



**Affirmative action is over in the United States, but only for Black people**

Tayo Bero, *The Guardian*, June 30th, 2023

Affirmative action as we know it is officially over.

The US supreme court ruled this week that race can no longer be considered as a factor in university admissions. And just to be clear, affirmative action as a whole isn't cancelled – it's just the race part that the court is gutting.

5 Affirmative action has always been divisive. But two recent cases involving Harvard and the University of North Carolina (UNC) are what finally killed it.

10 The court ruled against both universities, siding with an organisation called Students for Fair Admissions, who argued that race-conscious admissions at American universities constituted a violation of Title VI of the 1964 Civil Rights Act – the part that bars discrimination based on race, colour or national origin.

15 It's pretty obvious why the racial portion of affirmative action is important. It wasn't until the mid-1950s that school segregation was finally outlawed (on paper at least). But contrary to popular perception, affirmative action isn't just a "get in free" card for Black post-secondary students. Women, people with disabilities and other historically marginalized groups have all benefited from the court's recognition that circumstances beyond their control may exclude them from these institutions.

But much like welfare, public housing and other social programs created to help all vulnerable people, Black students were made the poster children for affirmative action.

20 Perhaps the most sinister end result of this racial stereotyping is the way it successfully pits Black and Asian communities against each other. The racist discourse around affirmative action teaches Asian students that they are being disadvantaged in college admissions in favor of Black students. As such, the myth of the model minority – who plays by the rules and has pulled themselves up by the bootstraps – has made many Asian Americans complicit in white supremacy's strategy of anti-Blackness masked as fairness.

25 "Today is a great day for Asian Americans and all Americans," Yukong Zhao, president of the Asian American Coalition for Education, told the BBC about the court's decision. "This decision will preserve meritocracy, which is the bedrock of the American dream."

30 Zhao is grasping here for something that simply doesn't exist. American meritocracy is a myth that was crafted by the powerful to excuse their role in inequity. Work hard, and you can have anything you want. But what they really mean to say is: ignore all the socio-political realities that make life harder for some people, so we don't have to talk about what makes it easier for others. Or how the two are inextricably linked.

35 And if all this was really about people earning their place, why is race the only factor being scapegoated? Because here's the thing: legacy admissions, donor admissions, athlete scholarships and other forms of admissions preferences are affirmative action. And some of the most effective kinds. I wrote in this very column about a 2021 study that found nearly half of all white students at Harvard were either athletes, had alumni parents, had donor parents or were children of Harvard employees. Only 57% of Harvard's white students had gotten in on merit. Yet, somehow the court

decides two years later that that same school doesn't need to be intentional about diversity? Come on.

- 40 But of course, this wouldn't be an American story if the people who worked to throttle affirmative action weren't also the ones benefiting from it the most. And no one has seen more gains from anti-discrimination legislation (both in and outside college admissions) than white women. White women have made much further social progress than any other minoritized group since the words affirmative action were first placed within the law in 1935, yet **they** remain some of its strongest opponents.
- 45 Even Justice Clarence Thomas, who has long been opposed to affirmative action and wrote that it was "patently unconstitutional" is a beneficiary **himself**. He was happy to be accepted into and attend Yale when the school joined the affirmative action movement in the 70s, and was seeking out Black students to make up about 10% of its incoming class. Talk about hypocrisy. [...]

## STEP 1: Understanding the document

A/ Look around the text (=context):

- **Source** (newspaper/magazine/website? British/American/other? author? known political leanings?): This document was taken from *The Guardian*, a British left-leaning newspaper. (Interesting fact since it gives a British viewpoint on an American issue.
- **Section** (news report? editorial? opinion piece? obituary? etc.): It is an opinion piece (even a column as mentioned in line 35.
- **Headline / Subtitle + first sentence/paragraph** (general topic? event? themes? problem? position). This opinion piece tackles the US Supreme court's decision to overrule affirmative action related to race.
- **Date** (recent/dated? before/after a particular event that is relevant to the topic?): This opinion piece is quite recent since it was written in early summer 2023.

B/ Read the text

- 1) Focus on what you understand (do **NOT** underline words you do not understand).
- 2) Re-read the text, spending more time on elements that you feel are **essential**.

