

10-1199
United States v. Rivera

UNITED STATES COURT OF APPEALS

FOR THE SECOND CIRCUIT

August Term, 2010

(Submitted: March 18, 2011

Decided: October 21, 2011)

Docket No. 10-1199-cr

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA,

Appellee,

— v. —

GILBERTO RIVERA, a/k/a Junco,

Defendant-Appellant.

Before:

KATZMANN, CHIN, *Circuit Judges*, and GLEESON, *District Judge*.*

Defendant-appellant Gilberto Rivera appeals from an order of the United States District Court for the District of Connecticut (Ellen B. Burns, *J.*) denying his motion for a sentence modification pursuant to 18 U.S.C § 3582(c)(2) based on the 2007 retroactive amendment to the offense guideline for crack offenses. The order of the District Court is VACATED and the case is REMANDED for further proceedings.

Judge Katzmann concurs in a separate opinion.

Gary D. Weinberger, Assistant Federal Defender (Thomas McCudden, Research and Writing Attorney, *on the brief*), for Thomas G. Dennis, Federal Defender, Hartford, CT, for Defendant-Appellant.

* The Honorable John Gleeson, Judge, United States District Court for the Eastern District of New York, sitting by designation.

1 Harold H. Chen, Assistant United States Attorney (Sandra S. Glover, Assistant United
2 States Attorney, *on the brief*), for David B. Fein, United States Attorney, District of
3 Connecticut, New Haven, CT, *for Appellee*.
4

5 JOHN GLEESON, *District Judge*:

6 Gilberto Rivera is a crack cocaine offender who was convicted after trial and sentenced in
7 1996 to a 292-month term of imprisonment. On January 14, 2008, Rivera filed a motion in the
8 United States District Court for the District of Connecticut pursuant to 18 U.S.C. § 3582(c)(2)
9 seeking a reduction of his sentence. Specifically, Rivera sought to benefit from the 2007
10 decisions by the United States Sentencing Commission (the “Commission”) to (a) reduce the
11 sentences for offenses involving crack and (b) make the reductions retroactive. The district court
12 denied the motion on the ground that Rivera was not eligible for a sentence reduction. Rivera
13 filed this appeal, and we now reverse. Rivera was indeed eligible for a reduction, and we remand
14 the case to the district court for a determination of whether he should receive one.

15 BACKGROUND

16 A. *Rivera’s Sentence*

17 1. *The Calculation of the Guidelines Range*

18 Rivera’s offense involved approximately 3.3 kilograms of crack cocaine. The highest
19 base offense level prescribed by the drug quantity table – Level 38 – applied at the time of his
20 sentencing to all crack offenses involving 1.5 kilograms or more of crack. U.S. Sentencing
21 Guidelines Manual (“U.S.S.G.” or the “Guidelines”) § 2D1.1(c)(1) (1996). Thus, Rivera’s base
22 offense level was 38, to which there were no adjustments. As for criminal history, Rivera’s prior
23 convictions earned him sufficient points under U.S.S.G. § 4A1.1 to place him in Criminal
24 History Category (“CHC”) IV. The applicable range under the offense guideline was therefore
25 324–405 months.

1 However, the nature of Rivera's convictions subjected him to treatment as a career
 2 offender under § 4B1.1.¹ Career offender status can affect both the offense level and the CHC.
 3 With respect to the former, the career offender guideline provides that the applicable offense
 4 level is the higher of the one provided by the offense guideline and the one provided by the chart
 5 in § 4B1.1(b), which sets forth a schedule of offense levels linked to the statutory maximum
 6 sentence for the offense of conviction. Since the highest of the levels on that chart is 37, in
 7 Rivera's case the career offender guideline borrowed the offense level of 38 from the offense
 8 guideline. As for the CHC, the career offender guideline gives all career offenders a CHC of VI.
 9 U.S.S.G. § 4B1.1(b).

10 Thus, Rivera's career offender status affected his Guidelines range by moving him from
 11 Level 38, CHC IV, with a corresponding range of 324–405 months, to Level 38, CHC VI, where
 12 the range is 360 months to life.

¹ Insofar as it is relevant here, U.S.S.G. § 4B1.1 provides as follows:

(a) A defendant is a career offender if (1) the defendant was at least eighteen years old at the time the defendant committed the instant offense of conviction; (2) the instant offense of conviction is a felony that is either a crime of violence or a controlled substance offense; and (3) the defendant has at least two prior felony convictions of either a crime of violence or a controlled substance offense.

(b) . . . [I]f the offense level for a career offender from the table in this subsection is greater than the offense level otherwise applicable, the offense level from the table in this subsection shall apply. A career offender's criminal history category in every case under this subsection shall be Category VI.

	<u>Offense Statutory Maximum</u>	<u>Offense Level</u>
(A)	Life	37
(B)	25 years or more	34
(C)	20 years or more, but less than 25 years	32
(D)	15 years or more, but less than 20 years	29
(E)	10 years or more, but less than 15 years	24
(F)	5 years or more, but less than 10 years	17
(G)	More than 1 year, but less than 5 years	12

1 2. *The Sentencing Proceeding*

2 At the sentencing on September 10, 1996, the district court (Alan H. Nevas, *J.*) departed
3 downward from the applicable range of 360 months to life. The basis for the departure was
4 Rivera's mental health. As the sentencing court noted, the presentence report included a history
5 of head injuries. Rivera had undergone several psychological and neuropsychological
6 assessments to determine his competency in connection with one of his prior prosecutions, and
7 there were strong indications that Rivera suffered from a profound cognitive disability. As a
8 result, the court invoked its power to depart based on Rivera's mental condition, stating as
9 follows: "[T]he court is going to depart downward three levels pursuant to [U.S.S.G. §§] 5H1.3
10 and 5K2.0.² The offense level is 35, the criminal history category is six, and the guideline range
11 from the sentencing table is 292 to 365 months." Having departed downward to that range, the
12 court then imposed a prison sentence equal to its lower end, 292 months.

13 B. *The Motion for a Reduction of Sentence*

14 On January 14, 2008, Rivera filed a motion to reduce his sentence pursuant to the
15 retroactive application of the amended crack guideline. The district court denied the motion and
16 Rivera moved for reconsideration.³ In an unpublished opinion granting the motion for
17 reconsideration but adhering to the initial ruling, the court held that Rivera had failed to satisfy
18 the threshold requirement for a sentence modification, *i.e.*, that his applicable guideline range
19 had subsequently been lowered by the Commission. Rivera argued that the applicable range was
20 the post-departure range, that is, the range three offense levels below his career offender range.

² At the time, § 5K2.0 allowed for a departure based on a circumstance of a kind, or to a degree, not adequately considered by the Commission. *See* U.S.S.G. § 5K2.0 (1996). Section 5H1.3 provided that a defendant's mental condition was "not ordinarily relevant" to the determination of whether to depart, *see* § 5H1.3 (1996), but the provision left room for a departure on that ground in extraordinary cases, *see, e.g., United States v. Barton*, 76 F.3d 499, 502 (2d Cir. 1996).

³ The district judge who imposed sentence on Rivera in 1996 had retired. A different district judge (Ellen B. Burns, *J.*) denied Rivera's motion for a reduction of sentence.

