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I understand the reasoning behind affirmative action, but in this day and age it has become obsolete and excessively racially-oriented.

The most common argument supporting affirmative action is that it benefits racial minorities who have been historically wronged—African-Americans, Hispanics/Latinos, Native Americans. But this completely ignores another significant racial minority: Asian-Americans.

Studies have consistently shown that affirmative action has the worst impact on Asian-Americans, not whites. Asians have to score 200-300 points higher on the SAT compared to other racial minorities, much higher than Caucasians. Asians are held to much more stringent schoolwork and extracurricular standards than other minorities or whites.

But like our fellow racial minority groups, Asian-Americans also have a long history of facing prejudice and discrimination. The Chinese Exclusion Act. 20th century exploitation of Asian laborers. Asian immigrants being beaten and lynched. Racist depictions in the media (think Oscars). As a Chinese-American who treasures my cultural heritage, I myself have been the victim of racial slurs and derogatory comments, and yet under affirmative action I am still judged negatively by colleges because of my race.

Clearly, the idea that affirmative action "corrects" for racism isn't valid when Asians are completely ignored. It's frustrating that proponents still claim it levels out the playing field for long-suffering racial minorities when Asians are clearly being hurt by affirmative action.

Another pro-affirmative action argument points to the disproportionately high levels of poverty among racial minorities, especially blacks and Hispanics. Impoverished students are naturally disadvantaged in college applications because they can't afford SAT tutors, private schools, or music lessons. And since disadvantaged students are disproportionately of racial minorities, affirmative action helps correct for this discrepancy.

I do sympathize with this argument. I lived in Oakland until I was 15. I saw firsthand how growing up socioeconomically disadvantaged places an enormous strain on certain students, many of whom were of racial minorities traditionally helped by affirmative action.

However, this doesn't justify affirmative action. In fact, this directly supports a much more beneficial alternative: instead of focusing on race, colleges should emphasize socioeconomic diversity. They should encourage more applicants who are impoverished and first-generation, and review them within the context of their background—being lenient if they have slightly less extracurriculars or lower scores.

By weighing socioeconomic diversity more heavily than pure racial diversity, this will still particularly benefit many of those same racial minorities, because they have much higher levels of poverty than Caucasians. This will thereby maintain exposure to different cultures in college communities, without imposing racial quotas that are blatantly unfair to certain racial groups like Asian-Americans.

Martin Luther King, Jr. once said: "I have a dream…that someday my three little girls will be judged by the content of their character and not the color of their skin." Perhaps universities should take a closer look at what that champion of civil rights had to say, and evaluate college applicants by their merit—within their socioeconomic context—instead of by the color of their skin.