

H A R L A N   R I C H A R D S

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Blackface Farce

Jeez, all the politically correct pundits are going nuts over Virginia Governor Ralph Needham's and Virginia Attorney General Mark Herring's revelations that they dressed up in Blackface when they were younger. Are you kidding me? As we like to say in prison, "who gives a rat's ass" what they did back in the 1980s?

The whole controversy is ridiculous. Doesn't anyone have a sense of humor any more? I've seen more offensive things on Saturday Night Live. Here's the way I see it. Often, neo-cons or other conservatives are outed for racist or misogynistic writings they produced when in college. These revelations are important because they reveal how those people really feel and what is going to drive their agenda if they get into a position of power - such as supreme court justice. Their past writings reveal their true nature because they have acted consistently over the years implementing that same agenda.

However, in the case of Mssrs. Northham and Herring, their records speak for themselves. They are progressive Democrats who seek fairness and justice for everyone - rich or poor, black or white, male or female, etc. To proclaim that after years (or decades) of progressive activism they are somehow unsuited to continue to do the good things they have been doing because of some hijinks back in their college days is like cutting off your nose to spite your face. You are killing off your own best soldiers in the war for justice and equality.

Was dressing up in blackface inappropriate and in poor taste? Yes. Does it mean that they are racist because of it? No. These guys exhibited insensitivity and a callous disregard for the feelings of black people. Back in the 1980s, I doubt if anyone realized the social harm such actions could cause. Overcoming racism in America is a decades-long project which began in earnest when the Civil Rights Law was passed in the 1960s. As the previous generations die off, taking their racist belief systems with them, we as a society become ever more sensitive to nuances of racism in America and eradicate it. Blackface in the 21st century is unacceptable. Blackface in the 1980s needs to be left there - especially when those involved have devoted their lives to progressive politics on behalf of others.

The greatest irony of this issue are the allegations of sexual assault against Virginia Lieutenant Governor Justin Fairfax - a black man. Which accusation is more damning? Which accusation merits impeachment proceedings? I'll take a man who once dressed up in blackface over a sexual predator any day.

Here's a little food for thought: Have you any idea what I was like as a young man? Do you know whether I was a racist? Or woman-hating redneck? If either of those was true, would it make my opinions and beliefs right now tainted? If I have grown and matured over the years to adopt a more loving, caring view of the world, isn't that a good thing? Shouldn't I be recognized for the person I am now instead of the person I was back then? It's a good thing there was no social media back when I was growing up because there is a whole lot of stuff I am very ashamed of now which I thought was the hot tip back then.