by Kenneth Lee

In the politically correct atmosphere of college campuses, young conservatives across the country have been incessantly assailed by administrators and leftist activists. The Cornell Review has once again been the target of anger and distortion. The November 2 issue of the Cornell Daily Sun reported that "during a chaotic and volatile debate that at times degenerated into shouting and name-calling, representatives from the Cornell Minority Business Students' Association (MBSA) and The Cornell Review discussed affirmative action in Kaufmann Auditorium." By reading the article, it appears as if uncouth Review staffers provoked hate-filled rhetoric against the innocent members of the MBSA. The Daily Sun wants its unwitting readers to believe that scenario. However, the events that transpired during the debate were far different from the version told by the Sun.

Reality, MBSA members resorted to ad hominem attacks and used faulty logic to corroborate their argument, while we behaved with proper decorum. The name-calling was perpetuated by one sole MBSA member. At one point, in the debate, a member of the audience posed an impromptu question: He wondered if the US government is culpable for perpetuating racism, how can they expect the same government to help disadvantaged minorities? Unable to answer the question, the MBSA member hurled epithets at the audience member by calling him "ignorant." Offered at the provocative attack, the disgruntled audience member stormed out of the audience. That was the only name-calling that occurred in the entire debate. No other debaters uttered any other epithet. Yet the Sun article proclaims that both sides indulged in name-calling. Not so.

The Sun also conveniently neglected to mention that the two moderators were affiliated with the MBSA. They would often interject their biased opinions on the behalf of the MBSA. Frustrated at the lack of objectivity, Review Contributing Editor Steve Wulf asked the moderators to refrain from their biased remarks. Then one of the moderators promptly rejoined that the debate was being sponsored by the MBSA, and therefore they set the rules. But the debaters weren't the only one guilty of unbridled behavior. The partisan audience members often shouted down the Review staff. Although their lack of civility was deplorable, their scurrilous arguments by far were the worst. Most of their contentions were blatantly false, and they often distorted our views to demonize opponents of affirmative action.

The MBSA attempted to portray us as right-wing racists by placing people into groups, like people from less fortunate backgrounds and Neo-Nazi hate mongers. When any debater criticized any aspect of affirmative action, the MBSA members labeled the person as a racist. Never mind that a recent Gallup poll discovered that 60% of Democrats and 80% of Republicans opposed affirmative action.

The Review concurred that in a country of 250 million people, bigotry unfortunately will abound. Furthermore, we agree that many of the minorities grow up in more disadvantaged backgrounds in comparison with whites. However, our stance on affirmative action has always been that it ultimately hurts the recipients instead of helping them. The track record of the program corroborates our claim. University of Pennsylvania, Berkeley graduates fewer black students today than it did 20 years ago. Moreover, only 3 out of 10 black students in the Cornell Engineering School graduate.

Furthermore, this program exacerbates racial tensions. Black students will unfortunately be treated as inferiors because people will always assume that they were accepted solely because of their race. Even a black student with a 1600 SAT score will have his credentials doubted.

The main problem with affirmative action is not that it hurts a white or Asian student; students from racial groups who are denied academic admission are probably marginal anyway. The real problem is that it hinders progress for black Americans.

Another spurious "fact" employed by the MBSA was their claim that America proclaims success for minorities and women. Never mind that historically marginalized groups, such as the Jewish and Japanese-Americans, now have higher family income than WASPs. A country with 250 million people will obviously have its share of racists, but to claim that a huge conspiracy exists is patently false.

And as Contributing Editor Matt Grossman explained during the debate, economic factors have virtually eliminated rampant racism. He cited historical examples to buttress his point. Nazi Germany bought goods from Jewish storeowners, and Southern train operators at first ignored segregation laws to avoid the cost of having to run separate cars they only later imposed the laws after being threatened with fines. They knew it was not economically expedient to discriminate.

One audience member argued that since Japanese-Americans received compensation from the US government for being placed into internment camps, black Americans are also entitled to restitution for past injustions. Once again, the issue is muddled by confusing group and individual rights. Japanese-Americans as a group did not receive restitution; only the individuals interned into camps received payment.

Throughout the whole debate, I was often singled out because of my Asian ethnicity. At one point, a debater intimated that the only reason I was at Cornell was because of affirmative action. Obviously, he had little understanding of how affirmative action actually works. Instead it assists the "underrepresented minorities." Asians represent only 3% of the nation, but at Cornell Asians constitute 19% of the school.

Since Asians are actually over represented, affirmative action does not apply to us in the realm of undergraduate admissions.
Since Asians are actually over represented, affirmative action does not apply to them in the realm of undergrad college admissions. In fact, it may hinder their chances. For example, Asians have one of the highest SAT scores when categorized by ethnic groups. Because of these facts, the Justice Department investigated claims of anti-Asian bias at elite universities such as Harvard and Cal Berkeley.

Opinions on affirmative action held by Review staffers stretch a wide gamut—from wacky weird to Wulf weird. Some members support the entire elimination of affirmative action and instead want vigorous enforcement of civil rights legislation.

I, on the other hand, hold a different view. Instead of abolishing the program, it should be modified and used for individual basis, because categorizing people into racial groups is demeaning and ineffective. Individuals, regardless of race, who have faced great adversity should receive special consideration. This would mean that a black student from the ghettos, as well as a white student from a low-income family would benefit from affirmative action; however, a Cosby kid would not. Not only would this legitimize affirmative action, it would also be fair and effective.

Affirmative action is undoubtedly an emotional and volatile issue. Although designed to help disadvantaged minorities, it has instead prolonged the vicious cycle of poverty for black Americans.

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