

Letter to the Editor

Lawyer chides high court's remarks on racial justice

Dear Editor:

Concerning the Virginia Supreme Court's statement last week calling for racial justice. (See "Supreme Court calls for pro bono work to address racial divide," VLW, June 22).

This is judicial leadership? This pablum is what is needed from the Supreme Court of a state whose history in civil rights litigation going back over 100 years and more is—not rhetorically, but literally—second to none in creating, supporting and justifying racism?

Shame on the court for not confronting its past—its past because

when a court speaks of earlier decisions, it says "we." Consider, in contrast, our governor's remarks, also last week, squarely confronting historical Virginia racism and what he has done and is doing to contend with it now.

Gov. Northam's blackface episode of some decades ago pales in comparison to the evil decisions of our Supreme Court for several hundred years that helped create and maintain the "racial divide" it now belatedly bemoans.

Victor M. Glasberg,
Alexandria

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100 NORTH NINTH STREET
RICHMOND, VIRGINIA 23219-2334
(804) 786-6455
WWW.VACOURTS.GOV

CLERK
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June 16, 2020

To Members of the Judiciary and the Bar of Virginia,

On the frieze at the top of the front steps of the Supreme Court of the United States is a short but profound statement: "Equal Justice Under Law."

Article 1 of the Constitution of Virginia states:

"That all men are by nature equally free and independent and have certain inherent rights, of which, when they enter into a state of society, they cannot, by any compact, deprive or divest their posterity; namely the enjoyment of life and liberty, with the means of acquiring and possessing property, and pursuing and obtaining happiness and safety."

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., spoke as a prophet when he caused a nation to consider his words from Birmingham Jail. We need to hear them again: "Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere."

While words may be inspirational and motivating, to have any lasting impact they must be followed by lawful action.

As Judges, we must take all steps possible to ensure that in the courtrooms of the Commonwealth, all people are treated equally and fairly and with dignity under the law. It is a moral imperative that we do so.

As lawyers, members of the Bar of Virginia, we must provide legal services to those who otherwise would be unable to afford a lawyer. As judges and lawyers, we must encourage our brethren at the bar to make pro bono services a priority in our communities.

At this time, we face many challenges and uncertainties. We must join together to be a part of the solution to problems and difficult circumstances we face. The racial divide we

experience in this country can only be bridged by personal efforts to develop new relationships in the communities where we live and work. We can do it ---- together.

Donald W. Lemons
Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of Virginia

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