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OPINIONS

The Chowan Herald
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A publication of Adams Publishing Group

Never too late

What lessons can we learn from one of North Carolina's most colorful political figures who served as attorney general, lost a gubernatorial election, won election as secretary of state, lost that position in disgrace, and then came back as a successful lawyer and lobbyist?

COLUMNIST



D.G.
MARTIN

In a recent column about Rufus Edmisten's book, "That's Rufus: A Memoir of Tar Heel Politics, Watergate and Public Life," I promised to share lessons from that book.

Edmisten's most important lessons are gathered in a chapter titled "Hubris" near the end of his book.

Writing that although he could find excuses for his "bad behavior" as secretary of state, he confesses, "It was nobody's fault but my own. This has not been easy to accept, but sometimes the truth isn't easy to take."

He compares his conduct with those of the Watergate figures he had earlier helped bring down as an aide to Sen. Sam J. Ervin. Edmisten writes that he, like them, "brought catastrophe upon themselves in part by becoming full of themselves, feeling a false sense of entitlement and making unwise choices."

Edmisten explains how his long years in office and in the public spotlight led to his problems. "Getting too impressed with myself resulted in bad things happening to me. When you hold public office or any position others perceive as one of power, a lot of people say a lot of nice things about you. While some of them might be true, many of them are simply intended to win favor. This works about as often as you might expect you really can catch more flies with honey than you can with vinegar. It can also really puff a person up. Everybody wants to be liked, after all."

His situation came to a head in 1995. "I had been doing some things that were foolish, to say the least. As I perceived myself to be more and more powerful I danced closer and closer to an edge I should never have gone near. I didn't intend to do wrong. I was just playing loose and easy with some rules I should have abided."

A report by the state auditor and articles in the Raleigh News & Observer alleged, according to Edmisten's book, the misuse of employees, misuse of a state car, abuses by subordinates, and improper hiring practices.

In this deluge of criticism, Edmisten announced he would not run for reelection, and, he writes, "I actually thanked God my daddy had died before this mess started."

Why did it happen? That is Edmisten's lesson for us.

It was the excessive pride that arose from his long years at the center of public attention that led to his troubles.

He warns his readers, "Once hubris gets a foothold it grows incrementally and accelerates until it is expanding exponentially, and in leaps and bounds takes over. No doubt the sycophants of the world recognize the hubris-infected when they see one and scamper to that person like crows to a fresh corn field. They converge and the convergence only adds to the inflated sense of self-worth of the Terrible Toad of Hubris because they are all paying attention to him. I forsook the humility that my upbringing instilled and became enthralled by the deluge of flattering attention."

This lesson about the dangers of hubris is not the end of the story. In inspiring chapters at the end of the book, Edmisten chronicles how his wife and friends led him back into the practice of law and other areas of service. His wife told him, "We are not going to whine."

"At the age of fifty-five," he writes, "I put aside all petty things and began a new life."

In making his new life, Edmisten gives us another lesson.

It is never too late to turn an old life into a new one.

D.G. Martin hosts "North Carolina Bookwatch," Sunday 11 a.m. and Tuesday at 5 p.m. on UNC-TV. The program also airs on the North Carolina Channel Tuesday at 8 p.m. and other times.

LETTERS

Letters must include the author's name, address and daytime phone number (for verification purposes). Unsigned letters will not be considered. Submissions will be edited. Please keep letters to 350 words or less. Letters for the upcoming municipal election will be accepted until Friday, Oct. 18, two weeks prior to the Nov. 5 election.

SUBMIT LETTERS

Submit letters to Opinion Page Editor Miles Layton via email at mlayton@ncweeklies.com. Letters can also be dropped off at our office, 423 S. Broad St., Edenton.

READER WRITES

Thanks goes to Chowan Herald

My name is Della Copeland-Robbins, a graduate of JAHHS Class of 1972.

I am writing this letter to compliment you and express my great satisfaction on the articles you published about JAHHS Class of 1972 Reunion which was held the weekend of September 6-8, 2019.

I feel with the articles being

published and you using the Chowan Herald as a media resource, reached classmates that we were not able to due to not having their contact information. This added to our attendance, a successful, full-filled, and remembrance class reunion.

Thanking you again, for sharing our memories and the newspaper being such a support system!

DELLA COPELAND-ROBBINS
Neuport News, Virginia

Why I don't want and don't deserve reparations

My great-great-grandfather Silas Burgess came to America shackled in the belly of a slave ship.

