



Educators Should Not Justify Blackface

By Shawnta S. Barnes – January 29, 2019

It almost seems like once a month there is a report of an educator or school-affiliated personnel that is caught in blackface. Before I go any further, blackface is wrong. There is no justification for an educator to support this action or to participate in the action. You are not an educated enough educator if you think it is okay.

Recently, I learned there was a blackface discovery in Nashville, Indiana. The superintendent of Brown County Schools recommended termination for coach and substitute teacher Richard Gist after a photo surfaced of him in blackface as Bob Marley. You would think if you were caught being culturally insensitive, especially if you work with students, you would acknowledge the error of your ways, apologize, and learn why what you did was offensive. Based on this individual's response, I understand why termination was recommended.

In approximately 2008 or 2007, or thereabouts, on Halloween I dressed up as Bob Marley, a character that I admire who spreads love, peace, and hope, and I dressed up as this person out of respect for him and what he believes and not in the intent of offending anybody or insinuating that another race is superior to any other," Gist said.

Bob Marley is a talented musician; he is not a character. Black people are not characters. Our skin, our essence, our being is not a costume you can drape over yourself under the guise of showing admiration. It is disrespectful, and it is wrong.

You would think after the first few incidents when people were caught in blackface and the black community explained why it was offensive and provided the history of minstrel shows that people would have deleted any photos of them in blackface from their phones and removed photos of themselves in blackface online. There is no excuse not to know this is inappropriate behavior especially from a person working with children. If you know someone suffering from this ignorance, go ahead and send them this article. We don't need people who believe blackface is okay in our schools.