1 As discussed further below, the post-departure range had been lowered by the retroactive
2 amendment. The district judge rejected that argument. Relying on, *inter alia*, *United States v.*
3 *Darton*, 595 F.3d 1191 (10th Cir.), *cert. denied*, 130 S. Ct. 3444 (2010), and *United States v.*
4 *Tolliver*, 570 F.3d 1062 (8th Cir. 2009), the court held that Rivera’s applicable range was the
5 pre-departure career offender range, which had not been lowered. *United States v. Rivera*, No.
6 94-CR-112 (EBB), 2010 WL 1169767, at *2-3 (D. Conn. Mar. 25, 2010). As a result, the court
7 concluded that Rivera was ineligible for consideration for a sentence modification. *See id.*

8 On March 31, 2010, Rivera filed a notice of appeal.

9 DISCUSSION

10 A. *The Sentencing Commission’s Retroactive Sentence Reductions and the Sentencing*
11 *Modifications They Authorize*

12
13 The Sentencing Reform Act of 1984 (“SRA”), Pub. L. No. 98-473, tit. II, ch. II, 98 Stat.
14 1987, requires the Commission to periodically review the Guidelines and to revise them as
15 appropriate. *See* 28 U.S.C. § 994(o) (2006). When the Commission amends the Guidelines to
16 lower the sentencing range for a particular offense, it is authorized by the SRA to decide whether
17 and to what extent previously-sentenced offenders may benefit from the change: “If the
18 Commission reduces the term of imprisonment recommended in the guidelines applicable to a
19 particular offense or category of offenses, it shall specify in what circumstances and by what
20 amount the sentences of prisoners serving terms of imprisonment for the offense may be
21 reduced.” § 994(u). As the Supreme Court recently observed, these provisions allow for
22 correction when a particular guideline becomes “a cause of inequality, not a bulwark against it.”
23 *Freeman v. United States*, 131 S. Ct. 2685, 2690 (2011) (plurality opinion).

1 The Commission's exercise of this statutory authority triggers an exception to the general
2 rule that sentencing courts are not authorized to modify sentences after they are imposed.

3 Specifically, 18 U.S.C. § 3582(c)(2) provides that

4 in the case of a defendant who has been sentenced to a term of
5 imprisonment based on a sentencing range that has subsequently
6 been lowered by the Sentencing Commission pursuant to 28 U.S.C.
7 § 994(o), upon motion of the defendant . . . or on its own motion,
8 the court may reduce the term of imprisonment, after considering
9 the factors set forth in section 3553(a) to the extent that they are
10 applicable, if such a reduction is consistent with applicable policy
11 statements issued by the Sentencing Commission.
12

13 One of the critical issues in this case is whether Rivera's sentence was "based on" a
14 subsequently-lowered sentence range within the meaning of § 3582(c)(2).

15 A retroactive amendment merely authorizes a reduction in sentence; it does not require
16 one. In determining whether to modify a sentence, a judge must consider not only the traditional
17 sentencing factors set forth in 18 U.S.C. § 3553(a), but also the post-sentencing behavior of the
18 defendant and any public safety concerns a reduction in sentence would raise. U.S.S.G.
19 § 1B1.10 cmt. n.1(B). Though a ruling granting or denying an eligible offender's request for a
20 reduction is reviewed for abuse of discretion, *United States v. Borden*, 564 F.3d 100, 104 (2d Cir.
21 2009), an order declaring an offender ineligible for one is reviewed *de novo*, see *United States v.*
22 *McGee*, 553 F.3d 225, 226 (2d Cir. 2009).

23 Section 3582(c)(2) grants courts the authority to reduce sentences only if doing so is
24 consistent with the Commission's applicable policy statements. The relevant policy statement in
25 this regard is U.S.S.G. § 1B1.10, entitled "Reduction in Term of Imprisonment as a Result of
26 Amended Guideline Range," which lists the amendments that the Commission has made
27 retroactive. U.S.S.G. § 1B1.10(c). In 2007, at the same time it made the reduced sentences for
28 crack offenses retroactive, the Commission also amended § 1B1.10 to more fully exercise the

1 authority conferred by 18 U.S.C. § 994(u) to dictate when and by what amount an amendment
 2 may reduce previously-imposed sentences. Of importance to Rivera’s case are the provisions in
 3 § 1B1.10(a) italicized below, which restrict a court’s authority to reduce a sentence to cases in
 4 which a retroactive amendment has the effect of lowering the defendant’s “applicable” guideline
 5 range:

6 (1) *In General.* – In a case in which a defendant is serving a term
 7 of imprisonment, and the *guideline range applicable to that*
 8 *defendant* has subsequently been lowered as a result of an
 9 amendment to the Guidelines Manual listed in subsection (c)
 10 below, the court may reduce the defendant’s term of imprisonment
 11 as provided by 18 U.S.C. § 3582(c)(2). As required by 18 U.S.C.
 12 § 3582(c)(2), any such reduction in the defendant’s term of
 13 imprisonment shall be consistent with this policy statement.

14
 15 (2) *Exclusions.* – A reduction in the defendant’s term of
 16 imprisonment is not consistent with this policy statement and
 17 therefore is not authorized under 18 U.S.C. § 3582(c)(2) if –

18 . . .

19 (B) an amendment listed in subsection (c) does not have the
 20 effect of lowering *the defendant’s applicable guideline*
 21 *range.*

22
 23 U.S.S.G. § 1B1.10(a) (emphases added). The Commentary to the section reiterates that
 24 eligibility for a sentence reduction “under 18 U.S.C. § 3582(c)(2) is triggered only by an
 25 amendment listed in subsection (c) [of § 1B1.10] that lowers the applicable guideline range.”
 26 § 1B1.10 cmt. n.1(A).

27 As for the extent of the permissible reduction in sentence, § 1B1.10(b)(2) provides that
 28 “the court shall not reduce the defendant’s term of imprisonment under 18 U.S.C. § 3582(c)(2)
 29 and this policy statement to a term that is less than the minimum of the amended guideline range
 30” U.S.S.G. § 1B1.10(b)(2)(A). If the original sentence was lower than the applicable range,
 31 the policy statement provides for a commensurate reduction in the amended sentence.

32 § 1B1.10(b)(2)(B) (“If the original term of imprisonment imposed was less than the term of

1 imprisonment provided by the guideline range applicable to the defendant at the time of
2 sentencing, a reduction comparably less than the amended guideline range . . . may be
3 appropriate.”).

4 Finally, despite *United States v. Booker*, 543 U.S. 220 (2005), which rendered the
5 Guidelines merely advisory, the limitations on the degree of a sentence reduction under
6 § 3582(c)(2) are mandatory: “Section 3582(c)(2)’s text, together with its narrow scope, shows
7 that Congress intended to authorize only a limited adjustment to an otherwise final sentence and
8 not a plenary resentencing proceeding.” *Dillon v. United States*, 130 S. Ct. 2683, 2691 (2010).

9 B. *Our Precedents*

10 The legal context in which we decide Rivera’s case also includes our own precedents,
11 which establish two important principles. First, if a crack offender who was also a career
12 offender under § 4B1.1 received no downward departure at his initial sentence, he is not eligible
13 for a reduction, at least where “the career offender range . . . remains unaltered by the crack
14 cocaine amendments.” *United States v. Martinez*, 572 F.3d 82, 83 (2d Cir. 2009). In those
15 circumstances, the sentence was “based on” the career offender range, which has not been
16 lowered by the Commission, rather than the range produced by the amended crack guideline. *Id.*
17 at 84–85. *Martinez* is in accord with the holdings of our sister circuits.⁴

18 Second, if the sentencing judge in this case had said he was departing from the career
19 offender guideline in order to base the sentence on the range provided by the offense guideline,
20 *i.e.*, § 2D1.1, Rivera would be eligible for a sentence reduction. *See McGee*, 553 F.3d at 228.

