAREZ: And the last word goes to our team arguing in favor of the resolution and to John McWhorter.

MCWHORTER: I lack profundity but I have to go with what I have. When I have a daughter and I will – if she is admitted to just about every school that she applies to while her white friends get into this one but not that one and this one and not the other two.

And the reason that she’s admitted to so many more schools than her white friends and this is what happens, this is what we’re talking about. If the reason that she is admitted to those schools given the fact that she will not have grown up under anything you could call disadvantage, is because there administrators beaming at the fact that by admitting my daughter, they are sticking a thumb in the eye at white people who don't feel guilty enough about their supremacy.

If the idea is that the administrators are beaming because my daughter is going to make the campus more diverse, if they are beaming because by admitting my daughter they’re showing that racism is not dead, if they are beaming because they are admitting my daughter and therefore selling that they regret that black people often have a harder time getting a car loan than white people.

If that’s the idea then I will want to vomit. I will feel that my daughter is being condescended to. I will feel as a mark of disrespect to me and my ability to get passed ills of the past and to pass on those abilities to my daughter.

If I were somebody who was a coal miner’s son, if my father drove a bus, if I drove a bus, if I worked for UPS and my daughter just wasn't very good at taking standardized
tests but there were other ways that she showed that she was worthy of sitting beside students at Columbia or students at UC Berkeley in terms of qualifications as we all know it, they're valid. Then sure, that kind of affirmative action is fine.

Affirmative action is not something that is suited to showing that we're aware that life isn't perfect for black people. Never has been, it isn't now, it never will be.

SUAREZ: Thank you very much. I think you'll agree that all our debaters tonight have given us a lot to chew over. I hope you've been provoked, maybe made a little bit uncomfortable, had your set feelings on this topic pushed on a little bit.

Thanks to our debaters on the pro side, Dalton Conley and John McWhorter and to the opposition Lee Bollinger and Julian Bond. Our next debate will take place in Charlottesville, Virginia and will focus on energy.

For more information on our debates go to the Miller Center Web site and for our broadcast on PBS please check your local listings. On behalf of the Miller Center I'm Ray Suarez, thanks for joining us, thanks for watching.

This program was made possible by the generous support of Fredrick W. Scott, Jr., Ann R. Morrow and the Microsoft Corporation.

(AUDIO BREAK)

QUESTION AND ANSWER PERIOD

QUESTIONER: (AUDIO CUT OFF) ...rather than simply saying to you the only way you're going to get an ear is this way.

SUAREZ: Do you have an answer on that question?

MCWHORTER: Well, I would just say I think what I tried to say before remember that many, many things are taken into account other than standardized test scores and grade point averages. And this is not a process where all the people are admitted on the basis
of those two things, and then there some students admitted on the basis of race and ethnicity.

It's just not the way admissions works. And so lots of things are considered, lots of people get in who have lower test scores, lower grade point averages than other students. If you want to start talking about the amount of differences in grades and standardized test scores the question then is why does it matter?

I mean what does it matter that there is a 10-point difference or a five-point difference or a three-point difference if you are convinced and you explain why the educational value and the societal good that is done by this over time is worth that kind of thing.

And we've done that as I've said repeatedly with geographic, with international, with athletic, with all kinds of different considerations so I think it's very unfortunate when we single out a one part here of an admissions process and then attribute to lots of problems to it.

**BOLLINGER:** And Ray I taught at a school, university that had sinking numbers of male students and rising numbers of female students. And they wanted to address, redress this imbalance and so they began dipping down into the pool of male students and picking students with lower SATs so because, you know, women do better on the SATs than men do.

And they kept, went down and down and now they have equal numbers. And I don't know if these men are going around the campus with their heads held low because everybody said, that's Charlie, look at him, you know, in fact I don't think they know. I don't think they care.

So I don't think it's the phenomenon that we hear described over and over again because all this is antidotal evidence and nothing but antidotal evidence.

