The American Society for Cell Biology Denounces Divisive Trump Administration Executive Order

September 28, 2020

This summer has been marked by a reckoning of the racial injustice that afflicts the United States. Rather than showing us the way to reconciliation, the Trump White House has issued an Executive Order that attacks efforts by the federal government to heal decades-old racial divisions within the U.S.

The Executive Order issued on September 22, 2020 focuses on diversity training programs within the federal government. According to the Executive Order and associated documents issued by the White House, too many diversity training programs within the federal government “promote race or sex stereotyping or scapegoating in the Federal workforce.” It wistfully remembers the Declaration of Independence’s assertion that “all men are created equal,” the patriots who fought to construct a new nation based on those ideals and Dr. King’s dream for his children and places these diversity programs in direct opposition to that history.

The founding of our country was an amazing accomplishment. But at its creation, it was not perfect and our history has been a story of making it more perfect. The history bragged about in the Executive Order is actually the story of overcoming wrongs, beginning with those that were present at the creation of our nation. It began with our founding document, which counted slaves as 3/5’s of a person and limited the right to vote to landholders, regardless of skin color. It continued with the demands for “state’s rights” in order to keep slaves that led to the Civil War, to Jim Crow laws, to Driving While Black, to unequal pay for the same work, to laws that decide who can love whom. Our history is a story of inequity but it is also the story of every generation working to right those wrongs. Ignoring our history, as required in this Executive Order, is just another wrong that will, one day, need to be righted.

In 2011, when President Obama issued the Executive Order creating diversity training programs within the federal government, he said it was his wish that the federal government would serve as a model for what TO do. Sadly, this Executive Order will serve as a model for what NOT to do.

Like every community, the American scientific community has its own wrongs in need of righting. Science is not the meritocracy we wish it was. But our community is being led by a new generation of scientists who will show us the way to right our wrongs. The ASCB is working hard to right our wrongs and to lead our community down a path that is more perfect for all of us.