⁴ See *United States v. Ayala-Pizarro*, 551 F.3d 84, 85 (1st Cir. 2008); *United States v. Mateo*, 560 F.3d 152, 155 (3d Cir. 2009); *United States v. Anderson*, 591 F.3d 789, 791 (5th Cir. 2009); *United States v. Perdue*, 572 F.3d 288, 292–93 (6th Cir. 2009), *cert. denied*, 130 S. Ct. 1537 (2010); *United States v. Forman*, 553 F.3d 585, 589–90 (7th Cir.), *cert. denied*, 129 S. Ct. 1924, and *cert. denied*, 129 S. Ct. 2817 (2009); *United States v. Thomas*, 524 F.3d 889, 890 (8th Cir. 2008); *United States v. Wesson*, 583 F.3d 729, 731 (9th Cir. 2009), *cert. denied*, 130 S. Ct. 2071 (2010); *United States v. Sharkey*, 543 F.3d 1236, 1239 (10th Cir. 2008); *United States v. Moore*, 541 F.3d 1323, 1330 (11th Cir. 2008).

1 The defendant in *McGee* was a career offender, but the sentencing judge determined that the
2 range computed under the career offender guideline overstated the seriousness of McGee’s
3 criminal history. She therefore departed under U.S.S.G. § 4A1.3 to the range produced by the
4 offense guideline (92–115 months), and sentenced McGee to a 115-month term of imprisonment.
5 *Id.* at 226. Since the actual sentence was explicitly based on the range produced by the offense
6 guideline, and McGee was thus “disadvantaged by the 100-to-1 sentencing disparity that the
7 crack amendments sought to correct,” we construed § 3582(c)(2) and § 1B1.10 in a manner that
8 rendered McGee eligible for a reduction. *Id.* at 230. As discussed further below, unlike
9 *Martinez*, the precise question we decided in *McGee* – is a career offender whose sentencing
10 judge departed under § 4A1.3 from the career offender guideline to a sentence based explicitly
11 on the drug offense guideline eligible for a sentence reduction under § 3582(c)(2)? – has sharply
12 divided the circuits.⁵

13 C. *Analysis*

14 This case is not controlled by *Martinez*. Though Rivera is a career offender, the
15 sentencing judge departed from the range computed under the career offender guideline. Nor is
16 *McGee* controlling, however, for the sentencing judge did not depart to the range supplied by the
17 offense guideline. Rather, he departed three offense levels from the career offender range based

⁵ The First, Third and Fourth Circuits have agreed with our holding in *McGee* that when the sentencing judge departs from a career offender range to the range established by the offense guideline, a modification under § 3582(c)(2) is available if the latter range has been lowered by the retroactive amendment. *See United States v. Flemming*, 617 F.3d 252, 266 n.20 (3d Cir. 2010); *United States v. Cardoso*, 606 F.3d 16, 19–21 (1st Cir. 2010); *United States v. Munn*, 595 F.3d 183, 194–95 (4th Cir. 2010); *see also Wesson*, 583 F.3d at 732 (dicta suggesting that if the appropriate question were presented the Ninth Circuit would follow *McGee*); *Moore*, 541 F.3d at 1329–30 (dicta suggesting same regarding Eleventh Circuit). The Sixth, Eighth and Tenth Circuits have held otherwise, declaring such defendants ineligible for reductions on the ground that their sentences were “based on” the career offender guideline, which has not been amended, despite each sentencing judge having departed from that guideline to the range provided by the offense guideline. *See United States v. Pembroke*, 609 F.3d 381, 384 (6th Cir. 2010), *cert. denied*, 131 S. Ct. 1599 (2011); *United States v. Darton*, 595 F.3d 1191, 1194 (10th Cir.), *cert. denied*, 131 S. Ct. 3444 (2010). *Pembroke* and *Darton* both rely on *United States v. Tolliver*, 570 F.3d 1062, 1066 (8th Cir. 2009), in which the sentence the defendant sought to reduce had strayed from the career offender range in unusual circumstances akin to a sentence bargain under Fed. R. Crim. P. 11(c)(1)(C), *see id.* at 1054. *Pembroke*, *Darton* and *Tolliver* are discussed below.

1 on U.S.S.G. § 5H1.3 because of Rivera’s mental condition. The sentencing judge did not
2 mention the offense guideline or the range it produced in Rivera’s case, and the sentence
3 imposed was below, not within, the offense guideline range. Thus, the argument that was
4 available to the defendant in *McGee* – that he was sentenced “based on” on a sentencing range
5 calculated pursuant to the since-amended crack guideline – is not available to Rivera.⁶

6 The government argues that Rivera is ineligible for relief under § 3582(c)(2) because,
7 notwithstanding the downward departure, he was not sentenced “based on” a range that has
8 subsequently been lowered by the Sentencing Commission, as that statute requires. Rather, it
9 contends, he was sentenced “based on” the career offender guideline, which has not been
10 amended. Relatedly, the government contends that Rivera is ineligible under § 1B1.10 because
11 his “applicable” guideline range, which it asserts is the career offender range, has not been
12 lowered by the retroactive amendment at issue, as that guideline requires.

13 We hold first that these two issues largely overlap. The Sentencing Commission
14 promulgated § 1B1.10 to implement its statutory authority under § 994(u) to determine when and
15 to what extent sentence reductions are retroactive and, once that authority is exercised, to guide
16 sentencing judges who are considering sentence reductions pursuant to § 3582(c)(2). The statute
17 authorizes a reduction when the original sentence was “based on” a sentencing range that has
18 been lowered; the guideline authorizes one when the range “applicable” at the initial sentence
19 has been lowered. Provisions enacted for the same purpose should be read *in pari materia*. *See*,

⁶ One could characterize Rivera’s pre-departure sentencing range as based – at least in part – on the crack guideline. As discussed above, under the terms of the career offender guideline, the offense level from the career offender table did not apply to Rivera because the offense level drawn from the pre-amendment crack guideline was higher. *See* U.S.S.G. § 4B1.1(b). Although this did not impact the pre-departure sentencing range for Rivera, it would for many other defendants if their convictions involved different quantities or they had received adjustments for acceptance of responsibility. Whether or not such sentences could be deemed to be “based on” the crack guideline, our holding in this case, as explained below, is based on the fact that the district court’s calculation of Rivera’s ultimate sentencing range and sentence would almost certainly have been different had the amended crack guideline been in effect.

1 *e.g.*, *United States v. Battista*, 575 F.3d 226, 234 (2d Cir. 2009). We think that the range the
2 initial sentence was “based on” within the meaning of the statute is also generally the range that
3 was “applicable” within the meaning of the guideline. *See Darton*, 595 F.3d at 1194. Despite
4 the difference in language between the statute and the guideline, we doubt there are many
5 scenarios in which a defendant could qualify for a sentence reduction under one but not the
6 other.

7 The question before us is this: What range was Rivera’s sentence “based on” – that is,
8 what was his “applicable” sentencing range for purposes of § 3582(c)(2) and § 1B1.10? There
9 are two candidates, as two ranges were implicated at his 1996 sentencing. The first was supplied
10 by the career offender guideline (at least in part), and it was 360 months to life in prison (Offense
11 Level 38/CHC VI). This was the “starting point” of the sentencing proceeding. *Freeman*, 131
12 S. Ct. at 2692 (citing *Gall v. United States*, 552 U.S. 38, 49 (2007)). The second range was the
13 one to which the judge departed based on Rivera’s mental condition. It was arrived at by
14 subtracting three offense levels from the career offender computation but remaining in CHC VI.
15 The resulting range was 292–365 months (Offense Level 35/CHC VI), and the sentence imposed
16 was at its low end, 292 months.

