**Blackface**

**America's long embrace of "blackface": Through most of American history, said Rhae Lynn Barnes, wearing blackface was so commonplace that scores of U.S. presidents, business leaders, and college frats regarded it as "all-American fun." As a historian who's studied blackface minstrelsy, I was not at all surprised to see the photo of a man in blackface and a second man dressed as a Klansman on Virginia Governor Ralph Northam's yearbook page. "Blacking up" with burnt cork or makeup and affecting "darky dialect" originated in the 1830s, but remained a widespread activity late into the 20th century. It was considered so inoffensive among white people that many presidents, including Theodore Roosevelt, Woodrow Wilson, Herbert Hoover, Franklin Roosevelt, and Ronald Reagan were enthusiastic audiences of blackface shows. During the Jim Crow era, from 1880 to the 1950s, minstrel shows were performed "in nearly every city and town in the U.S." Virtually every college yearbook I've examined from that era contained blackface images. By depicting "darkies" as bumbling, stupid, obsequious caricatures, these images taught generations of Americans that blacks were inferior. Blackface may now be verboten, "but the truth is, it's hard to look anywhere without seeing its vestiges." *(The Week magazine, February 22, 2019)***

**Blackface -- a form of mockery of black people that dates to 19th-century minstrel shows -- "did not become insensitive or ugly in the past month." It has always made black people cringe. So why did it take Fallon, Kimmel, and Tiny Fey (whose 30 Rock had many blackface moments ) years to apologize? "I didn't know" isn't good enough. *((The Week magazine, July 10/July 17, 2020)***

**The cultural torchbearers this week extracted anguished apologies from Jimmy Fallon and Jimmy Kimmel for decades-old blackface skits. Terrified TV networks and streaming services promptly announced that episodes of 30 Rock, Scrubs, and The Office will now be removed for instances of racial humor that caused no fuss at the time. One episode of The Golden Girls was banned because two main characters wearing mud-masks tell a black family, "We're not really black." (*The Week magazine, July 10/July 17, 2020)***

**A review of 900 college and university yearbooks from 120 schools across 25 states during the 1970s and 1980s turned up more than 200 images of students in blackface, wearing Ku Klux Klan robes or Nazi uniforms, and staging mock lynchings and "slave sales." *(USA Today, as it appeared in The Week magazine, March 8, 2019)***

**Why dressing in blackface isn't racist: Santa Claus is coming to town, and we're greeting him with our usual "seasonal cries of racism," said De Telegraaf. From mid-November until St. Nicholas Day on December 6, St. Nicholas, also known as Sinterklaas, travels from town to town, appearing in parades and town squares, visiting hospitals and schools, and checking to see whether the children have been naughty or nice. It's a big job, so of course he is accompanied by his helper, Black Peter. Sinterklaas dresses in a red cloak and white beard, while Peter is done up in blackface. But again this year, in what has become a wearisome annual feature, the politically correct are calling for the Black Peter character to be replaced by some sort of elf. They say the Peter tradition only emerged during the colonial era, when blacks were seen as servants or even slaves. This attack is, of course, "completely unjust." No one has ever demonstrated that the Black Peter figure "incites discrimination or racism or any kind of negative image of people with dark skins." In fact, the children love Peter and clamor to touch him, just as they do Sinterklaas. Black Peter is one of the country's most cherished traditions. "And these sourpusses can't change that." *(The Week magazine, December 3, 2011)***

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