



Written by [Thomas Sowell](#) on January 14, 2014

Politics Versus Education

Anyone who has still not yet understood the utter cynicism of the Obama administration in general, and Attorney General Eric Holder in particular, should look at the Justice Department's latest interventions in education.

If there is one thing that people all across the ideological spectrum should be able to agree on, it is that better education is desperately needed by black youngsters, especially in the ghettos. For most, it is their one chance for a better life.



Among the few bright spots in a generally dismal picture of the education of black students are those successful charter schools or voucher schools to which many black parents try to get their children admitted. Some of these schools have not only reached but exceeded national norms, even when located in neighborhoods where the regular public schools lag far behind.

Where admission to these schools is by a lottery, the cheers and tears that follow announcements of who has been admitted — and, by implication, who will be forced to continue in the regular public schools — tell the story better than words can.

When the state of Louisiana decided to greatly expand the number of schools available to students by parental choice, rather than by the rigidities of the usual public school system, Attorney General Holder's Justice Department objected on grounds that this was at cross-purposes with the federal government's racial integration goals for the schools.

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In short, Louisiana's attempt to improve the education of children is subordinated by Holder to the federal government's attempt to mix and match black and white students.

If we have learned nothing else after decades of socially divisive and educationally futile racial busing, it should be obvious that seating black kids next to white kids is neither necessary nor sufficient to get them a better education.

The truly despicable intervention by Attorney General Holder is his warning to schools against discipline policies that result in a higher proportion of minority students than white students being punished.

This racial body count method of determining whether there is discrimination by the schools might make sense if we were certain that there could be no differences in behavior that would explain the differences in punishment. But does any sane adult really believe that there cannot be any difference between the behavior of black boys and Asian girls, for example?

There is a lot of make-believe when it comes to racial issues, whether out of squeamishness, political correctness, or expediency. There is also a lot of deliberate racial polarization, and attempts to promote a sense of grievance and fear among black voters, in order to keep their votes in the Democrats'



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What makes this playing politics with school discipline so unconscionable is that a lack of discipline is one of the crushing handicaps in many ghetto schools. If 10 percent of the students in a classroom are disruptive, disrespectful, and violent, the chances of teaching the other 90 percent effectively are very low.

Yet, in the words of the *New York Times*, “The Obama administration speaks out against zero tolerance discipline.” It quotes Attorney General Holder and says that he was “on the mark” when he said that a “routine school disciplinary infraction should land a student in the principal’s office, not in a police precinct.”

In other words, Eric Holder, sitting in Washington, knows better than the thousands of people who run public schools across the country what kinds of sanctions are necessary to preserve some semblance of order in the classrooms, so that hoodlums do not make the education of their classmates impossible.

Like the *New York Times*, Attorney General Holder has made this an issue of “The Civil Rights of Children.” More important, the implied threat of federal lawsuits based on racial body count among students who have been disciplined means that hoodlums in the classroom seem to have a friend in Washington.

But even the hoodlums can end up worse off, if lax discipline in the school lets them continue on in a way of life that usually ends up inside prison walls. Nevertheless, if all this means black votes for the Democrats, that may well be the bottom line for Holder and the Obama administration.

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