**SUAREZ:** Mr. Conley?

**CONLEY:** I think it's funny that Lee keeps coming back to other illegitimate modes of admission to justify race. I mean the proudest, the most thing I am proud about NYU is
that we don't have a football team.

So we don't have to deal with you know passing the answers to the football players who got in because we want to win the Pac-10 or whatever. So like I said I challenge you get rid of legacy admissions at Columbia or donor admissions or politically sensitive admissions or any - all of these things are equally illegitimate.

What makes race specific in this case is that it is stigmatizing. And it's stigmatizing not just because whites are racists but because it's such a – based on group identity. I guarantee you when I see a kid who is a star athlete no matter what race they are or that I know that they the son or daughter of someone who has a building named after them on campus I'm stigmatizing them in my mind, too.

Don't worry I'm an equal opportunity stigmatizer. So I would like to get rid of all these things. I think actually Berkeley is a great example. There's, you know, too bad for me because Berkeley has no legacy admissions. My kids are not going to have a leg up on getting in. And as much as that bugs me, in one regard, I think it's the right thing.

QUESTIONER: Lee, I don't mean dog pile on you, but I just want to say that as far as Columbia goes, from what I see, if there's any affirmative action it's the good kind. I mean, everybody seems to me to be equally qualified, and if then it was decided that somebody should be (INAUDIBLE), and qualified, as anyone else as that guy is I should say because we keep bringing him up then it's fine.

But can you really say when you're talking about this holistic, and with race only being one element, and this is a genuine question. Would you really say, and I'm asking you this after many years, I wouldn't have asked you this five years ago.

But now in '09, would you really say that race was just one factor in how affirmative action was being done in the undergraduate program at U Michigan, because it seemed to me, and to many people that race was one of many, but was the vastly predominant factor, not in law school, but in the undergraduate school.

I'm sure you heard that argument. Was that incorrect?
BOLLINGER: Well, I think it's profoundly incorrect. I mean, I think the – I think it's very, very important to say very straight out that the African-American, Hispanic, Native American students who are admitted under affirmative action programs at selected universities are at the very top of the country in terms of their performance on grades and SATs.

I mean, they're – so again, we're not talking about not considering other academic factors. Now, you can say, as I think you really are, that is a factor that is either illegitimate to consider under any circumstances or it can be considered under some circumstances, but you consider it too much.

QUESTIONER: That.

BOLLINGER: That's what I thought

QUESTIONER: Yes.

BOLLINGER: Then the question is what is too much? How do you define that? And so when people say all across the country at higher education colleges, and universities, we believe for the future citizens of this country, and for the ways in which we want to educate our students, this is truly a beneficial thing to the education and to all students and to this society.

Then you have to say why you think that's not true because we have now reduced this down to the real issue. It's what is too much in terms of considering race and ethnicity. And that can only be answered in the context of what are the educational and societal values that we're trying to further? And that's where I think the debate meaningfully can be had.

SUAREZ: See what you started? Thanks for your question. Thank you. Next.

QUESTIONER: Hi, I'm Richard Kahlenberg, from the Century Foundation. I guess my question is to the supporters of race-based affirmative action. There was an empirical disagreement about whether class-based affirmative action would produce sufficient racial diversity.
But let's assume for a moment that Dalton Conley is right, and that using wealth as opposed to income would produce a sufficient level of diversity. That would nevertheless change the makeup of selective institutions. You'd suddenly have large numbers of low-wealth African Americans, Latinos and whites coming into some pretty privileged environments.

So I'm wondering would that be OK with you if wealth produced as much racial diversity would you be willing to make the change?

BOND: As much racial diversity as what?

QUESTIONER: As the current levels using race.

BOND: I don't know. It's hard for me to believe that it would. I understand we're being asked to believe that it would base (ph) the argument. But all the information I've seen and all of the studies I've seen done by several people say that it wouldn't, so it's a big leap of faith for me. So I can't go there.

