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The Brand-New “Task Force on New Americans”: Five Questions for Obama

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On November 20, President Barack Obama announced that, by executive order, he would grant deportation relief to roughly 5 million people living in the U.S. illegally. The following day, the President issued a memorandum announcing that he was establishing a White House Task Force on New Americans to integrate immigrants (he did *not* specify “legal”), refugees, and their children economically, civically, and linguistically into American life.¹

Since the memorandum states that the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) shall provide funding and administrative support for the task force, the House Committee on Homeland Security should ask DHS Secretary Jeh Johnson, who will testify at the committee’s December 2 hearing on the impact of the executive order, the following questions:

1. Is it the Administration’s view that we are a “nation of groups,” and is this the vision that will be instilled in the new immigrants? The presidential memorandum that establishes the task force is only 1,227 words long, and not one of these words is “assimilation” or “assimilate.” The memorandum does stress that the federal effort is meant to serve “our Nation’s diverse people” and the “diverse communities that include new Americans.”

Will the task force envision assimilating immigrants and their children as individuals who will become members of the American nation, one of shared experiences? Or will the task force support the policies of the past four decades, under which immigrants are encouraged to see themselves not as Americans but as members of groups and, in the case of immigrants from Asia and Latin America, as members of aggrieved minorities lumped together by the federal bureaucracy as Asians and Hispanics? While “assimilation” does not appear in the memorandum, “integration,” “integrate,” or “integrating” appear 17 times. Does the Administration make a distinction?

2. Which other industrialized countries and which policies does the Administration think should serve as models for integration? The memorandum calls for developing “a Federal immigrant integration strategy that is innovative and competitive with those of other industrialized nations.” Presumably, this means that President Obama finds some integrationist practices overseas to be attractive. In Western Europe, however, the breakdown in social cohesion is even more pronounced than it is in the U.S.² Japan, meanwhile, has opted out of mass immigration altogether and in fact seems bent on finding the answer to caring for an aging society in robotics.³ Canada follows a “mosaic” or “salad bowl” immigration pattern which, while suitable for Canada, is very different from the American melting pot, at least as it used to be practiced.⁴

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3. What role will the National Council of La Raza play in the task force? La Raza (Spanish for “Race”) is a leftist umbrella group that covers several groups that emphasize division, not national unity. President Obama has made former La Raza vice president and top lobbyist Cecilia Muñoz co-chair of the task force, sharing authority with Jeh Johnson. Muñoz, who required an “ethics waiver” to be brought into the Administration, as the situation violates the Administration’s own ban on hiring lobbyists,⁵ has been one of many La Raza alumni to find work in the Administration, a turnstile relationship about which the President himself has boasted.⁶ Government subsidies for La Raza went from \$4.1 million to \$11 million the year after Muñoz joined the Administration,⁷ and the relationship grew tighter. Can Secretary Johnson assure the committee that La Raza will not play a role in the task force?

4. Will affirmative action be a part of this new “integration”? Will it include pressuring lenders to lower home mortgage standards for minorities or coercing communities to integrate through “fair housing” practices? Public Law 94-311 in 1976 provided affirmative action for Hispanics because they “suffer from racial, social,

economic and political discrimination.”⁸ It quickly became clear, however, that extending to immigrants what was at first conceived as a remedy for past wrongs committed against African Americans was internally inconsistent and incoherent. Immigrants, after all, had immigrated to America of their own volition. Ricky Gaull Silberman, vice chairman of the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, recognized this fact by stating that immigrant participation was “the ultimate nightmare of affirmative action. It is its Achilles’ heel.”⁹

The federal government also aggressively markets benefits programs to immigrants, despite promises to American taxpayers that immigrants will not be public charges.¹⁰ Additionally, government pressure on lenders to lower lending standards for minority borrowers—mandated by the Community Reinvestment Act and a practice that La Raza has actively promoted¹¹—contributed mightily to the 2008 recession and devastated immigrants, especially Hispanics.¹²

President Obama’s Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) has also pressured local communities to integrate by force, for example by cutting off federal funds to Westches-