17 The stakes are high for Rivera. If he was sentenced “based on” the career offender range,
18 he is not eligible for a sentence reduction. This is because the retroactive amendment reduces
19 Rivera’s career offender *offense level* from 38 to 37,⁷ but that has no effect on the resulting
20 guidelines *range*; in CHC VI, Offense Levels 37 and 38 both result in ranges of 360 months to
21 life. U.S.S.G. Ch. 5, Pt. A. Thus, Rivera could not satisfy the threshold requirement in both

⁷ The difference results from the fact that under the amended guideline, the highest base offense level for crack offenses (Offense Level 38) now applies only where 4.5 kilograms or more of crack are involved in the offense. Rivera’s offense involved 3.3 kilograms, so his offense level under the amended guideline would be reduced from 38 to 36. *See* U.S.S.G. § 2D1.1(c). The career offender guideline would thus take over the offense level computation and prescribe an offense level of 37. *See* § 4B1.1(b).

1 § 3582(c)(2) and § 1B1.10 that a retroactive amendment has lowered the defendant's applicable
2 range.

3 On the other hand, if Rivera's sentence was "based on" the range to which his sentencing
4 judge departed, he is eligible for a sentencing reduction of up to 30 months. The same three-
5 level departure from the revised career offender computation yields an Offense Level of 34 in
6 Criminal History Category VI, with a corresponding range of 262–327 months. As mentioned, a
7 reduction to the bottom of that range would shorten Rivera's prison term by two and one-half
8 years.

9 We hold that Rivera's sentence was "based on" the range produced by subtracting three
10 offense levels from the career offender computation. The resulting range was the one the
11 sentencing judge found to be "applicable" to Rivera, and he chose a sentence at the low end of
12 that range. That range is lowered when the retroactive amendment at issue is plugged into its
13 calculation, even if everything else remains the same. Rivera is therefore eligible for a reduction.

14 The government contends that the range Rivera's sentence was based on was the career
15 offender range, but the sentencing judge *rejected* that range in favor of the one on which he
16 actually based Rivera's sentence. *See United States v. Cardoso*, 606 F.3d 16, 20 (1st Cir. 2010)
17 ("[T]he government fails to explain why it makes sense to so read 'based on,' given that it is a
18 less natural reading and inconsistent with the policy rationale for both the statute and
19 amendments in this case."). To be sure, the career offender range was the starting point of
20 Rivera's sentencing proceeding, but then the judging began, and because of Rivera's mental
21 condition that range was deemed inapplicable. The sentence imposed was based explicitly on
22 the post-departure range, which has since been lowered. *See Freeman*, 131 S. Ct. at 2695
23 (Sotomayor, J., concurring in the judgment) ("To ask whether a particular term of imprisonment

1 is ‘based on’ a Guidelines sentencing range is to ask whether that range serves as the basis or
2 foundation for the term of imprisonment. . . . As a result, in applying § 3582(c)(2) a court must
3 discern the foundation for the term of imprisonment imposed by the sentencing judge.”).

4 Our reading of the plain wording of § 3582(c)(2) is further supported by *McGee*. In
5 rejecting the government’s argument that McGee’s sentence was “based on” the *pre*-departure,
6 career offender range, as we do again here, we observed that the meaning of the language in
7 § 3582(c)(2) and § 1B1.10 is “inherently contextual.” *McGee*, 553 F.3d at 229 (quoting *United*
8 *States v. Dauray*, 215 F.3d 257, 264 (2d Cir. 2000)) (internal quotation marks omitted). It was
9 clear from the sentencing transcript in *McGee* that the judge had not relied on the career offender
10 range, and indeed “would likely have considered a different sentence from the one imposed” had
11 the retroactive amendment been in effect at the time. *Id.* at 228. In those circumstances, we
12 concluded that a holding that the (rejected) career offender range was the “applicable” range for
13 the purposes of § 3582(c)(2) and § 1B1.10 would amount to “excessive formalism,” and that
14 therefore McGee was sentenced “based on” the post-departure range. *Id.* at 227–29.

15 The same is true with Rivera. As described above, the starting point for his sentence was
16 a range of 360 months to life (Offense Level 38/CHC VI), but the judge determined that Rivera’s
17 mental condition warranted a three-level departure to Level 35. The judge then imposed a
18 sentence at the bottom of the resulting 292–365 month range. If Rivera’s sentencing range is
19 computed in light of the retroactive amendment, the resulting offense level is 37, not 38. The
20 same three-level departure from that level (again in CHC VI) produces a sentencing range of
21 262–327 months. Thus, there is ample reason to believe that Rivera would have received a
22 sentence as low as 262 months – 30 months lower than the sentence imposed – had the offense
23 guideline been amended before he was sentenced. In short, Rivera appears to have been

1 “disadvantaged by the 100-to-1 sentencing disparity that the crack amendments sought to
2 correct,” *McGee*, 553 F.3d at 230, in precisely the same way as *McGee*.

3 Our approach in *McGee* and in this case accords precisely with our obligation under
4 § 3582(c)(2) and § 1B1.10 to

5 isolate whatever marginal effect the since-rejected Guideline had
6 on the defendant’s sentence. Working backwards from this
7 purpose, § 3582(c)(2) modification proceedings should be
8 available to permit the district court to revisit a prior sentence to
9 whatever extent the sentencing range in question was a relevant
10 part of the analytic framework the judge used to determine the
11 sentence.

12
13 *Freeman*, 131 S. Ct. at 2692–93 (plurality opinion). The marginal effect of the rejected 100-to-1
14 ratio on Rivera’s sentence is easily isolated. It produced a sentencing range with a low end that
15 is 30 months higher than the exact same methodology would produce today. Accordingly, the
16 district court should be permitted to revisit Rivera’s sentence to the extent allowable under
17 § 3582(c)(2) and § 1B1.10.⁸

18 Other factors influence our decision as well. One is the context in which we decide this
19 case. Though our task is limited to construing the relevant statutory and Guidelines provisions,
20 we are not required to perform it wearing blinders. Retroactive amendments exist to allow

⁸ As was the case in *McGee*, our decision today is not in tension with *United States v. Williams*, 551 F.3d 182 (2d Cir. 2009), where we addressed the availability of relief under § 3582(c)(2) when the defendant benefitted from a “substantial assistance” motion under 18 U.S.C. § 3553(e) and U.S.S.G. § 5K1.1 at the original sentencing. In *Williams* we found the defendant ineligible for a sentence modification on the ground that he was not sentenced “based on” a subsequently-lowered range, even though the sentencing judge had departed to a sentence within the range calculated under the later-amended crack guideline. *Id.* at 185–86.

Williams has no bearing here because it involved the special context of a departure from an otherwise applicable mandatory minimum sentence. The Guidelines specifically provide that when a mandatory minimum sentence exceeds the guideline range, “the statutorily required minimum sentence shall be the guideline sentence.” U.S.S.G. § 5G1.1(b). That remains true even though a substantial assistance motion under 18 U.S.C. § 3553(e) has been filed and the mandatory minimum is no longer applicable. *Williams*, 551 F.3d at 185. Moreover, as we pointed out in *Williams*, our precedent has specifically limited sentencing judges considering departures from a mandatory minimum to but one factor: the nature and extent of the defendant’s cooperation. *Id.* at 186 (citing *United States v. Richardson*, 521 F.3d 149, 159 (2d Cir. 2008)). In those circumstances, it cannot reasonably be said that either the pre-departure range or the post-departure sentence has been lowered by the retroactive amendment.

