

## Ethel Branch's Responses to the Questionnaire from the Coalition for a Diverse Harvard

### **1. How important should diversity be at Harvard? What strategies should the University pursue regarding this? (Please discuss specific programs, including Ethnic Studies, and policies if you can.)**

Diversity at Harvard should be of vital importance to the University because what Harvard does best is recruit and train the leaders of tomorrow for the United States and the world. Because of this profound role, it has great capacity to facilitate transformative change at home and abroad. Diversity at Harvard ensures the diversity of future American leadership, which is necessary because we are a pluralistic society, and also ensures diversity of global leaders, which is ever more important as we become an increasingly globalized world facing issues that transcend political boundaries such as climate change.

One cannot truly know the struggles or experience of another without having lived that experience. Race and culture play a key role in shaping the unique struggles or experiences of individuals in our country, and so in order to ensure that the needs of all communities in our country are considered and addressed, we need leaders who come with the intimate and personal knowledge or relatability to all of our diverse communities in order to ensure equitable distribution of public resources to all Americans. And so it is critical that Harvard, as the oldest and most influential continuously operating higher educational institution in this country, continue to ensure a diverse student body.

Finally, I find it to be true that people tend to be more kind to people from other racial and cultural backgrounds when people know someone from that group already. It has somewhat of a humanizing effect. In order to maximize this, and to promote peace and human rights in this country and abroad, I think it is important that the Harvard student body be as diverse as possible.

#### STRATEGIES

W.E.B. Dubois once said "I was at Harvard, but not of it." That quote strongly resonated with me as a student at Harvard College where I felt alien to the environment, having come from a very poor, rural Native American community. I think many diverse students at Harvard experience this same phenomenon of isolation from all they know when they enter the gates of Harvard Yard, and the University should take specific steps to ensure that diverse students have as much right to be on campus as the non-diverse students who funnel into the school from Northeastern prep schools. Those steps should include providing counselors for minority students to help them understand how to thrive in the Harvard environment, how to take full advantage of all the University has to offer, and how to leverage their Harvard degree to make the most of their transition into the work world. Additionally, these counselors should work hard to ensure that the cultural transition to Harvard is seamless, or at least minimally stressful. The University should also recruit more faculty of color in order to ensure that students have role models and mentors within the faculty. Likely those faculty will provide an additional source of support for students of color as they transition into the Harvard environment. Those faculty will also likely incorporate fuller, more reflective multicultural content into their curriculum. The University should also adopt recruiting practices like Dartmouth and Stanford and fly minority students in free of cost for visitation periods, or in the recruitment process. The more diverse students feel familiar and comfortable with the Harvard environment, the more likely they will be to enroll in Harvard and contribute to a more diverse environment on campus. To that end, the University should consider implementing an on-campus Junior summer program for promising diverse prospective students so those students can come to campus and actually take courses at Harvard prior to the college application process. Finally, Harvard can do much, much more to make it better known to high school juniors and seniors from diverse schools that students from families making

under a certain income can attend the school free of tuition. This was a barrier to me, and almost led to me not applying to Harvard at all because I was so concerned about the cost of tuition.

**2. How can Harvard encourage more diversity among its alumni leaders and activities? (If not discussed above.)**

I think the more Harvard helps ensure that minority students feel ownership of Harvard while they are on campus, the more those students will want to be engaged with the University as alumni. So this objective can be aided by adopting the strategies set forth above, and also by actively recruiting alumni of color to take leadership roles as alumni, as was done in my case. Alumni leadership of color will have the effect of inspiring other alumni of color to become more active in alumni events. For example, I am certain that all of my friends, many of whom are diverse, will have greater interest in alumni activities due to me running for the Alumni Board.

