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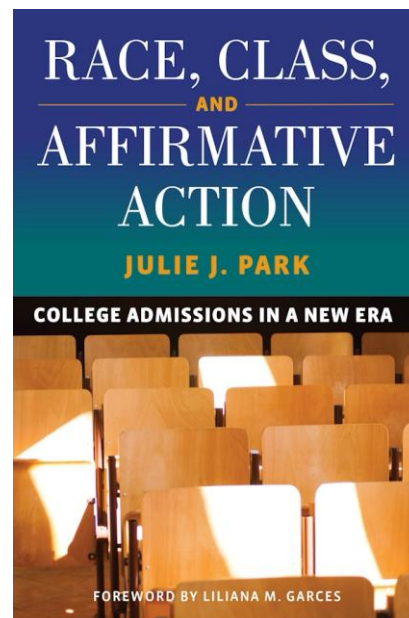
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Julie Park's *Race, Class, and Affirmative Action* is a timely and accessible intervention into one of the most urgent debates in contemporary higher education: how selective colleges and universities should pursue equity after the Supreme Court of United States's (SCOTUS) 2023 ruling in *Students for Fair Admissions v. Harvard* and *Students for Fair Admissions v. University of North Carolina*, which Park identifies as "a fallout to advance civil rights" in higher education (p. 1).

Written in the aftermath of the *Students for Fair Admissions (SFFA)* ruling, the book is both an explanation of what happened, such as the implications for admissions and campus life, and a call to action for what higher education institutions could do next. Park argues that the problem facing selective admissions did not begin with the Court's decision, but before the SCOTUS ruling, selective admissions was already a deeply unequal system shaped by race, class, geography, family wealth, school resources, legacy preferences, athletic recruitment, early decision policies, standardized testing, extracurricular opportunities, and other forms of accumulated advantage. The restriction of conventional race-conscious admissions did not create inequality, but removed one of the limited tools institutions had to address inequality. The book is important because it arrives at a moment of fear and institutional uncertainty. In the post-*SFFA* era, many colleges and universities have struggled to understand what is legally permissible, while some institutions have treated the decision as if all attention and consideration of race and diversity is banned. In this book, Park emphasizes that *SFFA* restricts conventional race-conscious admissions, but it does not prevent institutions from fulfilling their responsibilities or from creating race-neutral environments.



Park is a professor of education at the University of Maryland, College Park. Her scholarship focuses on race and diversity in higher education, especially college admission. She also examined the relationship among admissions policy, diversity, and student life in her earlier two books: *When Diversity Drops: Race, Religion, and Affirmative Action in Higher Education* (Park, 2013) and *Race on Campus: Debunking Myths with Data* (Park, 2018). In addition to her scholarly credentials, Park served as a consulting expert on the side of Harvard in the *Students for Fair Admissions* case and as co-director of the College Admissions Futures Co-Laborative.

After a foreword by Liliana M. Garces, Park starts with placing readers in the post-*SFFA* moment in the introduction. Park describes early enrollment declines among underrepresented racially minoritized (URM) students at several selective institutions and explains why the ruling has generated uncertainty. The book is organized into three main sections and seven chapters.

Chapters 1 and 2 serve as the first main part of the book, providing background on the current situation in selective college admissions and explaining the SCOTUS ruling. In Chapter 1, “Selective College Admissions: A Broken System, Even Before the Supreme Court Ruling,” Park points out that inequitable selective admissions already existed before the SCOTUS ruling. Park describes various forces to “push-out” (p. 19) racially minoritized and low-income students from higher education, including segregation, uneven schooling, wealth inequality, and institutionalized racism. She also analyzes factors such as expensive extracurricular activities, private college counseling, athletic recruitment, and nonresident recruitment, that “pull-in” (p. 26) students who enjoy some privilege. For example, while many students are facing difficulties with college admissions, some families spend thousands of dollars on high school research programs to help students “publish” research papers. Park uses this example to show how wealth can be converted into the appearance of merit within the broader educational system. In Chapter 2, “Students for Fair Admissions v. Harvard: What Exactly Happened?” Park explains the *SFFA* lawsuit and its impact and implications on race-conscious admissions and campus life. Notably, Park does not put Asian American students either as victims of affirmative action or as beneficiaries of diversity.

The second major section includes Chapters 3 to 6, which discuss the political needs, responses, and initiatives in the changing admissions landscape. Chapter 3, “Pursuing Diversity in a New Era: Easier Said than Done,” turns to the question of alternatives to expanding access after the SCOTUS ruling. Park examines the possibilities and limits of pursuing diversity through adversity, life circumstances, and socioeconomic status after the restriction of race-conscious admissions. Park also cautions that colleges cannot simply replace race with class or adversity and expect racial diversity to recover automatically. Although socioeconomic diversity is important, class cannot replace race since they operate differently. In this chapter, Park shows that class-based or race-neutral approaches require careful design, institutional investment, and structural changes. In Chapter 4, “Test-Optional, Test-Required, or Test-Free? The Debate over Standardized Tests,” Park reviews the arguments for and against standardized testing, and examines the

