

## OPINION

Brian Kelley, Editor

**Please write:** The Roanoke Times welcomes letters to the editor on public issues. Please provide your full name, address, and daytime phone number. **Letters** should not exceed 350 words and are subject to editing. **Writers** are limited to one published letter in any 30-day period. **Email:** letters@roanoke.com

## US isolationists key to Putin win

WASHINGTON — In autumn 1941, a few German units in Hitler's drive toward Moscow reached the city's outer suburbs, close enough to see the Kremlin's spires. Then Soviet forces counterattacked against a German army that lacked winter clothing because the high command had promised that the Soviet Union would fall before snow did.

A year ago, Vladimir Putin launched what he believed would be a quick dash to Kyiv. A few army units briefly touched the city's suburbs.



GEORGE WILL

Russia's estimated 60,000 military deaths so far are more than U.S. deaths in eight years in Vietnam, and four times what the Soviet Union lost in a decade in Afghanistan.

The "Putin exodus," which began well before the invasion and is accelerating, has cost Russia hundreds of thousands of mobile, educated young civilians.

Strategy scholar Eliot A. Cohen writes in the Atlantic that elements of Putin's army "have to be kept at the front by the fear of blocking units that will gun down soldiers fleeing the battlefield."

Putin's gangster regime has scrounged for cannon fodder in Russia's prisons, finding criminals to wage a war conducted as a war crime.



ASSOCIATED PRESS

Freshman U.S. Sen. Josh Hawley, a caricature of an anti-Washington demagogue, is a human windsock, responsive to gusts of public opinion. Hawley says the U.S. policy of supporting Ukraine's survival "has to stop."

Hence the pertinence of Nuremberg, where in 1946 the first of the charges against some Nazi defendants was of aggression, which the tribunal called "the supreme international crime" because "it contains within itself the accumulated evil of the whole."

Other charges included war crimes, crimes against humanity, and genocide. These categories are capacious enough to include Putin's indiscriminate rocket and artillery attacks on civilian concentrations and infrastructure, and the rapes and tortures inflicted by his rabble soldiery.

Wartime atrocity charges often merit skepticism. When, however, Ukraine says Russians are scat-

tering booby-trapped — explosive — toys to maim children, who then require caregivers, remember that Soviet forces did this in Afghanistan.

And Putin's abduction to "re-education camps" in Russia of unknown thousands of Ukrainian children is an attempt at cultural erasure akin to what his Chinese soulmates are doing to the Uyghurs, which U.S. policy has branded genocide. Putin is refuting his war rationale that Ukrainians are culturally Russians.

Putin can win only by Ukraine's allies choosing to lose by not maximizing their moral and material advantages. He is counting on Western publics' support for

Ukraine being brittle, and especially on the multiplication of Josh Hawleys.

This freshman Republican senator and probable presidential aspirant exhorted the Jan. 6 mob moments before he did what it demanded, trying to block some states' electoral votes.

Now, continuing his pandering to the most primitive portion of the GOP base, this Missouri Metternich is opposing what no one is proposing — giving Ukraine a "blank check." He evidently has not noticed the excruciating incrementalism of NATO allies' aid to that valorous nation.

Perhaps Hawley, advocate of nanny government "conservatism," has been too busy promoting his plan to make the federal government not Big Brother but Big Parent, taking over parenting with a law against children under age 16 using social media.

Hawley, a caricature of a (rhetorically) anti-Washington demagogue, is a human windsock, responsive to gusts of public opinion. An Associated Press poll shows that public support for aiding Ukraine militarily has declined from 60% last May to 48% today, and to 39% among Republicans. So, Hawley says the U.S. policy of supporting Ukraine's survival "has to stop."

The invincibly ignorant Rep. Matt Gaetz, R-Fla., has 10 co-sponsors, all Republicans, for a resolution calling for an end to aid for Ukraine. Their geopolitical

thinking probably is of Tucker ("Has Putin ever called me a racist?") Carlson sophistication.

They might eventually join hands across the barricades with some progressives who begrudge every federal nickel not devoted to feeding government-dependent Democratic factions. But Putin's congressional caucus will remain a mostly Republican rump.

Putin will be disappointed by the caucus's anemia. Few Republican legislators would be comfortable in the company of the likes of Hawley and Gaetz. And as Senate Republican Leader Mitch McConnell said last week, "Don't look at Twitter, look at people in power. ... Look at the top Republicans on the Senate and House committees that handle armed services, foreign affairs, appropriations, and intelligence." They support Ukraine.