QUESTIONER: I mean, just assume for the moment that it did. I mean you have a – you'd swap out essentially – you'd have very many few are upper-middle-class African Americans, many more lower-income African Americans.

And there's some who would object to that and say that it's important to have upper middle class African Americans in these institutions as well to teach – I've heard the argument, to teach whites essentially that blacks can be of all different socioeconomic statuses. And so I guess the question is whether – if you could get enough racial diversity, would that be OK?

BOND: I guess I would say that it would be OK.

QUESTIONER: Can we quit there?

BOLLINGER: I wouldn't say it would be OK. I mean I want to start by saying having young people from poor families and working class families is very, very important.
And I must say that Columbia and Michigan, the two universities that I've been privileged to lead, have wonderful and remarkable traditions of having the highest proportions of those students in the student body to the great benefit of those students and other students in the society. It's really important to do.

But it's also important to have people from all different parts of the socioeconomic spectrum, all different amounts of wealth. And perhaps the example would be we believe in international diversity.

It's really good in this new global environment to have our students educated in a context where there's students from the subcontinent, from China, from Europe, from Africa, from South America and so on.

It would not be as good if only low income students came from those regions of the world. You want to get a different group of people with different kinds of life experiences. These are to be sure, very rough measures, factors of how you build a student body.

It's an incredibly difficult thing to compose a student body but it's done every year by people who are very sensitive to students whom they believe can really perform in the educational system.

And when you walk onto an American campus, you feel the vitality of the campus just by looking around at the array of students before you and the qualities that they bring. It's one of the great things. It's like New York City. It's one of the great things about the city, its diversity.

**SUAREZ:** Thanks for your question. Let me just latch on for one moment and get a little explanation of mechanics since you've been speaking in favor of the approach that the questioner asked about.

How would that work? Would you just append a balance sheet with your application and you know basically do a wallet biopsy on your incoming families and know what you're dealing with? And use that?
CONLEY: That is a big challenge of how do you capture this without allowing families to gain the system. For example, they you know, over time they transfer $10,000 a year with a, you know, what's allowed in the gift law to their cousins and everybody to hold for them while their kids are applying to college.

There's many ways you could get at this that would kind of minimize that kind of gaming. For example, we know that housing is still even after 2008, is still the primary form of equity accumulation for American families, even with stock market participation rates high, higher than they've ever been.

You can – people are not going to all of a sudden move to the worst school district and into the poorest community because they want to get their kids into college. If you have a record of where people live, whether or not they were homeowners or not, which we do, you've already got a big piece of their wealth right there.

And you don't need their exact housing value. You can do it by census track and impute it. You don't even have to ask them a single question other than maybe you know their residential history of where they lived and whether they owned or rented. That's one piece you would get at.

You of course, would try to you know take in account of liquid wealth to the extent you can. I mean, there's limited amounts that people can game, and I've also said that when I do these statistical models, you know race doesn't matter.

It doesn't predict anything when you are comparing apples and apples when you are comparing kids coming from the same socioeconomic background. But among the socioeconomic factors, the only two that matter are parental education, which is easily measured and not gameable and wealth.

SUAREZ: Yes, your question.

QUESTIONER: My name is Steven Hayes from the American University Debate Society. Thank you so much for coming out. My question, I'm a Hispanic American from a rather advantaged economic background.
And I understand that affirmative action has a philosophy that essentially, in relation to African Americans, society has a duty to help them because of enslaving them in history. But where exactly does someone like me with an advantaged economic background, whose from a racial minority, actually fit into that debate? Why am I included in it essentially?

**BOLLINGER:** Well all I can say is that when you apply to a university, the fact that you’re Hispanic, Native American, African American has mattered and it’s mattered for 30, 40 years.

And it’s part of an effort in our higher educational system to bring people together and to overcome the sense of isolation that has existed because of discrimination and because of discrimination that continues not legally but just because of housing patterns and mostly school segregation.