1 inequalities to be fixed, and the now-infamous 100-to-1 ratio was the source of shameful
2 inequalities. The Department of Justice itself characterized that ratio as unjustified,
3 fundamentally unfair and racially discriminatory.⁹ And it bears emphasis that the 2007
4 adjustment to the offense guideline for crack offenders at issue in this case was billed by the
5 Commission itself as but “a very small step” toward rectifying that very large injustice. Hon.
6 Ricardo H. Hinojosa, Chair, U.S. Sent’g Comm’n, Opening Remarks at the United States
7 Sentencing Commission Public Hearing on Retroactivity (Nov. 13, 2007), *available at*
8 <http://or.fd.org/CrackRetroactivity%5CTranscript111307.pdf>, at 9.¹⁰

9 We recognized in *McGee* our obligation, both generally and in this specific setting, to let
10 lenity play a role in the construction of the Guidelines where there is doubt about their scope.
11 *McGee*, 553 F.3d at 228–29. The same holds true when we construe statutes. *See, e.g., United*
12 *States v. Kerley*, 544 F.3d 172, 178 (2d Cir. 2008) (“If Congress leaves a statute ambiguous . . . ,
13 ‘the ambiguity should be resolved in favor of lenity.’” (citation omitted)). As discussed above,
14 we believe the plain language of § 3582(c)(2) and § 1B1.10 compel the conclusion that Rivera’s
15 sentence was based on the post-departure range his sentencing judge found applicable to his case
16 – a range that has subsequently been lowered as a result of the Commission’s 2007 amendment.

⁹ *See Restoring Fairness to Federal Sentencing: Addressing the Crack-Powder Disparity: Hearing Before the U.S. Sen. Comm. on the Judiciary, Subcomm. on Crime and Drugs* (Apr. 29, 2009) (statement of Lanny A. Breuer, Assistant Att’y Gen., Crim. Div., U.S. Dep’t of Justice), *available at* <http://judiciary.senate.gov/pdf/09-04-29BreuerTestimony.pdf>, at 10–11.

¹⁰ A larger step was taken in June of this year, when the Commission voted to give retroactive effect to the amendments passed in response to the Fair Sentencing Act of 2010, Pub. L. No. 111-220, § 2, 124 Stat. 2372, 2372. That statute substantially increased the amounts of crack required to trigger mandatory minimum penalties, and the Commission’s subsequent amendment of § 2D1.1 substantially reduced the sentences recommended by the Guidelines for crack offenders. Unless Congress affirmatively disapproves the Commission’s action, the retroactivity of this more recent lowering of crack sentences will become effective on November 1, 2011, and the Commission estimates that as many as 12,000 inmates will be eligible for a reduction under § 3582(c)(2). *See* U.S. Sent’g Comm’n, News Release: U.S. Sentencing Commission Votes Unanimously To Apply Fair Sentencing Act of 2010 Amendment to the Federal Sentencing Guidelines Retroactively (June 30, 2011), *available at* http://www.uscc.gov/Legislative_and_Public_Affairs/Newsroom/Press_Releases/20110630_Press_Release.pdf, at 1.

1 But even if those provisions were ambiguous, the rule of lenity would prohibit the narrow
2 construction the government urges upon us here.

3 In addition, as discussed above, all we decide here is the *eligibility* of Rivera for a
4 sentence reduction under § 3582(c)(2), not his entitlement to one. *See Freeman*, 131 S. Ct. at
5 2694. The latter question is left to the sound discretion of the district court. If there are good
6 reasons why Rivera's sentence should not be reduced notwithstanding the influence the now-
7 discredited 100-to-1 ratio had on it, the district court is free to consider those reasons in
8 determining whether to reduce the sentence.

9 A contrary holding could produce anomalous and unfair results. The government
10 concedes, as it must in light of *McGee*, that a career offender convicted of a crack offense is
11 sometimes eligible under § 3582(c)(2) for a reduction if the sentencing judge departed from the
12 otherwise-applicable range. Yet it seeks a rule limiting that eligibility to cases in which the
13 sentencing judge explicitly stated that he or she was departing to the range established by the
14 offense guideline. This case highlights the potential unfairness of such a limitation. Rivera's
15 career offender range was 360 months to life (Level 38/CHC VI). His range under the offense
16 guideline was 324–405 months (Level 38/CHC IV). His range after the district court's departure
17 was 292–365 months (Level 35/CHC VI). Thus, the sentencing judge in this case departed to a
18 sentence *below* the range computed under the offense guideline. He might indeed have believed,
19 as did the sentencing judge in *McGee*, that the range produced by the career offender guideline
20 overrepresented the seriousness of Rivera's criminal history, *see* U.S.S.G. § 4A1.3, and that
21 therefore a sentence within the range produced by the offense guideline (324–405 months) was
22 fairer. Had the judge imposed such a sentence and used that reasoning, the government agrees
23 Rivera would be eligible for a sentence reduction. But if Rivera's sentencing judge harbored that

1 belief, he had no reason to express it, as Rivera's mental condition warranted an even greater
2 departure under § 5H1.3. Put another way, if the judge had had the foresight to depart in stages –
3 first under § 4A1.3 to the range provided by the offense guideline and then a second departure
4 under § 5H1.3 to 292 months based on Rivera's mental condition – the government would agree
5 that Rivera is eligible for a sentence reduction under *McGee*. But the judge's failure to anticipate
6 that fifteen years later we would be parsing his sentencing methodology in this manner, in the
7 government's view, should categorically deprive Rivera of the minor and long-overdue relief the
8 2007 amendment was intended to provide. We decline to adopt this crabbed approach. "There is
9 no reason to deny § 3582(c)(2) relief to defendants who linger in prison pursuant to sentences
10 that would not have been imposed but for a since-rejected, excessive range." *Freeman*, 131
11 S. Ct. at 2690.

12 Instead, we hold as follows: Where the sentencing judge departs from a range computed
13 under the career offender guideline to a lower range, the sentence imposed was "based on" the
14 latter range for purposes of § 3582(c)(2), and for the purposes of § 1B1.10 that range is the
15 "guideline range applicable" to the defendant. If a subsequently-lowered guideline "was a
16 relevant part of the analytic framework the judge used to determine the sentence," *Freeman*, 131
17 S. Ct. at 2693, the relevant statutory and Guidelines provision require that a § 3582(c)(2)
18 proceeding be available to allow the sentencing court the opportunity to remedy an injustice.

19 D. *The Approach of Our Sister Circuits*

20 *McGee* (and by extension our decision here) is in conflict with the decisions of several
21 other circuits. For example, in *Darton*, the Tenth Circuit faced the same situation we faced in
22 *McGee* – a request for a sentence reduction by a career offender who had received a criminal
23 history departure under § 4A1.3 to a sentence within the range produced by the offense

1 guideline. *Darton*, 595 F.3d at 1193. The defendant argued that the initial sentence was “based
2 on” the post-departure range, which was the “applicable” range under § 1B1.10, but his
3 argument was rejected by the Tenth Circuit. The court’s reasoning was driven by the Guidelines
4 Manual’s definition of the term “departure.” By specifically defining a departure as “a sentence
5 outside the applicable guideline range,” the court reasoned, the Guidelines make clear that “a
6 departure only exists *apart from* the applicable guideline range; there is no such thing as a
7 departure *to* the applicable range.” *Id.* at 1194 (citing definitions of “departure” in the
8 commentary to §§ 1B1.1, 4A1.3 and 5K2.0). Thus, it concluded that “the guideline range to
9 which a court departs cannot constitute the ‘applicable guideline range’ or, in other words, the
10 range upon which the sentence is ‘based’ for purposes of a sentence reduction under § 3582(c).”
11 *Id.*