### Reading strategies:

- Focus on key **noun phrases** (*groupes nominaux*):

<p><b>The US supreme court</b> ruled...</p> <p>Deter. N3 N2 Nom noyau Verb</p> <p>Les noms qui ne sont pas noyau jouent le rôle d'adjectifs.</p>	<p>Le GN de base est <i>The court</i> (determinant + nom noyau). Chaque mot ajouté à ce GN apporte davantage de précision. En anglais, les précisions sont généralement placées avant le nom noyau.</p>
<p><b>other historically marginalized groups</b> have all benefited from the court's recognition</p> <p>Deter. adv adj Nom noyau Verb</p>	<p>Pour comprendre des phrases composées de longs GNs, il faut procéder de la même façon:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ <i>Other groups have all benefited from...</i></li> <li>➤ <i>Other marginalized groups have all benefited from...</i></li> <li>➤ <i>Other historically marginalized groups have all benefited from...</i></li> </ul>
<p><b>The racist discourse around affirmative action</b> teaches <u>Asian students</u> that</p> <p>Deter. adj N prep adj N</p> <p>V</p>	<p>Le nom noyau ici est <i>discourse</i> (le nom qui est essentiel à la compréhension de l'information).</p>

- Identify the antecedents of **pronouns** (in bold letters in the text).
- Pay attention to **dates**, **tenses** and **modals** to establish a chronology.

1964 : Civil Rights Act (bars discrimination based on race)

1970s: Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas was accepted into Yale thanks to affirmative action.

2021: Tayo Bero wrote about a study which found that ½ of white students in Harvard had benefited from some legacy.

June 2023 : The US Supreme court ruled that race can no longer be considered as a factor in university admission. (Clarence Thomas voted against affirmative action).

- Use **punctuation** to separate what is essential from what is not (e.g. commas, brackets/dashes = extra information)
- Look for **synonyms/definitions**: the bedrock (I.26) = the basis ; gutting = emptying from its essential part (I.4)
- Guess using **context**: pulled themselves up by the bootstraps (I.22) = s'ensortir en se retroussant les manches; alumni (I.36) = former student

## STEP 2: Summary/Restitution

1) Intro

- **Contextualise** / Use a **catchphrase**
- Present the **key issue(s)**
- **Present** the document (source/&/date) and explain the link with the issue at hand

2) Core

- Identify **essential elements/arguments** and **(re)organise** them to avoid repetitions, only include numbers/dates/examples if they are important, and **do NOT write full sentences** (you can **highlight** key passages in the text to complement your notes)
- Do NOT add any information or comments.
- Do NOT plagiarise or even quote it not necessary

## STEP 3: Transition

- Based on your summary, raise an **important issue** that could be further explored (=TRANSITION)
- Announce your **key question** (=problématique)
- Give your **outline** (=plan)

## STEP 4: Commentary

- **Comment** on the issue(s) using your knowledge
- You may return to the text to **refute**, **expand**, or **qualify** (= nuancer) what the author says
- Use **transitions** between parts (avoid generic sentences like “~~Now I'm moving on to my second part~~”)
- **Conclude** by answering your initial question (and possibly raising another one)

