

Trump withdraws Obama guidances backing racial preferences in school admissions

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The Trump administration announced Tuesday that it has rescinded guidelines issued under Barack Obama encouraging schools and colleges to use racial preferences in their admissions processes. While the withdrawn documents did not have the weight of law, the move by Trump sends a signal to universities that they may face prosecution by the Justice Department or a cutoff of funds from the Department of Education if they aggressively pursue so-called “affirmative action” policies.

The joint letter from the Justice and Education departments said they had withdrawn seven letters and documents issued during the Obama years interpreting Supreme Court rulings and advising how institutions could use race as a factor to encourage “diversity,” while remaining within the boundaries set by the court. At the same time, the Education Department reposted a guidance issued under George W. Bush urging “race neutral” admissions policies.

The White House move is aimed at delivering a further blow to the Democratic Party following last week’s Supreme Court ruling barring states from requiring non-union public-sector workers to pay the equivalent of union dues where collective bargaining agreements are in place. That ruling targets a significant source of funding for the Democratic Party, for which the corporatist unions have long served as a cash cow.

It also follows the announcement by Associate Justice Anthony Kennedy of his imminent retirement from the court. Kennedy, who generally voted with the court’s more right-wing bloc, was the swing vote in a number of rulings upholding racial preferences in college admissions. He wrote the 4-3 majority decision in the 2016 *Fisher v. University of Texas at Austin* case upholding the use of race as a factor in making

admissions decisions.

Trump has promised to choose his nominee to replace Kennedy later this month and is virtually certain to name someone prepared to overturn pro-affirmative action precedent. A lawsuit is currently making its way through a Massachusetts federal court and ultimately to the Supreme Court over whether Harvard’s admissions process discriminates against Asian-Americans. The Justice Department has opened a separate investigation into similar allegations against Harvard filed by a coalition of Asian-American groups in 2015.

In rescinding the Obama-era guidelines, Trump also is appealing to right-wing and racist elements among his supporters. His attorney general, Jeff Sessions, said the Justice Department had identified a total of 24 guidance documents to repeal this month, including guidelines focusing on the rights of refugees and people granted asylum to work and federal protections against discrimination based on national origin.

There is, however, nothing progressive or democratic about the policy of racial preferences. In the name of affirmative action, it has been used for decades to cultivate the emergence of privileged elites within minority populations and their elevation into positions of power in government, academia, the media, the trade union bureaucracy and the corporations. This has been accompanied by a brutal assault on the vast majority of minority workers, as part of an overall attack on the working class, leading to a huge growth of social inequality within minority groups.

Affirmative action and racial politics are used to sow divisions in the working class and pit one section of workers against another for a share in the crumbs from the banquet table of the financial-corporate elite.

The Democratic Party, in particular, has made identity politics based on race, gender and sexual

preference the cornerstone of its program. It long ago abandoned any orientation to the working class in order to cultivate a base, beyond Wall Street and the military/intelligence apparatus, among wealthy upper-middle class social layers for whom racial and gender politics and preferences are a means to secure greater wealth and influence.

House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi denounced the withdrawal of the Obama guidelines as “yet another clear Trump administration attack on communities of color.” She was joined by the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, the National Education Association and other Democratic-Party aligned groups.

The reactionary character of affirmative action and identity politics, and the social interests they serve, clearly emerge in recent studies of the growth of economic inequality within racial minorities. A report published last September by the People’s Policy Project, based on Federal Reserve data, showed that the record growth of social inequality in America over the past decade was most acute within racial minorities.

The report showed that among both African-American and Latino populations, some 65 percent own zero percent of the total wealth owned by their respective ethnic groups. The richest 10 percent of African-Americans own 75.3 percent of all wealth owned by African-Americans. The richest 10 percent of Latinos own 77.9 percent of all Latino wealth. Among whites, 74.6 percent of the wealth is owned by the top 10 percent.

During the Obama years, the level of inequality within racial groups skyrocketed. From 2007 to 2016, the top 1 percent of African-Americans increased its share of the wealth of all African-Americans from 19.4 percent to 40.5 percent. Among Latinos, the top 1 percent increased its share from 30.7 percent to 44.7 percent. The figure also increased among whites, but less dramatically, from 31.9 percent to 36.5 percent.

The report also showed that during the Obama administration, wealth for the top 1 percent of African-Americans and Latinos soared, while it declined for the bottom 99 percent within those groups.

These are the material roots of the obsessive focus of upper-middle class layers on racial politics and its relentless promotion by the Democratic Party and its pseudo-left satellites.

Genuine socialism, represented by the Socialist Equality Party, fights to unite the working class and youth behind the demands for free primary and higher education, open admissions and the banning of all discrimination based on race, gender, sexual orientation or national origin.



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