In 1952, Dwight D. Eisenhower ran for president primarily to protect the Republican Party and the Republic from Robert A. Taft, who had been wrong about prewar preparedness and about postwar collective security.

Taft was a formidable intellect and legislator whose views resonated with the many Americans who were isolationists before the war and nostalgic for isolationism's comforts afterward. He sought the presidency three times (1940, 1948, 1952), winning it as often as Hawley will.

Will is a columnist for The Washington Post Writers Group.

## BLM AT SCHOOL

## Whitewashing lessons is true 'political manual'

It's no accident that governors such as Glenn Youngkin and Ron DeSantis are pushing back against Black history lessons in the classroom that they find objectionable.



MICHAEL PAUL WILLIAMS

They're employing a concerted tactic by ambitious Republican politicians to score points with their base. The strategy is simple: A schoolhouse lesson about systemic racism that hits too close to home is attacked as "political."

Apparently, Black thought isn't legit unless it comes with a conservative white governor's seal of approval. Which brings us to the Virginia Education Association's Black Lives Matter at School Toolkit and the Youngkin administration's criticism of it earlier this month.

When asked specifically what Youngkin objects to, Youngkin spokeswoman Macaulay Porter said:

"This toolkit clearly operates as a political manual at a time when schools and students should focus on recovering catastrophic learning loss. The Administration supports teaching all history, the good and the bad. Teachers' unions are attempting to advocate for 'the disruption of Western nuclear family' and ensuring 'heteronormative thinking no longer exists' instead of teaching fundamentals."

Porter's email is referring to a section in the toolkit outlining Black Lives Matter Guiding Principles, including "Queer Affirming" — "working towards a queer-affirming network where heteronormative thinking no longer exists;" and "Black Villages" — "the disruption of Western nuclear family dynamics and a return to the 'collective village' that takes care of each other." Other principles include "Empathy;" "Restorative Justice;" "Loving Engagement" and "Diversity."

The VEA had replied to Youngkin's broadside in a statement by its president, James Fedderman.

"Based on how the Gover-

nor's budget staggeringly underfunds majority Black school divisions, you might think he believes Black Lives Don't Matter in schools," Fedderman said. "Budgets and actions reflect values, and until he shows up for Black students with the resources they have been denied, his overt political attacks will continue to ring hollow."

Youngkin "seems more interested in waging culture wars to demonize our schools and communities than the nuts and bolts of running our government," said Fedderman, citing the administration's \$202 million math error in calculating state aid for K-12 schools.

Taisha Steele, director of human and civil rights for the VEA, states in the toolkit document that it is to be used "as a resource guide for advancing racial justice in Virginia's schools."

And therein lies the problem. "Advancing racial justice" have become fighting words, synonymous with critical race theory, for politicians pandering to people apoplectic at the mere mention of the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement. How else do we explain the Youngkin administration's hostility toward a "resource guide" with sample lesson plans such as "How Barbara Johns Helped End Segregation" and "Talking About Race and Racism"?

Look, this is a twofold: Youngkin can attack a teachers union and BLM. But this attempt to control or suppress the discussion of race in the classroom is the epitome of white supremacy.

In describing the toolkit as an attempt at "politically driven curriculum," the Youngkin administration is projecting.

His administration's attempted remake of the state's K-12 history standards is riddled with the fingerprints of right-wing standard bearers, from William Bennett, the education secretary under former President Ronald Reagan, to University of Virginia professor James W. Ceaser, formerly a staff member at The Heritage Foundation, a conservative think tank.

Among the other conservative advocates enlisted for the

Virginia draft were the Thomas B. Fordham Institute and Michigan's Hillsdale College, a Christian school headed by Larry Arnn, who chaired a panel established by then-President Donald Trump to support so-called "patriotic education." This 1776 Commission was a reaction to The 1619 Project, which explored the foundational role of slavery and white supremacy in U.S. history.

In Virginia, politics is driving a sharp right turn in our history curriculum. The Youngkin administration has at turns produced a draft that was heavy on references to Reagan but bereft of mention of the nation's first African American president, Barack Obama; called Native Americans "America's first immigrants"; and did not reference the ongoing legacy of slavery and its effects on today's society. People of color, thus far without success, have been demanding a curriculum in which their children see reflections of their heritage.

