

Understanding and Interrogating Dominant Culture

Unit by Friendship Public Charter School team,
part of the 2021 cohort of *The 1619 Project* Education Network

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[This 2019 Washington Post article](#) provides a history of white politicians – throughout the country and across the political spectrum – getting caught wearing blackface with few consequences. Discussion questions:

1. What are some of the “excuses” described at the beginning of the article that white politicians have made after pictures or videos emerged of them in blackface? What is your reaction to these excuses?
2. Were you surprised to read that white politicians from both political parties (Democrats and Republicans), and throughout the country (not just the South), have worn blackface in the past? Why or why not?
3. Why do you think blackface is still so common in the U.S. and accepted (the article referenced a recent poll where a third of Americans do not think it is offensive for white people to darken their skin for Halloween)?
4. Why is the history of blackface and its racist roots and depictions resurfacing now?
5. Do you think politicians who have been caught wearing blackface in the past should be forced to resign?
6. Virginia Governor Ralph Northam did not resign after old photos surfaced of him wearing blackface. However, since the photos emerged, the governor has signed laws and policies that many Black leaders and activists [have long fought for and were surprised to see implemented so quickly](#). These include the abolishment of the death penalty and the decriminalization of marijuana, both of which have disproportionately targeted Black Virginians, as well as the removal of Confederate statues in the state. Do you think Northam’s actions should be considered a sufficient apology or effort to make up for his racist actions in the past?