<i>Trame de la présentation</i>	<i>Contenu proposé</i>
<b>Introduction</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <i>Mise en contexte / Accroche</i></li> <li>- <i>Annonce succincte des enjeux</i></li> <li>- <i>Présentation du document (nature, date, titre, source, nom de l'auteur s'il est connu)</i></li> <li>- <i>Problématisation = fil rouge structurant la hiérarchisation du compte-rendu</i></li> </ul>	<p>The US Supreme Court recently decided to overturn affirmative action in college admissions, a policy aimed at promoting diversity. In her opinion piece entitled <b>Affirmative action is over in the United States, but only for Black people</b> which was published in the British Newspaper <i>The Guardian</i> on [the] 30<sup>th</sup> of June 2023, Tayo Bero argues with bitter irony that this decision only applies to the Black community, and explains to what extent they will thus be further discriminated against.</p>
<b>Compte-rendu</b> → structuré et objectif	<p>The Court's decision was based on a new interpretation of the 1964 Civil Rights Act, which makes racial and ethnic discrimination illegal. It came</p>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <i>Annonce de l'événement / de la situation traitée et/ou de la thématique = FACTS</i></li>   <li>- <i>Thèse de l'article (ne pas hésiter à s'appuyer sur les titres ou éventuelles illustrations)</i></li>   <li>- <i>SOLUTION</i></li> </ul>	<p>after two cases, against Harvard and the University of North Carolina, initiated by the organisations Students for Fair Admissions and the Asian American Coalition for Education. The latter, in particular, argued that Asian Americans had been discriminated against to favour African Americans.</p> <p>According to Bero, this argument does not hold. If race plays a significant part, other types of minorities have also benefited from affirmative action. This focus on the Black community is actually a typical divide-and-rule strategy used to discredit social policies.</p> <p>How to address inequality then? Surely meritocracy is not a viable option. While Yukon Zhao, from the Asian American Coalition for Education believes in the American Dream (meaning that if you work hard you can make it), it looks very much like an invention used to avoid questioning the structural inequalities that favour some while putting others at a disadvantage.</p> <p>In fact, there are a lot of preferential treatments other than race-based affirmative action – and those haven't been struck down by the Supreme Court. Nearly half of Harvard's white students got in because their parents are donors or alumni, because they're athletes, etc. Nothing to do with merit.</p>
<p><b>Transition</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <i>Une phrase de conclusion du compte-rendu</i></li> <li>- <i>Une phrase qui montre comment la problématique s'appuie sur cette conclusion (peut être la même)</i></li> <li>- <i>Problématique</i></li> <li>- <i>Annonce de plan (2 à 4 parties). Ce qu'il faut absolument éviter c'est le catalogue.</i></li> </ul>	<p>In other words, discrimination only raises concerns when it benefits the most marginalised group in society, while the rich and powerful continue to enjoy extraordinary privileges.</p> <p>To what extent could affirmative action offset such glaring disparities?</p> <p>After remembering the context in which this policy was introduced, it will be necessary to look at the modern-day challenges that make affirmative action far from sufficient. This will eventually lead me to study other possible alternatives.</p>

<p><b>Commentaire</b>  <i>Commentaire qui suit le plan et permet d'enrichir la réflexion par des apports personnels</i>  1/ the context in which this policy was introduced</p> <p>2/ the modern-day challenges that make affirmative action far from sufficient</p> <p>3/ other possible alternatives.</p>	<p>The Black community has come a long way. When the Civil Rights Movement finally turned the tables in the 50s and 60s, African Americans had known over 200 years of slavery followed by a century of racial segregation. Even then, they were at the bottom of society and lacked the economic ease, cultural background, and social connections to effectively climb the social ladder. Education was a case in point as it had been segregated, with Black institutions seriously underfunded. That is why around the same time President Kennedy – followed by President Johnson – introduced affirmative action as a way of speeding up the transition towards a more equal society. Isn't it ironic, then, that the bill that put an end to racial segregation, namely the 1964 Civil Rights Act, was used to make affirmative action illegal? If the Supreme Court had until now seen no contradiction, what has changed is in fact the nature of the Court itself, with 6 Republican-appointed justices (out of 9), three of whom were nominated by Donald Trump. For example <i>Roe v Wade</i>, another landmark decision, was also overturned last year, making it possible for States to ban abortion. This, of course, does not mean that all criticisms against affirmative action are strictly ideological.</p> <p>Some of today's challenges can make affirmative action look rather inadequate. First of all, it appears that in the 60 years that it has been implemented, it hasn't really succeeded in uplifting the community as a whole – making it something of a Band-Aid on a gaping wound. One might even argue that the focus on race has drawn attention away from economic injustices, which affect African Americans disproportionately. As Bero pointed out, wealthy and/or well-connected students often get preferential treatment, at the expense of <i>all</i> the other students. Perhaps those are the people Mr Zhao should be worried about.</p> <p>The obvious solution, then, could be to replace race-based affirmative action with socio-economic affirmative action, which would comply with the Court's literal interpretation of the Civil Rights Act while helping many disadvantaged Black students. Unfortunately, things are not that simple. Indeed, some groups have asked the Supreme Court to look into Thomas Jefferson High School's decision to use geographic and economic quotas, which they suspect to be a disguised form of race-based affirmative action. In a country where race and class have been intertwined for so long, it has become nearly impossible to address one without addressing the other.</p>
<p><i>Conclusion (introduite par un connecteur logique)</i></p>	<p>To conclude, Tayo Bero's palpable anger is understandable as it is clear that in the short term the African American community will suffer from the end of affirmative action – while the structural issues that plague American society remain unaddressed.</p>