But you know you can’t isolate a single thing. I mean, you have to look at your total package. I mean, you may have done spectacular things in setting up a business or setting up a nonprofit or you may be gifted as a musician as well.

You know there’s just so many things that going – the students who are admitted in these selective universities are an incredible array of talents and experiences. So again, it’s one of many. Is it too much? We’ve you know started debating that.

Is it really of educational value? Well we started debating that too. Is there stigma? I mean, these are all very legitimate and serious questions …

**SUAREZ:** Let me throw that to Julian Bond because earlier you talked specifically about the legacy of slavery. And during his opening remarks, Dalton Conley talked about diversifying country with many black students whose forbearers were not held as slaves in North America.

Increasing numbers of Africans, increasing numbers of Caribbean blacks, and then of course, increasing numbers of Latinos who are sort of not in that formation and not part of that history. Where does it end? Who gets included? Who doesn’t?
BOND: I don't know, really what the answer to those questions is, which is why I hoped my colleague would answer it as well as he did. But with him, I agree, from the little I know about admission practices at most schools that an amazing amount is taken into account.

When your application comes in the mail, an amazing amount of who you are and where you’re from and where your parents are and what they do and so on, an amazing amount of things on how you did in high school and so forth and so on is taken into account, when the judgment is we have three spaces left at American University and shall this young man get them?

So I don't know how I would make the fit, how I would say – I teach there. So I'm glad to know you're there, take my class. Yes, you can get in.

SUAREZ: Thanks for your question. Yes.

QUESTIONER: Thank you. I wanted to come back to a point that Dr. Conley made early in the discussion about how 86 percent of the beneficiaries of affirmative action policies are middle class or upper middle class. To borrow the president’s example, his daughter, Sasha Obama, rather than her counterpart in the first grade in the district’s failing public schools.

My question would what would you say to critics who point out that affirmative action might be benefiting a – serving a class of people who have historically discriminated against and have faced adversity, but it isn't truly benefiting the individuals or serving the individuals who are bearing the brunt of that adversity and discrimination today?

Is that not the purpose of affirmative action policy, is that why we have Patriot 12 policy or can affirmative action policies speak to those students as well?

BOLLINGER: I'm sorry, say – I'm not quite sure on this.

QUESTIONER: Should the students point out that it is the more – that it happens to be – that affirmative action is benefiting a class of people that has seen discrimination and
adversity, but not truly benefiting the individuals who are most bearing the brunt of that discrimination and adversity? What can we do to make sure that affirmative action policy speaks to them or brings them in as well?

**BOLLINGER:** Well let me say, first of all, that when President Obama's children apply to Columbia, they will have a legacy factor, which Dalton strongly objects to, and also I think we have a special factor for being children of the President of the United States. I'm prepared to say they're admitted right now.

I think, you know, the point that you're making, which I think is Dalton's powerful point, is we need to do more at the higher education level with the issue of wealth disparities in the country.

Everybody on this panel knows that in the last couple of years a number of universities, Columbia included, developed very, very aggressive financial aid policies to enhance their need-blind admission.

Need-blind admissions is, you know, one of the great things in the country because it puts all the applicants there and know nothing about their wealth and then we admit them and provide full financial aid for those students who can't pay.

But we also want to try to reach out and to get these students to come and to apply, and a huge amount of work has to be done in that. That's a very major problem that we have not successfully dealt with.

So insofar as Dalton's point and your point we're not serving every segment of the society through our admissions process to the degree we should be. And we're not correcting for problems that we have as a society through that one mechanism, I mean it's just one. I would say I agree with that.

**SUAREZ:** Thanks for your question. Yes sir.

**QUESTIONER:** How you doing? Bryan Freeman (ph). My question is for the pro side of the argument. How will colorblind policies work when the people implementing these policies and teachers and coaches and K through 12 educational systems may
have racial sigma that may affect students of varying racial and cultural background's ability to be qualified when they try to enter colleges?

