

**Reaction to the presentation by Dr. Walter Allen on “And the Last Shall Be First:  
Racial Diversity, Distributive Justice and Affirmative Action”.**

Dr. Allen’s presentation started by giving a long overview of the history of Black oppression in the United States. He used this history as a segway into why programs such as affirmative action are needed. My first reaction to his presentation is that he spent too much time talking about history and not enough time talking about affirmative action, justice, and reasons that the last will be first. Dr. Allen’s audience consisted mainly of student affairs professionals, student affair’s students, and faculty in higher education. Most, if not all, of these people are aware of the history of Blacks in America. Though I know the history is important in order to establish a need for affirmative action, I wish Dr. Allen would have done a brief overview of the history and then focused more on the continued need for programs like affirmative action in today’s society.

Though he briefly noted the Supreme Court’s decision at University of Michigan, he did not expand specifically on its impact in higher education. From his comments, I know that he thinks more needs to be done than what the University of Michigan case allows for, but he really did not explain this too well. After mentioning the case, Dr. Allen moved on to talk about Derrick Bell’s principles of racial loss and gain, which mainly center upon society’s willingness to support the rights of Black people only when it serves an economic or political interest of Whites. I felt that he over-generalized America by assuming that all Whites will do anything to advance their own interest, not advance Blacks’ interest. I agree with him that steps need to continue to be taken to help people of color, disabled, women, and others find an equal playing field with White men,

but I am not sure that I agree with his ways of presenting this stance. In part, I think I felt somewhat attacked sitting in the audience as a White person. Dr. Allen's way of presenting really frustrated me because I feel that I hold many similar values and thoughts as him, but I felt as if he would not even recognize that there are Whites who will fight the battle to help minorities gain more status.

I know that I am probably coming across as fairly critical of the presentation. In reality, I am a proponent of programs such as affirmative action, but I also believe that more needs to be assessed than simply race. I think Dr. Allen recognizes this, but his focus really was the Black race in particular. I wish that someone with his education and influence would have at least mentioned factors like socioeconomic status and varying school systems; I think these factors should be accounted for within programs like affirmative action.

On a whole, I enjoyed the presentation, though it made me frustrated for the reasons mentioned above. Dr. Allen's thoughts challenged me to make sure that I am fighting for the rights of everyone in society.