He was sold on an auction block in Charleston, South Carolina, to the Burgess Plantation.

Orphaned by age 8, he was, fortunately, surrounded by elder slaves who, though physically chained, mentally envisioned themselves as free men. They escaped, taking young Silas with them, making their way to West Texas.

Silas worked hard and saved his money. Eventually, he became the owner of 102 acres of farmland, which he cultivated and paid off within two years. I proudly carry the name of my first American ancestor — who, like millions of others drawn or brought to our country, struggled past overwhelming obstacles to live the American Dream.

Silas founded the first black church, the first black elementary school in his town. He was a Republican, a Christian, and a pillar of his community. He was proud and industrious and taught his children to be the same.

Now, because great-grandpa Silas was once a slave, so-called "progressives" want to give me money.

Never mind that, like him, I am an entrepreneur who received an excellent education, built businesses, raised a remarkable family and, unlike most white Americans, earned a Super Bowl ring.

Because of work I've never done, stripes I've never had, under a whip I've never known, these progressives want to give me money I've never earned. The fact that this money will be forcibly taken from others who also dreamed, worked and sacrificed for it, I'm told is not my concern.

But it is.

At the core of the reparations movement is a distorted and demeaning view of blacks and whites.

It grants superiority to the white race, treating them as an oppressive people too powerful for black Americans to overcome. It brands blacks as hapless victims, devoid of the ability which every other culture possesses to assimilate and to progress.

The reparations movement conveniently forgets the 150 years of legal, social, and economic progress obtained by millions of American minorities. It also minimizes the sacrifice of hundreds of thousands of white Americans and a Republican president who gave their lives to eradicate slavery.

I think Grandpa Silas would have seen this loss of American lives as payment in full. Every grateful black American, then and now, would feel the same.

The reparations movement also reinforces a view of racial relationships that undermines America's Judeo-Christian foundation. It defies the ideals of for-

giveness and second chances and scorns individual accountability.

Proponents of reparations believe that black Americans are incapable of carrying their own burdens, while white Americans must bear the sins of those who came before them. Proponents do not take into account the majority of white

Americans who never owned slaves, who fought to end slavery, or who came to America long after it was ended.

This divisive message marks the black race as forever broken, a people whose healing can only come through the guilt, pity, and benevolence of whites. Tragically, we now see this playing out on our college campuses. As young white Americans acknowledge their skin color as a "privilege," young black Americans — with no apparent shame — accept their skin color as one that automatically confers victim status.

In doing so, they seem unaware that this perception of blacks was shared by the 1960s Southern white supremacists of my youth. Those who seek reparations have accepted the theory that skin color alone is capable of making one race superior to the other — that with no additional effort, values, or personal initiative, white Americans will succeed, while black Americans will fail. At its very core, this represents the condescending evil of racism.

It certainly does not represent black America's potential.

Forty percent of black households today live the middle-class American Dream. There are thousands of black Americans among our nation's top 1% of income earners — doctors, lawyers, engineers and professors; not to mention music, TV, film and sports stars. Many of our society's most revered and celebrated citizens are black.

The journeys of these Americans to wealth and prominence vary, like those of their white counterparts, but many benefited from having ancestors like Grandpa Silas, who embraced the opportunities their country provided and who left behind a legacy of proud, productive, patriotic, and successful families. Why should white Americans — my neighbors, friends, and fellow citizens — owe me anything?

If Grandpa Silas were here, I'm certain his message to everyone, whether black or white, would simply be this:

Good character cannot be bought by bribery.

Burgess Owens wrote this for Prager University.

COLUMNIST



BURGESS
OWENS

More reasons to keep JAHHS in Edenton

From a previous downtown business owner's standpoint Holmes' students, parents and faculty represent daily income to downtown proprietors and tax revenue to the town.

Accordingly, my current Holmes school position is firm — keep Holmes downtown. Outlining my position with the following

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PATRICK
FLYNN

reasons should explain the many thoughts and feelings I have regarding the issue.

Looking at the dual enrollment Holmes/College of the Albemarle (COA) perspective, relocating Holmes to the County unnecessarily burdens college-bound students without cars. Driving an expected 20 minutes between COA and a new high school, especially if a driver doesn't have

a part-time job to pay for gas, will be a game changer.

