

How affirmative action helps the rich

It is another way for privileged students to get a leg up, including in higher ed.

BY JONATHAN ZIMMERMAN

By now, you've read about how very rich people allegedly faked their children's test scores and athletic prowess to get them into elite colleges. But here's what you might have missed: In some cases, the parents apparently falsified their kids' ethnicities, too.

Affirmative action, like sports, has become another way for privileged Americans to get a leg up. Of course, our colleges should give a boost to disadvantaged applicants. But affirmative action mostly benefits well-to-do kids, just as every other aspect of the college admissions system does.

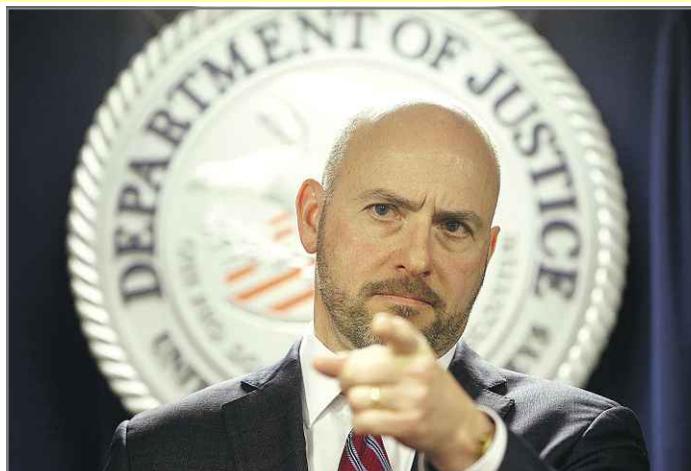
In a recent lawsuit alleging discrimination against Asian-American applicants at Harvard, for example, the university's own analysis showed that 71 percent of African-American and Latino students there came from wealthy backgrounds. And the admissions preference for black applicants was almost twice as large as the boost for students from families making \$60,000 a year or less.

I don't see how we can justify that. And here I heartily agree with former President Barack Obama, who has said his daughters shouldn't receive the same affirmative-action boost that he did; he was raised by a single mom who often struggled, while they grew up in steady comfort and affluence.

"We have to think about affirmative action and craft it in such a way where some of our children who are advantaged aren't getting more favorable treatment than a poor white kid who has struggled more," Obama told a group of minority journalists in 2008.

But that's precisely the system we have now, as the Harvard case confirmed. So we shouldn't be surprised that people game affirmative action, too, by reporting the race or ethnicity that will benefit them the most.

On the website College Confidential, where students compare notes about their experiences, a student who identified as black, Latina and Pacific Islander confessed that she had



U.S. Attorney for Massachusetts Andrew Lelling announces indictments last week in a college admissions bribery scandal.

reported herself simply as African-American. "Of course it's unfair," she wrote in 2011. "But people will do anything to get that little extra advantage in admissions."

That's almost a perfect description for the current scandal, which revealed just how much certain parents will do, and just how low they will sink, to get that extra advantage. They paid large sums to a well-connected college admissions adviser, who in some cases faked their kids' ethnicities. He also bribed test

administrators — to bring up the children's scores, of course — as well as college coaches, who falsely said they were recruiting these students.

That's because athletes get the biggest admissions preference. According to a 2002 study of 30 selective colleges, athletes received a 48 percent boost, as compared with 18 percent for minorities.

And guess what? Most of the recruited athletes are wealthy — and white. They participate in sports such as sailing and water

polo, which require the kind of training and facilities that poorer students usually can't afford. Not surprisingly, coaches from both of these sports were implicated in this week's scandal.

I've got no problem with giving preference to athletes who come from disadvantaged circumstances. But most of them don't. Outside of sports such as football and basketball, the athletes are wealthy — just like most of the minorities who are admitted.

"There can be no separate college admissions system for the wealthy," said Boston's U.S. attorney, Andrew Lelling, announcing charges against 50 people last week. But we already have such a system. Our elite colleges remain playgrounds of the rich, where people come from different racial backgrounds but mostly from the same ZIP codes.

And that might be the biggest scandal of all.



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The University of Southern California said it fired two athletic officials indicted in the college bribery scandal and will handle students implicated in the situation case by case.

ers, but was not approved by the New York State Legislature. Congestion pricing remains one of the only options on the table to ease New York City's twin ills of traffic congestion and under-funded public transit. Now is the time.

James T. Rooney, Centerport

Reflections on college bribery scandal

People have paid colleges forever to get their kids in, but it's normally with a large donation, which while unfair, is not illegal ["College admissions scandal," News, March 13].

I hope those who have com-

plained about affirmative action will speak up now against this bribery scandal. Affirmative action is a noble act, with the intention of giving underprivileged children a chance to escape poverty and manual labor. The positive results benefit us all.

Yes, some kids may lose a place, and that's regrettable, but in our country, our goal is to help those who work hard but still need assistance. We are not supposed to continue a system in which these people never get the opportunity to rise above their upbringing, which is of no fault of their own.

The courts need to come down hard on all involved in the scandal, and not show leniency because of status.

Robert Broder, Stony Brook

I was furious to read about movie stars allegedly making payoffs to get their children into elite colleges. Many people have seen their own children

struggle for admittance to certain colleges, only to be denied. I hope those who got in without merit are denied full matriculation.

Beth Pruzan, Huntington

A lot of people in the world of alternative education, which comprises schools and organizations that build on the interests of the learner, rather than a curriculum-centered approach, are scratching their heads about the college bribery scandal.

We are fed up with simplistic tests that high school students are pushed to take to get into college. Many colleges have found that these tests are not good predictors of success, and more than 1,000 have made the SAT or ACT optional for applicants. Many of these barriers have been broken down by home-schoolers and alternative-school graduates who send colleges portfolios of actual work.

Also, many parents and stu-

dents from alternative approaches are not so interested in elite colleges, whose traditional methods are out of date. These students are more interested in higher education alternatives that have more individualized and innovative approaches, such as Goddard College in Vermont, with its low-residency program, and Antioch College in Ohio, a pioneer in work experience education.

Jerry Mintz, Roslyn Heights

Editor's note: The writer is director of the Alternative Education Resource Organization, a nonprofit network.

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