12 *Darton* relied in part on the Eighth Circuit’s decision in *Tolliver*, which reached a similar
13 result in a different (and unusual) setting. In *Tolliver*, the parties engaged in plea bargaining
14 based on the assumption that the crack guideline would yield a range of 188–235 months.
15 *Tolliver*, 570 F.3d at 1064. However, the probation officer determined that the career offender
16 guideline applied, the court agreed, and *Tolliver* was sentenced to a 262-month term. *Id.* Later,
17 *Tolliver* and the government stipulated to a grant of § 2255 relief on the condition that *Tolliver*
18 would then be sentenced to a 188-month term. *Id.* That sentence was imposed, and after the
19 2007 amendment to the crack sentences, *Tolliver* sought a reduction under § 3582(c)(2) and
20 § 1B1.10. *Id.* In finding him ineligible, the Eighth Circuit relied not only on the Guidelines’
21 definition of the term “departure,” but also on the application instructions for the Guidelines set
22 forth in §1B1.1. *Id.* at 1065–66. Those instructions require a sentencing judge to take all the
23 steps necessary to compute the guidelines range *before* deciding whether any departures are

1 warranted. “It follows,” the court observed, “that . . . the application instructions will only
2 permit a departure *from* the ‘applicable guideline range,’ and thus preclude a departure *to* the
3 ‘applicable guideline range.’” *Id.* at 1066 (emphases added). Therefore, it held, the career
4 offender range was the defendant’s “applicable” range, and since it had not been lowered by the
5 2007 amendment, Tolliver was ineligible for a sentence reduction. *Id.* at 1066–67.¹¹

6 The Sixth Circuit reached the same result in *United States v. Pembroke*, 609 F.3d 381
7 (6th Cir. 2010), *cert. denied*, 131 S. Ct. 1599 (2011). In holding that a sentenced defendant who
8 was indistinguishable from the defendant in *McGee* was *not* eligible for a sentence reduction, the
9 court found its “most persuasive support” in the Guidelines’ application instructions relied upon
10 by the court in *Tolliver*. *Id.* at 385. Since the order of operations established by those
11 instructions makes it clear that departures occur only *after* the applicable guidelines range has
12 been computed, the court reasoned that “applicable” range for purposes of § 1B1.10 must be the
13 *pre*-departure range. *Id.* Like the Eighth and Tenth Circuits in *Tolliver* and *Darton*,
14 respectively, the Sixth Circuit also found support for its holding in the Guidelines’ definition of
15 the term “departure.” *Id.*¹²

16 *Pembroke*, *Tolliver* and *Darton* are all based on the same flawed premise – that the
17 applicable range for the purpose of a sentencing proceeding must necessarily be the same as the
18 applicable range for the purpose of a subsequent sentence *modification*. We see no reason why
19 that must be the case. We acknowledge a “natural presumption that identical words used in
20 different parts of the same act are intended to have the same meaning,” *Atlantic Cleaners &*

¹¹ *Tolliver* was decided before the recent *Freeman* decision by the Supreme Court. Since the stipulation resolving Tolliver’s § 2255 motion appears to have been the functional equivalent of a sentence bargain under Fed. R. Crim. P. 11(c)(1)(C), *Tolliver* appears to have been abrogated by *Freeman*.

¹² *See also United States v. Caraballo*, 552 F.3d 6, 11 (1st Cir. 2008) (the initial sentence was “based on” the career offender range notwithstanding a sentence of 43 months below that range because the lower sentence was conferred “*after* the court ha[d] established an appropriately calculated guideline sentencing range”).

1 *Dyers, Inc. v. United States*, 286 U.S. 427, 433 (1932), and we agree that the same presumption
2 would generally apply to identical phrases used in different parts of the Guidelines Manual. “But
3 the presumption is not rigid and readily yields whenever there is such variation in the connection
4 in which the words are used as reasonably to warrant the conclusion that they were employed in
5 different parts of the act with different intent.” *Id.*; see also *Helvering v. Stockholms Enskilda*
6 *Bank*, 293 U.S. 84, 87 (1934) (“[S]ince most words admit of different shades of meaning,
7 susceptible of being expanded or abridged to conform to the sense in which they are used, the
8 presumption readily yields to the controlling force of the circumstance that the words, though in
9 the same act, are found in such dissimilar connections as to warrant the conclusion that they were
10 employed in the different parts of the act with different intent.”).

11 One circumstance in which the presumption is readily rebutted is “[w]here the subject
12 matter to which the words refer is not the same in the several places where they are used,”
13 *Atlantic Cleaners & Dyers*, 286 U.S. at 433, and that is precisely the situation here. The subject
14 matter of the phrase “applicable guideline range” in the definition of “departure” in the
15 commentary to § 1B1.1 is the defendant’s sentencing, at which time the applicable range is “the
16 starting point and the initial benchmark” of the proceeding. *Gall*, 552 U.S. at 49. Because the
17 Guidelines themselves contemplate departures from the applicable range (and *Booker*
18 contemplates variances from it even where departures are unavailable), the starting point is not
19 always the finishing point. Thus, it is true that when Rivera was sentenced, his applicable range
20 was the career offender range of 360 months to life. From there, the sentencing judge departed
21 based on his mental condition to a different range, 292–365 months.

1 The subject matter of the phrase “guideline range applicable to the defendant” in
2 § 1B1.10 is not a sentencing proceeding but a modification proceeding that occurs after (in this
3 case, more than 10 years after) sentence has been imposed. The question in that context is not
4 what sentence is appropriate, but rather whether the sentence actually imposed should be reduced
5 in light of an intervening retroactive amendment. In that setting, common sense suggests that in
6 deciding whether “the guideline range applicable to the defendant has subsequently lowered,” a
7 court should focus on the range that was actually applied by the sentencing judge to the
8 defendant, even if, as in this case, that range differs from the one that was the starting point of
9 initial sentencing proceeding. Now that Rivera seeks a modification of his sentence, the 292–
10 365 month range to which his sentencing judge departed is his applicable range. In concluding
11 otherwise, we respectfully suggest that our sister circuits have “simply misemploy[ed] the
12 ‘presumption that identical words used in different parts of the same act are intended to have the
13 same meaning.’” *Gen. Dynamics Land Sys., Inc. v. Cline*, 540 U.S. 581, 595 (2004) (quoting
14 *Atlantic Cleaners & Dyers*, 286 U.S. at 433).

15 Our conclusion that the “applicable range” may have one meaning for sentencing
16 purposes and another for purposes of a § 3582(c)(2) proceeding finds support in our rationale in
17 *Martinez*. The defendant there sought a modification under § 3582(c)(2) and contended that his
18 initial sentence was “based on” the offense guideline because the sentencing judge consulted that
19 guideline in calculating his range as a career offender. We disagreed, holding that his applicable
20 range for purposes of § 3582(c) was the end result of the overall guideline range calculus – *i.e.*,
21 the career offender range, not the interim steps along the way. *Martinez*, 572 F.3d at 85. We
22 explained that

23 “the term ‘sentencing range’ clearly contemplates the *end result* of
24 the overall guideline calculus, *not the series of tentative results*

1 *reached at various interim steps in the performance of that*
2 *calculus.” . . . Therefore to determine which Guideline a*
3 defendant’s sentence is “based on” we look only to the end result
4 of the overall calculus . . . and not to the “interim” steps taken by
5 the District Court.

6
7 *Id.* at 84 n.3 (quoting *United States v. Mateo*, 560 F.3d 152, 155 (3d Cir. 2009)) (emphasis
8 added); *see also United States v. Caraballo*, 552 F.3d 6, 10 (1st Cir. 2008).