From a student's standpoint Holmes' kids won't be able to sit in a variety of seasonally comfortable environments without a car to drive back downtown with the potential of losing a job there. This contrasts dodging 18-wheelers on Rt. 32 in the County. Another disadvantage with a new Holmes is not being able to watch the marching band set up or practice while driving to or from downtown errands. Always cool! Holmes in the County probably means a field/gym in a galaxy far, far away from a main road.

To introduce a pro-environment, anti-Big Wind commentary into the Holmes question is another important consideration that may suggest how dangerous Timbermill will make Chowan's future. Testimony before Chowan Commissioners back in the day explained White Oak Elementary and the middle school would be screened from Timbermill turbines. Infrasound is not so screened. A recent Finnish study documents Infrasound broadcasting up to 40-60 KM in distance.

If built, an unwritten conflict will be the intensity of the Infrasound waves that will assuredly plague most, if not all, Chowan residents. A new school near the Community Building will bring students that much closer to the negative, health-altering effects of operational wind turbines, effects that contributed to most European countries abandoning wind power.

Further, everyone in the County will be more Infrasound-affected than people living downtown because Timbermill would create a 14 KM (9 Mile) broadcast range radius from a turbine origination center, (emitting an 18-mile circle of negative, health-related influence according to an earlier study.) Timbermill has been a song a dance routine from its inception.

Turbines aside, my accountant antennas go up when I hear student enrollment estimates have dropped from when they were first planned. If building size and cost are estimates several years old, using those numbers means designs will not be proportional to current needs. Accounting numbers shouldn't be so inflated before committing to a bond issue or borrowing bank money.

For me, the debate becomes a new facility will create a better educational environment. Let's hope so. The bottom line for Holmes is the quality of the opportunities inside the bricks and not how the budget will slap together new ones or tear down old structures and build them anew. High school students and the health of Chowan residents will be the priority wherever it is built.

Patrick Flynn is a local businessman dedicated to environmental awareness in Chowan County.

No check could substitute for an apology

Be honest. When you hear the word "reparations" in relation to compensation to African Americans for the sin of slavery, you think of a check from the U.S. Treasury, one in the amount of "priceless" for more than two centuries of free and forced labor followed by the ongoing impacts and persistence of racism, discrimination and white supremacy. And then you wonder where that money is going to come from and who's going to get it.

My colleague Charles Lane tackles the latter question in a sobering column that asks a question of its own that I had not yet considered: Would reparations be constitutional? "Maybe not" is his response.

"Any financial benefits awarded to African Americans in compensation for historical discrimination would collide with well-established Supreme Court precedents," Lane writes before going on to explain. In the end, given Supreme Court precedents, it could boil down to an individual being able to show that they personally and directly suffered or were injured by slavery. Reaching that point requires getting through a hornet's nest inside a Pandora's box wedged into the smallest of the Matryoshka dolls.

Though focusing on the compensation aspect of reparations is understandable, it misses a larger discussion this nation has yet to have. I've written this before so forgive the repetition. A national conversation about reparations is more nuanced than promising black folks a check. The path set forth by H.R. 40, which had a historic hearing on June 19, is the one the nation needs to follow. The preamble of the bill sponsored by Rep. Sheila Jackson Lee (D-Texas) spells it all out.

To address the fundamental injustice, cruelty, brutality, and inhumanity of slavery in the United States and the 13 American colonies between 1619 and 1865 and to establish a commission to study and consider a national apology and proposal for reparations for the institution of slavery, its subsequent de jure and de facto racial and economic discrimination against African-Americans, and the impact of these forces on living African-Americans, to make recommendations to the Congress on appropriate remedies, and

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JONATHAN
CAPEHART

for other purposes.

Two phrases stand out for me. "Appropriate remedies" is the golf umbrella of legislative terms. Just about anything can fit under it. Thus, a "proposal for reparations" with its myriad facets would be among those remedies. And it would force us to broaden or outright change the definition of what reparations are. All would be up for discussion, from providing direct cash payments to figuring out how to destroy the school-to-prison pipeline to instituting real efforts to break racism's vice grip

on our political and cultural life. All remedies should be considered and debated.

What doesn't need to be debated, but is an absolute must, is "a national apology." Yes, the bill language says "consider a national apology," which leaves the possibility for none. But to walk down the path of H.R. 40 with all the monstrous evidence already strewn about it would be a disgrace. We must face our history.

"We need to be honest about not just

See CAPEHART, A7