

Progressives inflict progress in California; George Will column: Progressives inflict progress in California

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Body

Shades of Orwell

WASHINGTON

California, our national warning, shows how unchecked progressives inflict progress. They have placed on November ballots Proposition 16 to repeal the state constitution's provision, enacted by referendum in 1996, forbidding racial preferences in public education, employment and contracting.

Repeal, which would repudiate individual rights in favor of group entitlements, is part of a comprehensive California agenda to make everything about race, ethnicity and gender. Especially education, thereby supplanting education with its opposite.

The 1996 ban on preferences was not intended to, and did not, end all measures to increase the participation of minorities and women in the state's post-secondary education, or in doing business with the state government.

So, Proposition 16 primarily should be seen as an act of ideological aggression, a bold assertion that racial and gender quotas - identity politics translated into a spoils system - should forthrightly be proclaimed and permanently practiced as a positive good.

California already requires that by the end of 2021 some publicly traded companies based in the state must have at least three women on their boards of directors, up from the 2018 requirement of one woman.

This past month, the legislature mandated that by the end of 2021, at least one director shall be Black, Latino, Hispanic, Asian, Pacific Islander, Native American, Native Hawaiian or Alaskan Native, or identify as LGBTQ. And by 2022, boards with nine or more directors must include at least three government-favored minorities.

Where will this social sorting end? Proposition 16's aim is to see that there is no end to the industry of improvising remedial measures to bring "social justice" to a fundamentally unjust state and nation.

The aim is to dilute, to the point of disappearance, inhibitions about government using group entitlements - racial, ethnic and gender - for social engineering. Most important, Proposition 16 greases the state's slide into the engineering of young souls.

They are to be treated as raw material for public education suffused with the spirit of Oceania in George Orwell's "1984": "Who controls the past controls the future; who controls the present controls the past." Progressives have a practical objective in teaching the essential squalor of the nation's past.

The New York Times' "1619 Project" - it preaches that the nation's real founding was the arrival of the first slaves; the nation is about racism - is being adopted by schools as a curriculum around the nation. If the past can be presented as radically wrong, radical remedies will seem proportionate.

This past month, Gov. Gavin Newsom signed legislation requiring all 430,000 undergraduates in the California State University system to take an "ethnic studies" course, and there soon might be a similar mandate for all high-school students. "Ethnic studies" is an anodyne description for what surely will be, in the hands of woke "educators," grievance studies.

Discussions of the proposed high-school requirement are being conducted in the progressive patois about "collective narratives of transformative resistance" in the "post-imperial life" of a nation groaning under the bondage of capitalist, patriarchal and other "systems of power." Students will be taught to become "positive actors," with the government's public-education bureaucracy stipulating what political positions are and are not "positive."

Coming in the context of such measures, Proposition 16's proposed repeal of the ban on racial preferences should be understood as repealing all scruples about the government-approved groupthink that Orwell warned against in "1984." In this enterprise, California progressives have company.

Writing in the British journal *Standpoint*, Charles Parton, with 22 years of diplomatic experience working in and on China, explains that President Xi Jinping's hostility to freedom's prerequisites includes root-and-branch rejection of education, understood as the development of individuals' abilities to think critically.

Xi, who calls teachers "engineers of the soul," wants education to be, Parton says, "collective, ideological and political." The Chinese Communist Party says education begins by "grasping the baby;" primary school promotes "loving" the party, socialism and the collective; secondary schools inculcate "the ideology of socialist builders;" and universities must be, in Xi's words, "CCP strongholds."

The CCP's and California's indoctrinators differ somewhat concerning the particular mentalities they aim to impose. But both groups would extinguish actual education - teaching individuals how, as opposed to what, to think. The principal difference is that the CCP is more candid than California is about replacing thinking with the regurgitation of government-stipulated orthodoxies.

In 1932, U.S. Supreme Court Justice Louis Brandeis celebrated how a single state "may, if its citizens choose, serve as a laboratory; and try novel social and economic experiments without risk to the rest of the country." Or as a warning to it.

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Graphic

California Gov. Gavin Newsom, shown at a June press conference, signed legislation in August requiring all undergraduates in the California State University system to take an "ethnic studies" course. THE ASSOCIATED PRESS
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