1. News release, “Presidential Memorandum—Creating Welcoming Communities and Fully Integrating Immigrants and Refugees,” The White House, November 21, 2014, <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2014/11/21/presidential-memorandum-creating-welcoming-communities-and-fully-integra> (accessed November 26, 2014).
2. Stephanie Hanes, “Immigration: Assimilation and the Measure of an American,” *The Christian Science Monitor*, July 7, 2013, <http://www.csmonitor.com/USA/Society/2013/0707/Immigration-Assimilation-and-the-measure-of-an-American> (accessed November 26, 2014).
3. BBC News, “Japan May Pick Robots Over Immigrants,” May 17, 2010, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/business/8687196.stm> (accessed November 26, 2014).
4. Howard Palmer, “Mosaic versus Melting Pot: Immigration and Ethnicity in Canada and the United States,” *International Journal*, Summer 1976.
5. Judicial Watch, “NCLR Funding Skyrockets After Obama Hires Its VP,” June 20, 2011, <http://www.judicialwatch.org/blog/2011/06/nclr-funding-skyrockets-after-obama-hires-its-vp/> (accessed November 26, 2014).
6. News release, “Remarks by the President to the National Council of La Raza,” The White House, July 25, 2011, <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2011/07/25/remarks-president-national-council-la-raza> (accessed November 26, 2014).
7. Judicial Watch, “NCLR Funding Skyrockets After Obama Hires Its VP.”
8. Mike Gonzalez, *A Race for the Future: How Conservatives Can Break the Liberal Monopoly on Hispanic Americans* (New York: Crown Forum, 2014).
9. Ibid.
10. Ibid.
11. Judicial Watch, “La Raza Group Teams up With Feds to Push Govt. Aid in Spanish,” July 8, 2011, <http://www.judicialwatch.org/blog/2011/07/la-raza-group-teams-up-with-feds-to-push-govt-aid-in-spanish-2/> (accessed November 26, 2014).
12. Phil Gramm, “Deregulation and the Financial Panic,” *The Wall Street Journal*, February 20, 2009, <http://online.wsj.com/articles/SB123509667125829243> (accessed November 26, 2014).

ter County in New York because HUD deemed the county's integrationist practices insufficiently aggressive.¹³ Does the task force intend to continue these practices or even expand them?

5. Will English be taught to new immigrant children through immersion or through “bilingual programs”? The memorandum mentions that “English language acquisition allows new Americans to attain employment or career advancement and be more active civic participants.” While this is undeniably true, in the past, the liberal approach has been to teach English as a second language or in a bilingual setting, foregoing the immersion model that proved to work for centuries.

This is partly the result of the Bilingual Education Act of 1968, which interprets the prohibitions against discrimination based on national origin as a mandate for schools to have special programs for English-as-a-second-language (ESL) students.¹⁴ The reality has not been a record of success. According to New York City's own Department of Education, 36 percent of ESL students in 2010 had failed a yearly assessment for the previous seven years, and only 30 percent were able to graduate from the program within three years.¹⁵ Does Secretary Johnson envision the task force avoiding these mistakes?

President Obama has already overreached his executive authority by announcing that he would work around Congress and legalize the residency of millions of illegal immigrants. The memorandum he issued the following day, late on a Friday, has not received nearly as much attention but should be seen as a second act. Congress has a responsibility to question Secretary Johnson about the details of the task force's agenda.

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13. Ronal D. Utt, “HUD's Mandatory Minority Relocation Program,” Heritage Foundation *WebMemo* No. 3473, January 31, 2012, <http://www.heritage.org/research/reports/2012/01/huds-mandatory-minority-relocation-program>.

14. Education Commission of the States, “English Language Learner/Bilingual,” <http://www.ecs.org/html/issue.asp?issueID=16> (accessed November 26, 2014).

15. Mike Gonzalez, “The Big Lie We Tell ‘English Learners,’” *The New York Post*, October 6, 2014, <http://nypost.com/2014/10/06/the-big-lie-we-tell-english-learners/> (accessed November 26, 2014).