contested role of standardized testing in post-ruling admissions. She defines standardized testing as a “gray” (p. 102) area and argues that the research does not point in only one direction and that institutions need to weigh the pros and cons of different testing policies. Even though Park acknowledges that test scores might be useful in some cases, she doubts the extent to which required testing can advance racial diversity, especially after the restriction of race-conscious admissions. Chapter 5, “Inequality Beyond Tests: Extracurricular Activities, Letters of Recommendation, and Essays,” expands the discussion beyond standardized testing. Park argues that these “nonstandardized” materials are also shaped by inequality, such as unequal access to money, time, school resources, family knowledge, and institutional support, and should be evaluated in relation to context and opportunity. In other words, a student’s achievements should be read in relation to the opportunities available to them, not as though every applicant had access to the same resources. Chapter 6, “Implications for Campus Life: How Demographic Changes Affect Students’ Lives,” shifts the discussion from admissions policy to student on-campus life and campus climate. Park argues that declines in racial diversity change institutional demographics and, as a result, also affect peer relationships, students’ sense of belonging, racial climate, student organizations, classroom dialogue, and access to supportive communities. This argument connects directly to her work in *When Diversity Drops*, in which she examined how policy changes in California affected everyday student life following the ban on race-conscious admissions (Park, 2013). Moreover, Park highlights the importance of middle-class and moderate-income Black students as bridge-builders across racial and socioeconomic divides, especially in historically White institutions. More importantly, rather than accepting “repressive legalism” (p. 150), which describes how administrators may retreat from lawful equity work, she argues that colleges must continue supporting diversity-related programs that remain legally defensible.

The third part of this book is Chapter 7 “We Won’t Go Back: Reimagining Admissions in an Era of Repressive Legalism,” which concludes the book and calls for a rethinking and reimagining of selective college admissions. Park believes that current selective admissions is more of a “pay-to-play among the broader pool of talented students” (p. 162) system. This phrase is one of the book’s most important takeaways because it summarizes Park’s central critique of meritocracy that although talent matters, opportunity is unequally produced, purchased, and recognized. Park argues that institutions must both start equity-oriented practices and stop practices that reproduce privilege.

A limitation of the book, acknowledged by Park, is that the admissions landscape is changing so rapidly that some details may quickly become outdated, as it is a response to a shifting legal and political environment. However, this is not a flaw in Park’s book. Readers should take the book as an analysis and a rethinking at a particular moment rather than as a final word on post-*SFFA* admissions.

This book is closely related to several published works. For example, it extends Park’s earlier scholarship in *When Diversity Drops* and *Race on Campus* by connecting admissions policy to campus racial climate (Park, 2013, 2018). It also speaks to Guinier’s critique of testocracy and merit (Guinier, 2015) and Warikoo’s work on

elite admissions and fairness (Warikoo, 2016, 2022). What distinguishes this book is Park's post-*SFFA* synthesis. Many works have separately criticized affirmative action bans, standardized testing, or elite admissions. Park brings these debates together and asks what institutions could and should do now.

It is a powerful and necessary book for the post-*SFFA* era for all people related to academia. For admissions professionals and higher education leaders, this book offers warning and guidance. For scholars, it provides a synthesis of research and a model of academic writing for public consumption. For students and families, it reveals the hidden structures behind selective admissions. For policymakers, it demonstrates why race-neutral approaches alone are unlikely to achieve racial justice unless applied with necessary institutional transformations. In a moment when many institutions are retreating, Park urges them to rethink, take action, and lead the pursuit of equity. This book reminds readers that the law may restrict certain tools, but it does not absolve colleges and universities of their responsibility to pursue equity.

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About the Reviewer

Yingyuan Sun is a Ph.D. candidate in the Department of Educational Policy, Research, and Administration at the University of Massachusetts Amherst. Her work explores how mentorship, institutional structures, and generative AI shape students' academic identity trajectories and identity development. Since 2021, she has served as a graduate research assistant, administrative associate, and co-coordinator of the Youth Board at the Center of Racial Justice and Youth-engaged Research, UMass Amherst, co-creating a youth-centered space with/for high school students in Western Massachusetts and neighboring areas. Her current research examines youth leadership development, youth participatory action research 2.0, and the *publication-socialization* experiences of international doctoral students. Her work has been presented at the American Educational Research Association and the Comparative and International Education Society. She serves as chair of publicity



and communications for the *Journal of Equity & Excellence in Education*, and as an executive member of the AERA Division G graduate committee. Moreover, she is also a Co-PI for the *SUMERU: One Thought, One Thousand Worlds*, an interdisciplinary, education- and research-oriented transmedia interactive narrative and serious game project with Northeastern University.

About the Author

Julie J. Park is a professor in the Department of Counseling, Higher Education, and Special Education at the College of Education, University of Maryland, College Park. An expert on race and diversity in higher education, she served as a consulting expert in the landmark case *Students for Fair Admissions v. Harvard* on the side of Harvard. She is the author of three books on college admissions and campus life, including *Race on Campus: Debunking Myths with Data*. Her work with the College Admissions Futures Co-Laborative examining the impact of test-optional policies and future of college admissions was funded by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. Her research has also been funded by the National Science Foundation. Besides publishing widely in academic journals, she has also published op-eds in outlets like the *Chronicle of Higher Education*, *Inside Higher Ed*, and the *Washington Post*. She earned her Ph.D. in Education from UCLA (Higher Education and Organizational Change), with a graduate concentration in Asian American Studies, and B.A. at Vanderbilt University (Sociology, English, and Women's Studies).



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