**3. Please state your views on affirmative action and race-conscious admissions.**

I think affirmative action and race-conscious admissions is an important, meaningful, and necessary way for institutions to ensure equity in a national environment where active efforts, often facilitated by the United States government, have been made to oppress or exclude minorities from full engagement in American society and to restrict them from full access to the freedom and opportunity that this country seeks to advance. These historic truths and systematic and long-standing efforts require active undoing in order to ensure that all Americans have a truly equal opportunity to access all the benefits that American citizenship has to offer. I speak of the legacy of the unwilling relocation of African and Caribbean people to the United States and the enslavement, terrorism, and segregation of them once here; the theft of Native American lands and the genocide of Native American people; and the exclusion and limitation of the free immigration of non-Western European immigrants, such as through the Chinese Exclusion Act and subsequent immigration quotas and anti-immigrant policies such as what we see on the Mexican border today. This legacy has adversely impacted the asset base and wealth of contemporary descendants of African American, Native American, Asian American, and Latino people in this country. The lack of wealth among significant sectors of these groups means that a disproportionate number of their children, as compared to non-minority children, do not have access to the type of nutrition, health, and education resources that would give them a strong advantage in the college admissions process, or in the work application process. Hence, affirmative action and race-conscious admissions is necessary to ensure that all Americans have fair and equal access to American academic institutions, work places, and sectors of society. To withhold this equal opportunity of access cuts sharply against the ideals of equality, freedom, and democracy that our country was founded upon but has failed to live up to for so long.

**4. What do you think Harvard's role should be in creating a more equitable, inclusive and just society?**

Please refer back to my answers to the above questions. I think Harvard's race-conscious admissions process is an important and meaningful way for the University to create a more equitable, inclusive and just society by ensuring diverse leadership for our country. It will be devastating if the University does not prevail in its admissions lawsuit. However, that is just the bare minimum of what Harvard should be doing to ensure that national and global leadership is truly reflective of the full, complex and diverse composition of American and global society. By ensuring maximum diversity, the University could do much to advance peace and understanding in the world, and to ensure that the needs of all communities in national and global society are addressed, and hopefully met.

**5. What steps have you taken to bring diversity and inclusion to Harvard, to your workplace, and/or to an organization that you have been involved with?**

When at Harvard College, I worked to recruit Native American students to Harvard both on a volunteer basis through the Harvard University Native American Program (HUNAP) and as an employee through the Undergraduate Minority Recruitment Program. Once students arrived on campus, I worked hard to ensure that they felt welcome at Harvard through activities I helped organize through my leadership roles in the Native Americans at Harvard College, Latinas Unidas, and the Minority Students Alliance. As Co-Chair of MSA, I actually led an awareness and support campaign for Affirmative Action when the California schools' policies were under attack.

After college, I went home to the Navajo Indian Reservation and served as the Headmistress of a small public charter high school where I sought to ensure that our students would be Harvard-ready because while I was at Harvard, I often thought of my reservation classmates who were smarter than me and who should've been there with me, but were not. I wanted to ensure that young people from my community would realize the broadness of their horizon, and would have a better chance of fulfilling their greatest potential. I also knew that the greatest asset of our community was human capital, and I wanted to bring more of the resources that Harvard opens the door to back to my community through building a stronger base of alumni who could help in transforming our community into a healthier and more successful environment with greater opportunities available to our children.

When at Harvard Law School, I similarly recruited Native students and sought to make them feel welcome on campus through my participation and leadership in the Native American Law Students Association.

When I entered the legal profession, I successfully recruited minorities to my law firms, and I volunteered to assist in strengthening the pipeline of Native students applying to and enrolling in law school through giving talks to prospective students whenever asked to do so. I also made myself available whenever HUNAP wanted me to speak with a prospective HLS student. Even as Attorney General of Navajo Nation I made time to speak with any prospective law school or HLS applicants who reached out to me for guidance or with questions. I have also done the same with respect to Harvard College applicants from my community. I work hard to recruit them, and once in, I provide them with all the advice I can think of so they do not have to go through the same difficult adjustment that I went through.