***Grutter v. Bollinger* (2003)**

**Issue:** Affirmative Action in College

**Bottom Line:** Colleges Can Use Race as a Factor in Admissions

**Background**

In 1997, Barbara Grutter, a white Michigan resident, was denied admission to the University of Michigan Law School. Grutter, who had a 3.8 undergraduate grade point average and good standardized test scores, sued the university over the law school's affirmative action policy, which considered race as a factor in admissions. Michigan and many other universities use affirmative action to increase the number of minority students admitted. Grutter claimed that Michigan admitted less-qualified minority applicants in violation of federal civil rights laws and the Fourteenth Amendment, which guarantees citizens "equal protection" under the law.

**Ruling**

The Supreme Court upheld the use of affirmative action in higher education. "Student-body diversity is a compelling state interest that can justify the use of race in university admissions," the Court said. But the Court emphasized that the University of Michigan's policy was acceptable because the school conducted a thorough review of each applicant's qualifications and did not use a racial quota system—meaning it did not set aside a specific number of offers for minority applicants.

**Impact**

Affirmative action, which has its origins in a 1961 executive order issued by President John F. Kennedy, continues to be a contentious issue, with critics charging that it amounts to reverse discrimination. Since 1996, voters in three states—California, Washington, and, most recently, Michigan—have approved laws banning affirmative action in public education, in state government hiring, and the awarding of state contracts. (At Upfrontmagazine.com: a look at the Court's decision in June limiting the use of race in public school integration plans.)

Information from: <http://www.nytimes.com/learning/teachers/featured_articles/20080915monday.html>

**Thematic Question:** How does the topic of rights and responsibility relate to this court case?

**Notes:**