

OPINION: Let's update California's affirmative action policy: Vote yes on Prop 16

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Body

Callie Radecki PZ '22 encourages California voters to reinstate affirmative action in the state by voting yes on Prop. 16. (Talia Bernstein · The Student Life)

Operating on the assertion that the equal protection clause of the 14th Amendment did enough to ensure racial equality in the state, California passed Proposition 209 in 1996, banning affirmative action. Yet, if the continuation of killings of Black folks and the disproportionate effects of COVID-19 on people of color remind us of anything, it is that injustice is still prevalent in America today.

Now, the fight for racial and gender equality is back on the ballot. If passed, Proposition 16 will reinstate affirmative action in the state.

Affirmative action is a set of policies and practices that aims to increase the representation of historically marginalized groups in education and the workplace in hopes of counteracting the decades of discrimination that has kept these groups on the outs. In short, it aims to level the playing field, taking into account historical and ongoing discrimination and oppression. Prop 16 will allow for the reinstatement of affirmative action in California.

In the 1978 landmark Supreme Court case *Regents of the University of California v. Bakke*, the Supreme Court deemed affirmative action permissible under the conditions that race may be one of several criteria when making decisions and that schools have no specific racial quotas.

Yet, many years later, in 1996, conservative Californians supported the passage of Prop 209 under the height of Republican Pete Wilson's time in office as governor of California. Conservative groups are opposing the passage of Prop 16 today. Prop 209 banned affirmative action practices in public hiring, contracting and education in California. California is currently one of nine states with a ban on affirmative action.

The effects of the affirmative action ban were felt immediately. Off the momentum from the Civil Rights Movement when many affirmative action policies were put in place, efforts to diversify California's public education system ramped up. By the 1987-88 school year, UC Berkeley consisted of 7 percent Black and 15 percent Chicano/Latino students, thanks to the affirmative action policies in place at the time. Compare that to 2017, many years after the ban on affirmative action, when 1.98 percent of students identified as Black or African American, and 13.5 percent identified as Hispanic or Latino.

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Those opposed to affirmative action and Prop 16 tend to support "colorblind" policies that neglect to take into account identity factors, such as race or ethnicity. Yet, this position fails to take into account the inequalities that exist in our country. We are not in a post-racial society. The median white family has 41 times more wealth than the median Black family and 22 times more wealth than the average Latino family.

Prop 16 is the closest we have ever come to repealing Prop 209. The Claremont Colleges can participate in affirmative action practices as they are private institutions, but our fellow Californians, including women and people of color, continue to face obstacles in their advancement due to out-of-date policies. Prop 16 is supported by the likes of the founders of Black Lives Matter, Gavin Newsom, Dolores Huerta, Planned Parenthood, Kamala Harris and many more.

We must not be bystanders as the effects of discrimination continue to play out in California's public education system, as well as in hiring practices. We must advocate for policies that promote the diverse, progressive California that we aspire toward. We can no longer pretend that discrimination in our country and state does not exist. The fight for racial and gender equality is on the ballot this November. We must vote yes on Prop 16 to ensure there are the proper tools to deal with the problems that exist in California.

Callie Radecki PZ '22 is from Silver Spring, Maryland. She loves dogs and spending time outdoors.

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