

The Racist Douche

What more can be said about Donald Sterling, right? He's a racist douche who deserves all the anger and disgust our enlightened post-racial society can rain on him. This rich white man said nasty, unacceptable things, and that's really the beginning and the end of the story. Crucify him. Right?

Well... maybe not. Here's a contrarian view: Donald Sterling, billionaire bête-noire, is far more victim than villain. Many actual racists must surely have come to that same conclusion, but I like to think my lack of loathing springs from a slightly better disposition. It would be interesting, wouldn't it, to go back to the day before TMZ aired the infamous phone call, before we all learned who Mr. Sterling is and what he looks like, then go conduct a survey in any U.S. city to ask people seeing his photo for the first time; "On a scale of 1 to 10, how surprised would you be to learn that this man occasionally expressed racially prejudiced views in private?" If 1 = "totally unsurprised" and 10 = "utterly shocked", I'd bet any amount that the average over one thousand answers would hover around a 2. Further, I'd bet that YOU wouldn't bet against me on that.

The point is, we all know that Donald Sterling's views aren't that surprising. The guy is a 150-year-old white billionaire, which is hardly a demographic that drips with liberal sociological perspective. His comments so far have definitely been crass and potentially offensive, but if we're being honest, they're also kind of funny. It seems ol' Donald really thinks he hasn't said anything anyone else wouldn't say, and he truly can't hear how it sounds to our modern, hyper-politically-correct ears when he says things like "I love black people! I feed them, I buy them cars and houses...", so the result is his comically awkward attempt to rescue

the sinking canoe of his reputation.

If this were any average white octagenarian, the same comments would literally just be laughed away. His grandkids would snicker and roll their eyes at each other, then go get Gramps another Jack Daniels — extra ice — and leave the crotchety coot to his dotage. But Donald Sterling is no average old man; he's the owner of the LA Clippers, and he's obscenely wealthy to boot. Of everything Americans love, watching billionaires squirm has to be second only to flaunting our own unearned self-righteousness, and triple bonus if we get to high-five each other for our moral superiority to the super-rich... which is exactly what we're doing now. Donald Sterling is clearly from another era AND elite social class. Isn't it possible that his comments and the hard-to-watch follow-up "apologies" are best understood as generational artifacts and the by-products of privilege? Couldn't any of us have had similar 21st century social retardation if we'd grown up and lived in his very different world?

Personally, I think T.V. personalities like Anderson Cooper should be more ashamed than anyone, with their smug judgmental glares and simplistic traps to catch pitifully easy prey... they know exactly what they're doing. They're pandering to the worst instincts of their audience, and they're being bullies. The powerful can be bullied too, of course, especially by media-juiced mobs. I say, give Donald Sterling a break, despite his douchiness. He's old, he's set in his ways, and he's a product of his environment who emphatically does NOT represent the vast majority of America in 2014. Let's lay off the enlightened outrage and work on a sense of reality, empathy, and humor, probably in about that order. Let's stop feigning shock at the outdated ramblings of an old man when we know we're just swiping at someone out of spite. Let's get some perspective and start being a little more honest, and maybe even as decent ourselves as we demand others be.