



Interview: Race-based admission policy at U.S. universities puts Asians at disadvantage, says expert

August 9, 2017

Admission policies employed by most U.S. universities, in which skin color plays a major role, have put Asians at a disadvantage, a U.S. legal expert has said.

"The use of race in various ways is a standard part of how university administrators are brought up to believe their job is done," Ilya Shapiro, a senior fellow at the U.S.-based think tank Cato Institute, told Xinhua on Tuesday.

Including race as an impact factor when evaluating an applicant for a job or admission to a program is rooted in the concept of affirmative action, when first appeared in the United States in the 1960s to combat racial discrimination.

The Supreme Court supported the notion that race can be a factor to "increase diversity" in a ruling in the late 1970s, changing the main goal of affirmative action from promoting racial justice to guaranteeing racial diversity in institutions.

But decades later, this ruling began to show serious side effects, as the line between upholding racial diversity and racial discrimination started to blur, and certain racial groups, primarily Asians and Asian Americans, began to feel at a disadvantage.

"Even though Asians and Asian Americans represent the largest growing group of college applicants, their numbers at the selective institutions remain as they were 20, 25 years ago, so there is a certain disconnect," Shapiro said.

"Studies by Princeton University show that it's not the thumb on the scales, it's a brick," said Shapiro, who is also the editor-in-chief of the Cato Supreme Court Review.

"I think oftentimes university administrators might have a stereotype of Asians as being one-dimensional, perhaps just being interested in math and science, that's definitely a form of racism," Shapiro said.

Furthermore, the more prestigious the university, the bigger the differences in academic qualifications by racial groups appear, Shapiro said, pointing to Ivy League universities including Harvard.

"People in the lowest 25 percent in academic achievement at a given institution are racial minorities, generally Latinos, blacks, and native Americans," Shapiro said.

The unfair practice does not only hurt Asians and Asian Americans, but also those who are given preferred treatment, Shapiro said.

"They end up in a place oftentimes where the work is more advanced and they end up switching into easier majors and they don't do as well on the bar exam or the medical licensing exams," he said.

Due to these unfair policies, several universities, including Harvard, University of Texas and University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, have been sued over allegations that they discriminated against certain racial groups.

Shapiro said it may take at least three years before the case arrives before the Supreme Court for a final ruling, but the Department of Justice has recently announced that it has launched a probe into whether universities broke the law with their admission policies.

"Educational administrators have proven again and again that they're not simply using race as one factor, it's an overwhelming factor in so many cases and they are not being transparent," Shapiro said.

He said U.S. universities should not use race as a factor during admission at all. "People should be judged on their merits, by the content of their character, not the color of their skin, as Dr. Martin Luther King said."

"It's good to have people with different perspectives but I don't think skin color or an artificially designated race is a good way of doing that," he added.

In addition, U.S. universities should be more transparent in their admission processes, because in theory then they should be able to demonstrate that they're following the law, Shapiro said.