

Discussion Guide, Beginner

Episode 9

In 1974, Allan Bakke, a white male, applied to medical school at the University of California, Davis. He was rejected, even though his grades and test scores were higher than some of the minority candidates who were admitted that year.

Bakke sued the medical school. The U.S. Supreme Court decided that he should be let in. Schools could use race as one factor among others in deciding which candidates to accept, but they could not use race as a quota, by reserving some seats for minority candidates only.

Was the decision of the U.S. Supreme Court just? Consider the following questions as you think about the morality of affirmative action.

1.

Do you think Bakke was treated unfairly? Does he have a right to be considered solely on the basis of his academic and personal merit?

1.

Bakke couldn't help that he was born a member of the white majority. This is a factor over which he had no control, so why should he be rejected from medical

school just because he's white?

1.

Bakke did nothing to be born with the capacity for high achievement. His natural talents are a factor over which he had no control, so why is he entitled to be judged only by his personal and academic merit?

1.

Often, naturally gifted athletes go to college on scholarship. However, their natural talents are a factor over which they had no control. Is it just that scholarships should go to gifted athletes but not to other people?

1.

What is merit? Often, minority groups receive better care from minority doctors and better representation from minority lawyers. Does the ability to serve the needs of minority communities constitute a form of merit? Shouldn't schools train doctors and lawyers who will provide the best care and the best representation?

1.

Barbara Grutter applied to law school at the University of Michigan. She was rejected, even though her grades were higher than some of the minority candidates who were admitted. This time, the US Supreme Court decided that the University of Michigan had acted lawfully, because racial diversity at law school was an important goal. Do you agree? Was the decision of the US Supreme Court just or unjust?

1.

In the United States, African Americans have historically been disadvantaged because of slavery and racial segregation. Is affirmative action in college admissions an acceptable form of compensation for historical disadvantage?