Opinion: It’s in America’s DNA to be ‘divisive’

By Wesley Morris, New York Times

Let’s face it: There are some things we just can’t face. Life’s too short. Somebody’s too sensitive. And the subject — whatever it is, although lately it’s been whatever — is too third-rail dangerous. Border walls, charter schools, closing Guantánamo, global warming, that Al Jazeera documentary claiming Peyton Manning used performance-enhancing drugs, Hillary Clinton, #OscarsSoWhite: Why bring any of this up? Why bring it up now? It’s too fraught, too . . . divisive.

This used to be an easy word. In a generic sense, it means ‘‘causing disagreement or dissension.’’ There, ‘‘divisive’’ meets up with our more discursive selves. We like to argue, and what we’re arguing about is that which leaves us on opposing sides of a divide. Last year, the world went bananas arguing over the color of a dress posted on Tumblr. Some people saw white and gold. Some people saw black and blue (although they’re crazy). And that made the dress divisive. But that kind of divisive seems quaint.

The word is now used in a way that is both antirhetorical and opportunistic.

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