Months after Virginia Gov. Ralph Northam came under fire for the racist images on his yearbook page from Eastern Virginia Medical School in 1984, he remains in office, a battered and chastised public figure. But maybe this isn't a bad thing. A quick resignation would have elicited rhetorical condemnations, a symbolic “washing of hands” and sent the wrong message that everything has been resolved. It most certainly has not been. The Commonwealth of Virginia, and our nation, must address the root cause of racism 35 years ago, and today — the belief in a hierarchy of human value that poisons our society.

Through centuries, America has failed to do the required work of uprooting and finally eliminating the idea and belief in a hierarchy of humanity — the empowering of one human being over another because of skin color or religion or ethnicity. It was stunning that when USA Today examined 900 yearbooks from the same era, it found more than 200 examples of racist materials, demonstrating the depth of racial bias in our society.

The heart of the problem is the hierarchy of human value. This core belief is the myth that built America. Human value hierarchy fueled unfettered land confiscation from Native Americans and unprecedented human decimation and enslavement of Africans, all of which fueled a young country's rapid economic growth and emergence as a world power.

As long as the foundational myth of unequal human value is allowed to fester consciously and unconsciously, the idea can, will and indeed IS being manipulated for political gain and potentially authoritarian power.
Hitler perfected this art of fearmongering and emotional manipulation using the idea of a hierarchy of human worth and value. His Nuremberg laws became the basis of Nazi Germany and the Holocaust. These laws were modeled after racist laws and practices here in the United States. The 2017 book, *Hitler's American Model* by Yale legal scholar James Whitman, documents how America's racial oppression helped inspire the Nazis' anti-Jewish legislation.

Clearly, if America only “washes our hands” after every incident of racism, we fail to enact any meaningful change. The action that is long overdue in Virginia and the whole of America is a truth and racial healing process.

To heal is to make whole, to set right. A broken bone must be reset in order to heal without deformity. Setting the United States right requires humanely and sincerely facing and unpacking the truths of our past, and finally burying the myth of a hierarchy of human value, replacing it with awareness and appreciation of the sacred interconnected reality of humanity. We must all realize that we are truly one human family, ultimately tracing our genomic ancestry to common ancestors on the continent of Africa.

Only at this point can we begin to envision a healed and shared future together as one America — not simply as red or blue — but with a shared vision of a truly reconstructed America that values all equally. No more susceptibility to manipulation through “dog whistle politics” and social media tricksters. No more deeply held racial resentments ripe for the picking by domestic and foreign enemies.

Together, we can then create a new, more complete narrative. We can construct a new story of America for our children, one honoring and embracing all of them. We can heal our perceived divides, share authentic memories and listen to one another, forging relationships of mutual understanding, trust and respect.

We can leverage these new bonds to meld division and separation into the “Beloved Community” envisioned by the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Working together,
communities are capable of creating affordable housing, employing equitably, educating and caring for all. Laws and policies need to redress inequities created by centuries of adhering to a human hierarchy.

A compassionate, united and thoughtful people can create an authentic and expansive form of democracy that is poised to generate a far more fair and equitable economy; rather than continuing to increase wealth and income divides.

This change in our core belief and perception, in our way of seeing and willingness to relate to and with one another is America's unfinished business. The persistence of blackface, Klansmen (with and without hoods), racial, anti-Semitic, gender and xenophobic violence are symptoms of the deeper pathology of having embraced human hierarchy as a way of life.

Let us take this moment to begin the true journey of healing that our future demands.

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