**MCWHORTER:** I didn’t really understand the question.

**CONLEY:** I’ll take the question. I think the issue is that if there, if you’re asking correctly that we get to the point of where affirmative action really kicks in the higher education and the labor market and you're citing SAT differences or whatever or a lower standard.

But what about the racism throughout from zero, age zero to 18 that produce those very differences. I think that everybody on this panel would agree that we need to address those, address those in several ways. One is, you know, this has been tried over and over again, it's redesigning the test.

You know the SAT is quite ironic as Lee’s dean of journalism school has written about that it was brought in to fix the old boy’s network in higher ed and to actually provide this meritocratic objective indicator so that people would open the doors of higher education. And then it ends up being a mechanism by which folks are excluded.

Those are tricky issues; we have to address those. But I think the further, you know, to borrow the metaphors that were used in a series of books about affirmative action we have to go back to the source of the river rather than the shape of the river in our education.

And I think if you wanted, again I would say it's not an either/or; I'll agree 100 percent with that but I would say that universal head start, K through 12 education investment, desegregation policies, you know, family housing desegregation policies and wealth filling policies would fix that.

So we would have no SAT gap by 18 if we did those things. I mean that's, you know, that's the ideal I don't know how many years that would take, I don't know if we have the political will but we're here.

We're in Washington but we're not supposed to be hampered by what we can get
through, you know, whatever Senate subcommittee which is thinking big and I think that's doable. We've seen it with other groups in history as well.

SUAREZ: Thanks for your question. Yes sir.

QUESTIONER: Thank you sir. I'd like to frame this question in a way that can suit both sides of the panel. The essential question is why do we focus on race?

Julian Bond made allusion earlier to the gender gap on our campuses which we know is true. Since the '60s while we've closed the race gap considerably the gender gap has gotten wider and widest among black students. There are considerably more black females than black males on campus.

Now my college age son does not mind this at all. I am troubled by it however. Wondering as well as Henry Louis Gates of Harvard and Lani Guinier as others have pointed out we have a large percentage of our selective universities of our black students are from immigrant families.

Which I say more power to them but I wonder what is our post-slavery traumatic disorder and is it being dealt with by affirmative action as it exists? So my question to this side of the debate is doesn't this show after 40 years are you still satisfied with affirmative action as it's been practiced for the last 40 years in addressing these new gaps?

And to this side of the panel are you satisfied with the way our selective colleges address wealth gaps because as I understand it the percentage of low income, that's low quintile students from poor families is much lower than a percentage of black or Latino students on campus. I hope that's clear enough for both sides.

SUAREZ: Thank you, thank you very much.

BOND: Thank you sir.

QUESTIONER, to Suarez: You did a fine job with it.
SUAREZ: Well, thank you.

BOND: Gentlemen. To answer the question particularly, no I don't think any of us even those of us who are opposed to race affirmative action, especially those opposed to race based affirmative action can be satisfied with the way these policies have been played out over years.

And in my thinking they are sort of bad substitutes for a wider range of things which you just discussed a moment ago that ought to have been done over this period, but have not been done and I'm not even sure if they're going to be done any time soon. But no, I'm not satisfied with the way these programs have worked out.

BOLLINGER: Well, I would say that what I said a moment ago there's a lot of work to be done in shaping admissions to try to deal with issues of wealth and gender that you point out and other matters. I think it's very important to acknowledge that there are things to work on.

I think it's very important to acknowledge that the American system of higher education is by far the best in the world. I mean people from all over the world come to be part of this educational system and part of its greatness, is in its very high academic and intellectual standards and its sort of serving as a fulcrum for bringing people together from all over.

So it's a tremendously successful organization that still has a lot of work to do and the last thing I say is we have to be careful we don't put too much weight on college, university admission to carry the problems that we're talking about. And I think that's key.

SUAREZ: Could you address that specifically? That last ...