9 When Rivera was sentenced, the offense guideline and the career offender guideline were
10 *both* interim steps in the sentencing calculus, the end result of which was the lower range to
11 which the sentencing judge departed. Thus, the applicable range at Rivera’s sentencing was the
12 career offender range, but the applicable range for his 3582(c)(2) proceeding is the range on
13 which the sentencing judge actually based his sentence.

14 Our approach is also consistent with the Supreme Court’s emphasis in *Dillon* on the fact
15 that a § 3582(c)(2) proceeding is not a resentencing. It is, rather, a limited revisiting of a
16 previously-imposed sentence, during which the analytic framework of the sentence is replicated
17 with one exception – the provision that has been retroactively amended is substituted for the
18 corresponding provision applied at the time of sentencing. *See Dillon*, 130 S. Ct. at 2691 (citing
19 § 1B1.10(b)(1)). By its very nature, then, the focus of the modification proceeding is on the final
20 result of the sentencing proceeding, and the analysis that led to that result. Where the final result
21 is the same as the initial applicable range, as in *Martinez*, the “applicable guideline” at both the
22 sentencing and the subsequent modification proceeding are the same. But where, as here, the
23 analytic framework of the sentence includes a determination that the defendant falls outside the
24 heartland of the applicable range that was the starting point of the sentencing proceeding, the
25 applicable range at the modification stage will be different.

1 We think *Pembrook*, *Tolliver* and *Darton* strain to avoid the commonsense conclusion
 2 that the “guideline range applicable to the defendant” within the meaning of § 1B1.10 is the
 3 range that was actually used in sentencing the defendant. In *Pembrook*, for example, the
 4 defendant was actually sentenced within the range produced by the drug offense guideline, which
 5 the district court used after departing under § 4A1.3 from the range prescribed by the career
 6 offender guideline. *Pembrook*, 609 F.3d at 383–84. But the Sixth Circuit nonetheless held that
 7 the “applicable” range was the career offender range the sentencing court had found *inapplicable*
 8 because it overrepresented the seriousness of the defendant’s criminal past. *Id.* Though we
 9 disagree with the details of the court’s analysis,¹³ the more important point is the one we made in
 10 *McGee* and reiterate here: the combination of the rule of lenity and the fact that the crack
 11 amendments were adopted and made retroactive to ameliorate past sentences that were both
 12 fundamentally unfair and racially discriminatory counsels against the government’s crabbed
 13 construction of § 3582(c)(2) and § 1B1.10.¹⁴

¹³ The court in *Pembrook* found that § 1B1.10’s limitation on the *degree* of a reduction under § 3582(c) supports the government’s argument that the “guideline range applicable to the defendant” must refer to the pre-departure range. *Pembrook*, 609 F.3d at 384–85. Specifically, § 1B1.10 prohibits a reduction to a sentence below the amended range unless “the original term of imprisonment imposed was less than the term of imprisonment provided by the guideline range applicable to the defendant at the time of sentencing,” in which case a comparable reduction from the amended range is authorized. That provision, *Pembrook* reasoned, “weighs in favor of interpreting the defendant’s applicable range as his pre-departure guideline range.” *Id.* at 385.

A simple hypothetical reveals the flaw in this reasoning. Assume the sentencing judge in *Pembrook*, after first departing to the range produced by § 2D1.1 on the ground that the career offender guideline overrepresented the seriousness of the defendant’s criminal past, departed an additional six months because an unreasonable delay in prosecution deprived the defendant of an opportunity for a concurrent sentence. *See United States v. Los Santos*, 283 F.3d 422, 428 (2d Cir. 2002). In that event, the applicable guideline range for purposes of the § 3582(c)(2) proceeding would still be the post-departure range provided by § 2D1.1, and § 1B1.10 would operate to limit the authorized reduction to a point “comparably less” than the range produced by the retroactive amendment to § 2D1.1. § 1B1.10(b)(2)(B). In short, there is nothing in the text or structure of either § 3582(c)(2) or § 1B1.10 that precludes our conclusion here, *i.e.*, that the range the sentence was “based on” for purposes of § 3582(c) was the range it was in fact based on, and the range that was “applicable” for purposes of § 1B1.10 at that time was the range that was in fact applied.

¹⁴ Though we are aligned with the Third and Fourth Circuits in our result, we do not fully agree with their reasoning. Specifically, the Fourth Circuit in *Munn* adopted the following approach: When a sentencing judge departs under § 4A1.3 from the career offender range to the drug offense guideline range, the post-departure range is the “applicable” range under § 1B1.10 for a reason unique to criminal history departures. The reason is the order of operations prescribed by the application instructions in § 1B1.1. Those instructions require the sentencing judge to

1 We are aware that other courts have found crack offenders ineligible for § 3582(c)(2)
 2 reductions in sentence despite the fact that they received Chapter Five-based departures from
 3 their career offender ranges, as Rivera did in this case. *See United States v. Wesson*, 583 F.3d
 4 729, 730–32 (9th Cir. 2009) (despite departure grounded on diminished capacity, initial sentence
 5 “based on” career offender guideline), *cert. denied*, 130 S. Ct. 2071 (2010); *Caraballo*, 552 F.3d
 6 at 8, 11–12 (same; departure grounded on medical condition). While there are elements of those

“[d]etermine the defendant’s criminal history category as specified in Part A of Chapter Four,” § 1B1.1(a)(6), before determining the guidelines range from Chapter Five, § 1B1.1(a)(7). Since the authority to invoke criminal history departures is set forth in Part A of Chapter 4, *Munn* reasoned, such departures must therefore precede the determination of the applicable range: “[I]t would make little sense for a sentencing court to apply all of Chapter Four, except for an assessment of the applicability of an Overrepresentation Departure [*i.e.*, a criminal history departure under § 4A1.3, as in *McGee*], only to return to that issue after determining the defendant’s applicable guideline range from Chapter Five.” *Munn*, 595 F.3d at 192. As a result, “the Overrepresentation Departure . . . is a departure *to*, as opposed to a departure *from*, the applicable guideline range.” *Id.* at 193; *see also Fleming*, 617 F.3d at 264–70 (describing as “plausible” the Fourth Circuit’s interpretation of § 1B1.1 but finding the application instructions ambiguous as to whether a criminal history departure occurs before or after the applicable range is determined).

We note first that this reasoning, which implicitly distinguishes between Chapter Four-based criminal history departures and Chapter Five-based departures, such as the one in this case, would support a conclusion that Rivera is not eligible for a sentence reduction despite our decision in *McGee*. But we are wholly unpersuaded by it for two reasons.

First, the application instructions in § 1B1.1 simply tell judges to count up the criminal history points (Part A of Chapter Four) and then determine whether career offender or one of the other sentence-enhancing statuses is present (Part B). The fact that the authorization for the criminal history departure is located in Part A (§ 4A1.3) hardly requires the odd conclusion that a judge is supposed to decide whether to *depart* from the applicable criminal history category as part of his or her determination of what that category is.

Second, contrary to the reasoning of *Munn*, we see no anomaly in a judge “return[ing] to” the criminal history departure after determining the applicable guidelines range from Chapter Five. Chapters Two and Three of the Guidelines Manual provide numerous departure options that require judges to perform the same task. For example, § 2D1.1 recommends a departure where reverse sting operations distort the drug quantity. § 2D1.1 cmt. n.14. The fraud guideline recommends one where the loss quantity substantially overstates the seriousness of the offense conduct, § 2B1.1 cmt. n.19(C), or where frauds with non-monetary objectives cause reasonably foreseeable physical or psychological harms, § 2B1.1 cmt. n.19(A)(ii). Among the recommended Chapter Three departures is an upward departure where there is a vulnerable victim enhancement in the current case and the defendant’s criminal history includes a crime that involved a vulnerable victim. § 3A1.1 cmt. n.4. No one could argue that these and the various other departures sprinkled throughout Chapters Two and Three amount to departures *to*, rather than *from*, the applicable range, even though the same application instructions guideline require judges to apply Chapters Two and Three before determining the applicable range from Chapter Five. § 1B1.1(a)(2)–(3). Rather, just as is the case with criminal history departures under § 4A1.3, sentencing judges “return to” those departure grounds, if appropriate, after calculating the applicable range.

