

Student paper defends plan for segregated living spaces at New York University

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The *Washington Square News* (WSN) published an editorial Monday defending the efforts to implement race-based housing at New York University (NYU). The student-run newspaper published its editorial under the headline “Providing Spaces for Black Students Does Not Mean Segregation.”

The statement was produced in response to the outpouring of public opposition triggered by the *World Socialist Web Site*’s exposure of the initiative, which went viral on social media last week.

The first point that must be made about the editorial is that it confirms the initial report by the WSWWS, which stated that NYU was planning on implementing racially segregated student housing. Following this report, NYU issued a statement declaring it “false and misleading,” and the AP posted a fraudulent “fact-check” concluding that the report was “false.”

As the WSN editorial states, the initial petition produced by the Black Violets student group requested “on-campus housing that provides Black-identifying students with a space to celebrate Black culture and find community and support.” It notes that the university issued a statement that it “was working with the authors of the petition to see how they could best achieve their goal of creating a safe space for Black students on campus.”

While the editorial asserts that “NYU has not agreed to provide housing only designed for students of one race,” this is the clear and stated intent of the proposal. And the editorial goes on to explicitly defend racially segregated housing.

The WSN argues that establishing racially separate housing for black students does not amount to segregation because segregation is “a term heavily associated with the creation of white-only spaces under Jim Crow laws.”

“By creating a space for marginalized students in residence halls NYU is not segregating dorms,” WSN writes, “but providing Black students with a supportive place within an institution where they represent just over 10 percent of the previous year’s incoming class.”

The editorial board argues that allowing African American students to live in separate campus housing based on race is no different than established units for first generation students, international students or those interested in French language and culture! They claim further that this would create a space on campus where black students can “feel safe and supported.”

This argument is deeply reactionary. If racially separate housing is necessary to make African-Americans students “feel safe” from their peers, why not separate dining halls, class rooms and ultimately, as under Jim Crow, separate schools? Students must consider seriously the logical outcome of this initiative.

Whether it realizes it or not, the WSN is replicating the arguments of Jim Crow segregationists who insisted that the white and black races could never live together peaceably and therefore segregation was necessary to protect both. The defenders of segregation argued that the separation of the races arose from the customs and desires of both whites and blacks and was therefore beneficial to education.

In *Brown v. Board of Education*, the 1954 case that struck down legal segregation in public schools, the superintendent of Topeka schools, Kenneth McFarland, said that segregation was the outcome of “the social customs of the people.” Here is the exchange:

Q: Have you ever, as an administrator of schools, considered it part of your business to formulate custom—and social customs and usage in the community?

A: Mr. Goodell, I think the point is extremely significant; in fact, it’s probably the major factor in why the Board of Education is defending this lawsuit, and that is we have never considered it, and there is nothing in the record historically, that it’s the place of the public school system to dictate the social customs of the people who support the public school system.

The implementation of Jim Crow laws and customs in the 1900s was not primarily meant, as the WSN claims, to create “white-only spaces” free from blacks, but to drive a physical wedge between black and white workers in the factories and

forestall the reemergence of a united movement of poor white farmers and black sharecroppers that had threatened Democratic Party rule throughout the South in the Populist movement of the 1890s.

Significantly, in attacking the *World Socialist Web Site's* criticism of the housing plans at NYU, WSN cites the WSWs' critique of the *New York Times's* 1619 Project. The WSWs, it notes, "published a series of articles attacking the project for promoting a 'race-based world view' in line with that of the Nazis."

This gets to the heart of the issue. In its critique of the *Times* project, the WSWs denounced the effort to interpret and falsify all of American history entirely through the prism of race and racial conflict. The history of the US was presented as a conflict between "white people" and "black people," in which class divisions and class struggle were entirely excluded.

The "politically motivated falsification of history," we wrote, "legitimizes the effort of the Democratic Party to construct an electoral coalition based on the prioritizing of personal 'identities'—i.e., gender, sexual preference, ethnicity, and, above all, race." The elevation of race into the fundamental category of history and contemporary politics, we explained in the passage to which the WSN objects, "is a mirror image of Trump's own racial politics, and it bears a disturbing resemblance to the race-based world view of the Nazis."

This political logic is carried out in the NYU plan, which is part of an aggressive promotion of racist politics on campuses throughout the country. It cannot be separated from the broader strategy of the Democratic Party and its affiliated media outlets to insist that the basic social category in American society is race, not class.

Racism certainly exists. It is promoted by the state, and by the Trump administration in particular. The White House is actively inciting fascistic violence, as the developments of the past week make clear. However, the claim that black students confront an epidemic of racism on campus, that they need to have segregated housing in order to feel "safe" from white students, is a lie.

The answer to racism, moreover, is not the separation of the races, but the fight to unify workers of all races. Indeed, the promotion of racist politics only plays into the hands of the far right.

It is significant that the WSN begins its editorial by referring to the protests over police violence following the murder of George Floyd by police in May. The Democratic Party responded to the multi-racial protests that erupted in the aftermath of the killing of Floyd by hijacking them and promoting the lie that what was expressed in Floyd's murder was the consequence of "white supremacy," not the violence

of the ruling class and its state.

The outcome is the Democrats' nomination of Joe Biden—an individual with a decades-long history as a representative of the ruling class—and Kamala Harris, an ex-prosecutor who enforced laws targeting the poor and oppressed, including minority workers and youth.

What is expressed in the racist campaign for segregated housing at NYU has nothing to do with the interests of workers of any race. Racial and identity politics express the interests of privileged sections of the upper-middle class who are fighting for positions, including in academia.

It is notable that those promoting the Black Violets' petition have nothing to say about the massive cost of tuition and housing, the enormous cost of attending college and the skyrocketing cost of living, particularly in Manhattan, where the campus is located. Their demands are completely devoid of anything relating to the interests of the working class, of any race, gender or ethnicity.

What limits access to NYU—one of the most elite private universities in the world—for students of all races and ethnicities is above all the immense levels of social inequality that prevail in American society. The average cost of one year at NYU, after financial aid is factored in, is more than \$42,000, or two-thirds of US median household income. On top of this, campus housing, food and living expenses for an NYU student cost an estimated \$100,000 over four years.

The struggle against racism is impossible outside the struggle to unify the working class against capitalism in the fight to establish socialism, which would mean genuine equality for all. Public education must be supported and expanded with trillions of dollars in funding to build new schools and train more teachers and staff members. Higher education must be made free and available to all who wish to attend. It is on this basis that the effort to set aside housing based on race at NYU must be rejected by all students and workers.



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