DeSantis has more vigorously performed the same schtick in Florida in attempting to purge Black history and Black thought he finds objectionable. In the meantime, he's appointed activist Christopher Rufo — the architect of the anti-critical race theory movement — to the board of trustees of that state's New College as part of its right-wing remake.

In Virginia, the governor whose first official action was to protect the feelings of white students seems to have little empathy for Black students, other students of color or LGBTQ students.

If you're OK with a curriculum shaped by the Fordham Institute, Hillsdale College and the Heritage Foundation — but draw a line at discussing BLM in the classroom — you're the one pushing a political agenda, not the educators.

The real "political manual" in operation is on the whitewashing of history in public education.

Michael Paul Williams is a columnist for the Richmond Times-Dispatch.

## Vital that we work to preserve justice

This nation has been overwhelmed with tragedy and the continuous suffering from the history of what it chooses not to learn. Officers tased, pepper sprayed and brutally beat 29-year-old Tyre Nichols during a Jan. 7 traffic stop, according to the horrific video footage released by the city of Memphis on Jan. 27.

The footage, which comes from a SkyCOP camera and officers' body cameras, is split into four devastating videos. Police can be heard yelling at Nichols to get out of his car and forcibly removing him from the car. The video has been described by law enforcement and attorneys for

BRYAN HANCOCK

Nichols' family as "absolutely appalling," "alarming" and "unconscionable."

It is my opinion that the officers in Memphis and others who choose to use barbaric force do not adhere to the rational mindset of what service and dedication to a community looks like or should be. Empathy and moral ethics go hand in hand with being a humble, dignified community servant.

Officers should not operate as a lynch mob, nor as judge, jury and executioner. Officers who are supposed to uphold the law should not be oppressors and definitely should not be operating with a gang mentality.

If you aren't interested in learning about and positively impacting the community you serve, this is simply not the line of work for you. The choice to take life in any way, shape or form is egregious and horrific. We have seen it countless times, and it shatters the trust of the public time and time again.

The past few months I've worked on an initiative called The Empathy Project. [See Roanoke Times article "Empathy Project memorializes Roanoke gun violence victims," Nov. 16, 2022.]

I've sat and listened and learned from three different families who have had their lives severely shattered by losing a loved one to murder. All three families sought justice for their loved ones and worked tirelessly with law enforcement to bring these murderers to justice.

Those months, for me, included eye-opening meetings with law enforcement who do care about serving their community. I've seen officers comfort grieving families in

these traumatic situations.

In my personal life, I've seen some officers strive to work in fairness and in the principles of service, and I've also witnessed the narcissistic ego trips that are the equivalent to giving a toddler a Ferrari.

I can remember two years ago, here in Roanoke, during the George Floyd protest, there were some officers who were protesting with us, but there were also officers who were smug and hurtful.

Tyre Nichols should still be here. As this situation unfolds, we see that another vast hole has been created, sucking life from us and feeding evil, corruption and the lust for power.

I can't help but wonder what he and others like him could have been. Close your eyes and think about how much we truly take for granted in just getting to our next destination unharmed.

Think about the fact that at the end of the day, we all have someone waiting for us. Life is a gift, and we should savor it. Some look at these situations as soundbites or opportunities to heighten careers, but at the end of the day, and after the cameras go on to the next headline, there is still a family grieving someone very special lost to more senseless, egregious and inhumane behavior that shouldn't be happening anywhere.

The essential root of solving this problem is awareness. Sometimes I feel as if we are becoming so reactionary as a society that we can't process or even fathom that there are solutions.

I choose to acknowledge the challenges we face as a society but also keep believing in our betterment because there are people who genuinely care, even if there are others who are corrupt, jaded and hateful. I genuinely believe that good and right can and will win out.

We have to go beyond politics and start supporting all people instead of taking the easy way out by making accusations and generalizations.

For any community to thrive, it is vital to have people who work to produce and preserve justice, love and genuine righteousness. Thurgood Marshall said, "In recognizing the humanity of our fellow beings, we pay ourselves the highest tribute."

Bryan "Harvest Blaque" Hancock is a Virginia-based actor, Slam poet, writer, Hip-Hop performer, and Perry F. Kendig-nominated artist who lives in Roanoke.