

Don't turn Forest Hills into a laughingstock



Your Turn
David Wolfford
Guest columnist

You may recall "Inherit the Wind," the play based on the 1925 Scopes "Monkey Trial" that pitted Fundamentalist-driven censorship against Darwinism in Tennessee. The state had just barred any teaching of evolution. The trial spotlighted a showdown of evolving ideas and academic freedom against a backwoods closed-mindedness. The trial and circus-like atmosphere made a monkey out of the statute and censorship. Years later, playwrights Lawrence and Lee set the story in fictional Hillsboro.

Now, in an era of cancel culture, the newly elected and greatly inexperienced Forest Hills Board of Education abruptly canceled that evil of evils, Turpin High School's Diversity Day.

One must wonder where in the evolutionary chain the four new board members fall. Their chief campaign point for their first real educational gig was protecting the district from critical race theory – the cultural right's newest boogey-man – never mind locally it didn't exist. I don't recall any concern about Turpin's Diversity Day in their limited platforms. Last year, the long-running program hosted over 100 student participants and the sky never fell.

At a recent Sunday emergency meeting the BOE voted 4-0 to kill the event and pledged not to pay one dime nor devote one minute of instructional time to a diversity program. Their only specific criticism pointed to questions on an anonymous survey. Seems the questions were meant to cause a realization that not everybody's got it the same. If the BOE members had concerns with some

of these questions, they could have offered a tweak here or there in advance of the event. If they feared an indoctrination, they could have attended Diversity Day to shape the next one in any appropriate direction, not cancel the whole show.

Is emphasizing diversity or assuring students understand those outside of our rather white neighborhoods a bad thing? Isn't it something we should spend a little time and money on? Apparently not. Four speakers were scheduled to lend their expertise. The sudden and embarrassing cancellation on Diversity Day even paralleled the 1925 court's denial of Scopes' expert witnesses. Don't let the enlightened ones speak, so our kids don't get any newfangled ideas.

The Forest Hills board members could not have genuinely been worried about indoctrination or ulterior motives. The event was as optional, non-disruptive, transparent, and academically well-planned as it could be. It was only open to juniors and seniors.

Turpin administration sent out the day's agenda, materials, and script in advance for parents to examine. Students could opt in or opt out. Those who opted out, "will simply attend the school day like normal," read the communique. Teachers were not going to be taken from their classrooms. And those who opted in, were not exempt from any assignments. This is standard high school operating procedure.

Teachers are protective of instructional time, but to "lose" a day here or there for a good cause – a pep rally, a snow day, an assembly, a field day – is not a big deal and is the nature of the business. A day for part of the student body to educate and examine society and hear from experts, isn't a loss, but rather money and time well spent.

In 1925, the Fundamentalists won the battle when Scopes was found guilty, but



Students at Turpin High School in walk out of school during class to defend Diversity Day, which was canceled this year. KAREEM ELGAZZAR/THE ENQUIRER

as "Inherit the Wind" conveys, somehow freedom of thought and exposure to ideas seemed to win the wider war. The town became a laughingstock. To my Anderson Township friends and neighbors who may rightly say, "Elections have con-

sequences," I agree.

Forest Hills is starting to look like Hillsboro while four board members walk on all fours.

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NICK ANDERSON