In sum, our conclusion that post-departure ranges are the ones that count in a § 3582(c)(2) proceeding is not grounded in the Guidelines’ application instructions or definitions of the term “departure,” issues that have received extensive attention from our sister circuits on both sides of the circuit split. It based on our conclusion that the sentencing range a defendant’s initial sentence was “based on” is, quite simply, the range that was used by his or her sentencing judge in imposing sentence. Nothing in § 3582(c)(2), § 1B1.10 or elsewhere in the Guidelines Manual precludes that result.

1 courts' analyses that conflict with our analysis here, a critical distinction eliminates the need for
2 extended discussion of them. Specifically, there was no indication in either case that the
3 retroactive amendment would alter the outcome of the career offender guideline computation, as
4 it does for Rivera (by lowering his offense level from 38 to 37). Thus, even if those defendants'
5 sentences were found to be "based on" the *post*-departure range in their cases, it could not be
6 said that that range was lowered by the 2007 amendment. The case before us involves a
7 defendant whose career offender computation is indeed altered by the amendment in question, as
8 well as a sentencing methodology that strongly suggests the alteration would have made a
9 difference to the sentencing judge. We need not address here situations in which one of those
10 factors is missing.

11 Finally, we acknowledge the Sentencing Commission's proposed amendment to
12 § 1B1.10, *see* U.S. Sentencing Comm'n, 76 Fed. Reg. 41332 (proposed July 13, 2011). Absent
13 congressional disapproval, that amendment will become effective on November 1, 2011, and it
14 will dramatically alter the landscape for sentenced prisoners who seek to benefit from this year's
15 retroactive reduction of crack sentences. Among other effects, the proposed amendment will
16 preclude sentence modifications in situations like the one in *McGee*,¹⁵ where we found them
17 permissible, and at least arguably permit them in situations like the one in *Williams*, *see supra*
18 n.8,¹⁶ where we found them to be precluded. Indeed, because the amendment will prescribe the

¹⁵ U.S. Sentencing Comm'n, 76 Fed. Reg. at 41332 (amending commentary to § 1B1.10 to define "applicable guideline range" at initial sentencing as the range determined "before consideration of any departure provision in the Guidelines Manual").

¹⁶ *Id.* (amending § 1B1.10 to authorize sentence modification where defendant received substantial assistance motion and permitting comparable departure from subsequently-lowered range). We held in *Williams* that a defendant who received a downward departure pursuant to substantial assistance motions pursuant to both U.S.S.G. § 5K1.1 and 18 U.S.C. § 3553(e) was ineligible for a modification because the mandatory minimum of 240 months applied as his guidelines range (despite the motions), and thus his sentence was not "based on" a guidelines range that had been subsequently lowered by the Commission. 551 F.3d at 185–86. In the "Reason for Amendment" discussion that accompanies the July amendment, the Commission evidences an intention that

1 precise construction of “applicable guideline range” that we refuse to give the existing guideline,
2 *i.e.*, it is the pre-departure range from the initial sentencing, the proposed amendment would
3 render Rivera himself ineligible for a sentence reduction if it were applied to his case. However,
4 because the amendments to § 1B1.10, which abrogate the law of this and certain other circuits,
5 are substantive, rather than merely clarifying, *see United States v. Sabbeth*, 277 F.3d 94, 99 (2d
6 Cir. 2002), they cannot fairly be applied retroactively to Rivera’s § 3582(c)(2) proceeding on
7 remand.

8 CONCLUSION

9 A remand for the purpose of allowing the district court to exercise the broad discretion
10 afforded by § 3582(c)(2) is consistent with our approach to related sentencing situations. After
11 *Booker*, we faced the question of how to deal on direct review with sentences imposed before

defendants like the one in *Williams* receive a break in the context of their § 3582(c)(2) proceedings comparable to their downward departure for substantial assistance:

[T]he Commission has determined that, in a case in which the term of imprisonment was below the guideline range pursuant to a government motion to reflect the defendant’s substantial assistance to authorities (*e.g.*, under 5K1.1), a reduction comparably less than the amended guideline range may be appropriate. Section 5K1.1 implements the directive to the Commission in its organic statute to “assure that the guidelines reflect the general appropriateness of imposing a lower sentence than would otherwise be imposed . . . to take into account a defendant’s substantial assistance in the investigation or prosecution of another person who has committed an offense.” *See* 28 U.S.C. 994(n). *For other provisions authorizing such a government motion, see 18 U.S.C. 3553(e)* (authorizing the court, upon government motion, to impose a sentence below a statutory minimum to reflect a defendant’s substantial assistance); Fed. R. Crim. P. 35(b) (authorizing the court, upon government motion, to reduce a sentence to reflect a defendant’s substantial assistance). The guidelines and the relevant statutes have long recognized that defendants who provide substantial assistance are differently situated than other defendants and should be considered for a sentence below a guideline *or statutory minimum* even when defendants who are otherwise similar (but did not provide substantial assistance) are subject to a guideline *or statutory minimum*. *Applying this principle when the guideline range has been reduced and made available for retroactive application under section 3582(c)(2) appropriately maintains this distinction and furthers the purposes of sentencing.*

U.S. Sentencing Comm’n, 76 Fed. Reg. at 41334 (emphases added).

1 that decision by judges who were under the erroneous impression that the Guidelines were
2 mandatory. Our resolution of the plain error and harmless error issues in such cases was to
3 remand them to the district courts “for determination of *whether* to resentence,” firm in the belief
4 that “an appellate court will normally be unable to assess the significance of any error that might
5 have been made.” *United States v. Crosby*, 397 F.3d 103, 117 (2d Cir. 2005). When the
6 Supreme Court in *Kimbrough v. United States*, 552 U.S. 85 (2007), made it clear that we had
7 been erroneously inhibiting sentencing judges from deviating from the 100-to-1 ratio, we faced a
8 similar plain error issue. Once again, acknowledging “the broad deference that this Circuit has
9 afforded the sentencing discretion of the district courts,” we elected to remand all such cases to
10 give the district courts an opportunity to determine whether, in light of subsequent changes in the
11 law, they would have imposed different sentences. *United States v. Regalado*, 518 F.3d 143,
12 147, 149 (2d Cir. 2008). Our holding today brings that same approach to an analogous setting.
13 The Commission determined that sentences imposed under the onerous crack guideline should be
14 reexamined. The benefit of that long-overdue measure must not be limited to “arbitrary
15 subset[s]” of defendants whose sentences appear to have been influenced by the pre-amendment
16 guideline. *Freeman*, 131 S. Ct. at 2695. The best way to remedy the “systematic injustice”
17 produced by the old guideline, *id.*, is to err on the side of empowering the district courts to revisit
18 crack sentences, especially since (a) any actual sentence reduction is committed to the sound
19 discretion of the district courts and (b) the extent of any such reduction has been carefully
20 circumscribed by the Commission. These circumstances counsel in favor of a generous
21 construction of § 3582(c)(2) and § 1B1.10, not the narrow ones adopted by some of our sister
22 circuits.

1 The order denying Rivera's motion for a sentence reduction is reversed and the case is
2 remanded for a determination of whether such a reduction is appropriate in his case.