

ALERT TOP STORY

Opinion/editorial: Tip line divides us

The Daily Progress

Jan 28, 2022

Say you are a governor of a state that enslaved Black people for centuries, and when they were freed, lynched some of them, illegally blocked their voting rights and forced them to use separate bathrooms and go to “colored” schools. Say one of your predecessors even shut down public schools rather than integrate them and your state legislature refused to rescind a legal ban on interracial marriage until the U.S. Supreme Court forced them to do so.

If you are Virginia Gov. Glenn Youngkin, you set up a tip line to keep students from learning about their state’s ugly legacy of institutional racism and how it may have created structural inequality between races.

In the Old Dominion, snitches don’t get stitches for ratting our teachers and schools that try to make young people learn from history. They get a pat on the back from the chief executive for turning in their neighbors on suspicion of violating Youngkin’s executive order forbidding all discussion of white privilege.

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It's all so Berlin in the 30's and Beijing in the 40's. A tip line that aims to punish deviation from dogma comes right out of the totalitarian textbook. It turns people against each other in a way that teaching about institutional racism never could. Divide and let white power conquer so to speak.

Republicans have adopted this conservative narrative about what they call "Critical Race Theory." This narrative is now being tested in Virginia and other places in anticipation of its application in political races across the country. Supporters hope to end discussions about the role of institutional racism in the creation of inequality saying it unfairly targets all white people.

In keeping with that theme, the Albemarle County school system currently faces a lawsuit that claims an antiracism program must be killed because it is itself racist. The suit features illustrations and written materials from a one-month pilot program that operated at a middle school in 2021. The program ended last May. It no longer exists. Still, the Alliance Defending Freedom (ADF), a conservative Christian group based in Arizona, filed a lawsuit on behalf of several Albemarle families in December. The Alliance, which has fought against gay rights initiatives in public education, claimed Albemarle is forcing students to adopt concepts that violate their religious beliefs.

A school system spokesman told the Daily Progress that Albemarle has not heard any objections to its policies from the governor.

The American Historical Association is among 152 professional organizations that signed a statement decrying efforts identical to Youngkin's. "Knowledge of the past exists to serve the needs of the living," the statement says. "In the current context, this includes an honest reckoning with all aspects of that past. Americans of all ages deserve nothing less than a free and open exchange about history and the forces that shape our world today ... A white-washed view of history cannot change what happened in the past."

Autocrats often use a theory of propaganda called “projection” where they accuse opponents of doing what the accusers are actually doing. The hard push against antiracism programs in Virginia schools depends on charging those programs with promoting racism. Youngkin’s executive order bans “inherently divisive concepts, including Critical Race Theory,” a concept so broad that it can sweep in virtually every controversy. Conservatives apparently think this is necessary because sins of the great grandfathers and great grandmothers should not be visited on their current progeny. Doing so, the argument goes, will produce so much bad feeling between the races that it will destroy the progress America has made in race relations.

Autocrats also offer edicts. Youngkin did so as soon as he was inaugurated. Then, to make sure no schools and teachers undercut his effort to ease the Caucasian conscience, he invited tattletales to be his willing accomplices.

Given the history of such invitations, maybe Virginia should adopt a dress code that identifies supporters of the governor’s ban. How about shirts with matching colors? Brown should work.