MCWHORTER: Yes, although I want to say also the questioner was the famous columnist Clarence Page. Hello, Clarence. And I would say first of all that when I was at Berkeley and I was looking at income levels I was definitely dismayed by something that Clarence brought up and one of the previous questioners, which was that it was often said that affirmative action policies were addressing poverty.
But when I looked at the income levels of for example of the black students over the past several years, this was back in the '90s. It was clear I did not look at their houses and census tracks. What is quite clear is that poverty was very rare among them and it made me think wow, this university in particular is not fulfilling a mission of addressing poverty and clearly there's been some sort of mission creed.

But another important issue that Clarence brought up is that on especially elite and selective college campuses black students are so predominantly these day’s immigrant students. I had that exact conversation with my black students in my Columbia class the other day.

We actually found out that the only quote, unquote "pure bred black person" in the class is me. All of them are you know mutts in some way in terms of immigrants or something like that. And it’s something that needs to be worked on and we keep bringing up Obama.

I think that President Obama has cut through that to a considerable extent by his model. And what I mean by that is that although many people don't like to hear this, a lot of the reason that there’s this problem with native born black students is because of a sense based on legacies of the past that there is something separate from being authentically black in being a nerd.

It's quite easy to see why that would be a historical legacy, but it's a problem. I think we see some of it in a certain discomfort that many of us tacitly have in the idea that if there seems to be a problem with black people and SATs, the idea is that we need to teach one another to do better on the tests, not take the test away.

There’s a tacit sense that doing well on that test is somehow not black, that we should be exempt. Understandable, that's our civil rights history. But I think that the idea that a student can be told, "Well, what do you think you’re white by liking books?"

Now somebody can say, "Well, is President Obama white? I think that that model will change that a lot. And I have challenged a few people to take a look, in 10 years, at how much less prevalent that'll be. But we need to work on that, within the native born
population because it is an issue.

SUAREZ: Professor Conley?

CONLEY: I just wanted to pick up – well, first of all to answer your question, yes, I think we have not paid enough attention to the issues of class and wealth in admissions policy. Period. We've paid attention to the wrong lands, I mentioned, with donors and elite legacy admissions.

But I want to pick up on this notion of – I know Ray has tried to push us to think about the firehouse and the civil service and the private firms out there in the labor market, and I guess the composition of the panel, we keep coming back to education, and in a way that's wrong.

SUAREZ: Gave it a shot.

CONLEY: Yes. That's wrong because actually when – first of all, the real issue in terms of getting more people to get B.A.s and higher degrees is really not an issue of affirmative action because if someone has the financial means to go to college and they're encouraged and they have the sort of cultural wherewithal or they're surrounding by people with the cultural wherewithal to get them to apply to college, basically, we have an open admissions policy country wide.

And everyone who wants to go to a four-year college can get there eventually, if they can afford it and they culturally understand the returns to college. What we're really talking about is at the elite institutions, trying to get more representation there.

And, again, going back economic data, the talented Stacy Dale and Allen Krueger did a beautiful study, where they looked at people who got into these schools, got into the Columbias of the world, but didn't go there for whatever reason.

Their mom was sick at home. They didn't want to go away to college and they went to local state U and lived at home and what have you, whatever the reasons were, or they were, you know, Woody Allen or Bill Gates, they dropped and made millions.
They did just as fine in life, which I guess some of us will have to go just back and visit what kind value add we’re giving. The point is that, again, really why is this a big debate, because they’re symbolic? It's symbolic how many students of background are at Harvard or Princeton or Columbia or Berkeley.

But it’s much more that than it is who, you know, whether you went to Berkeley or San Diego, whether that's going to determine your life chances and address issues of life expectancy or earnings or wealth.

It just doesn't play out in the data. So it really is part of our national – it's a proxy for some deep, cultural discussion that we’re having and it's really not where the action is, in terms of infant mortality and all the things we really need to care about in the long run.

SUAREZ: Well, please thank our panelists tonight.

(APPLAUSE)

END