**Virginia Gov. Ralph Northam admits he posed in yearbook photo showing men in blackface, Klan robe**

**BY PATRICK WILSON AND ANDREW CAIN**

Democratic Gov. Ralph Northam apologized Friday after admitting he appeared in a racist photo in the 1984 Eastern Virginia Medical School yearbook depicting one person in blackface and another in a Ku Klux Klan outfit. The photo was met by a cascade of calls for his resignation from Democratic allies ranging from the Virginia Legislative Black Caucus to Democratic presidential candidates.

As speculation mounted about an imminent resignation, Northam's Democratic support in Virginia politics collapsed Friday night. Among allies calling for Northam's resignation Friday night were House and Senate Democrats in the General Assembly, Reps. Donald McEachin, D-4th, Abigail Spanberger, D-7th, and Elaine Luria, D-2nd, Richmond Mayor Levar Stoney, and Northam's predecessor as governor, Terry McAuliffe.

Northam said in a statement Friday evening that he was one of the two people in the photo and that he is "deeply sorry." The statement did not say whether Northam was the person wearing blackface or the person wearing a Klan outfit.

The news rocked Northam's administration and he resisted calls for his resignation on Friday, later issuing a video statement saying he wanted to serve out his four-year term. Virginia's two Democratic U.S. senators, however, Mark Warner and Tim Kaine, each issued statements saying Northam should carefully consider how he moves forward.

"This photo is shocking and deeply offensive, all the more so because of Virginia's long and painful history of racism and violence toward African Americans," Warner's statement said. "The Governor must now listen to the people and communities he has hurt, and carefully consider what comes next."

Northam acknowledged the photograph was "clearly racist and offensive" and added, "I am deeply sorry for the decision I made to appear as I did in this photo and for the hurt that decision caused then and now."

If Northam were to resign, Lt. Gov. Justin Fairfax would become governor. Fairfax is a Democrat.

The right-wing blog Big League Politics first published the photo Friday, saying it showed Northam and a friend - one in blackface and one in the Klan outfit.

The Virginia Legislative Black Caucus issued a statement saying the photo was "disgusting, reprehensible, and offensive. We feel complete betrayal."

The caucus later issued a statement saying, "We just finished meeting with the Governor. We fully appreciate all that he has contributed to our Commonwealth. But given what was revealed today, it is clear that he can no longer effectively serve as Governor. It is time for him to resign, so that Virginia can begin the process of healing."

State Sen. Bryce Reeves, R-Spotsylvania, was one of the first to call for resignation, issuing an afternoon statement saying he hoped the picture was "inaccurate," but that Northam should resign immediately if it was real.

Taikein Cooper, who is black and is the chairman of the Prince Edward Democratic Committee, also called on Northam to resign.

"You can't champion racial reconciliation, during the 400 year anniversary of enslaved Americans being brought to Virginia, while being comfortable under the hood and/or behind a blackface," Cooper posted on social media.

In his written apology, Northam said he would heal the damage his past conduct had caused.

"This behavior is not in keeping with who I am today and the values I have fought for throughout my career in the military, in medicine, and in public service. But I want to be clear, I understand how this decision shakes Virginians' faith in that commitment.

"I recognize that it will take time and serious effort to heal the damage this conduct has caused. I am ready to do that important work. The first step is to offer my sincerest apology and to state my absolute commitment to living up to the expectations Virginians set for me when they elected me to be their governor."

Last month, Florida's secretary of state, Michael Ertel, resigned following a report by the Tallahassee Democrat that he posed in photos as a Hurricane Katrina victim in blackface 14 years ago.

Jack Wilson, chairman of the state GOP, said in a statement Friday afternoon, "Racism has no place in Virginia," and the "pictures are wholly inappropriate."

Wilson said: "If Governor Northam appeared in blackface or dressed in a KKK robe, he should resign immediately."

Republican leaders in the Virginia House and Senate had said in an afternoon statement: "This is a deeply disturbing and offensive photograph in need of an immediate explanation by the governor." They did not, however, call for his resignation.

Richmond Mayor Levar Stoney said late Friday: "Governor Northam has a long and distinguished history of service to our Commonwealth and nation, but he should do the honorable thing and step down."

Stoney, an African-American, had recruited Northam to run for state Senate during his tenure as executive director of the state Democratic Party.

As the evening unfolded, more calls came nationally on social media for Northam to resign, including from the NAACP and R&B star John Legend.

Julian Castro, a 2020 Democratic presidential candidate and former secretary of the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, called on Northam to resign.

"It doesn't matter if he is a Republican or a Democrat," Castro tweeted. "This behavior was racist and unconscionable. Governor Northam should resign."

Castro's tweet was followed later by one from U.S. Sen. Kamala Harris of California, another Democratic presidential candidate, who said: "Northam should step aside so the public can heal and move forward together."

U.S. Reps. Abigail Spanberger, D-7th, and Elaine Luria, D-2nd, also called for Northam to resign.

A quotation on the yearbook page purportedly from Northam, reads, "There are more old drunks than old doctors in this world so I think I'll have another beer."

Vincent Rhodes, assistant vice president of marketing and communications at EVMS, said: "Yearbook production was a student activity. We don't know when or where the picture was taken. … We're really not able to comment on a picture of a medical school student taken 30 years ago."

Northam is an Eastern Shore native who graduated from Virginia Military Institute in 1981 and then attended Eastern Virginia Medical School in Norfolk. He represented Norfolk and the Eastern Shore in the state Senate from 2008 to 2014 before becoming lieutenant governor and then being elected governor in 2017.

In a 2017 interview with the Richmond Times-Dispatch, Northam said he had just recently learned that his ancestors were slave owners. "My family's complicated story is similar to Virginia's complex history. We're a progressive state, but we once had the largest number of slaves in the union," Northam said.

An abrupt turn

Early in his tenure as governor, Northam had enjoyed signature achievements, signing off on Medicaid expansion and wooing half of Amazon's eastern headquarters to Crystal City in Arlington County. But one tumultuous week sparked a sharp turn.

The news of the photo surfaced two days after Northam made controversial remarks about late-term abortion that caused a storm in national conservative media and prompted Republicans to accuse him of supporting infanticide.

As governor, Northam has stressed inclusiveness. In his inaugural address he noted what he called Virginia's "complex" history.

"In a church on a hill 15 blocks from here, Virginia's first elected governor helped launch the American Revolution when he cried, 'Give me liberty, or give me death!'" Northam said.

"But at the bottom of that same hill, one of the country's largest slave-trading markets was coming to life. A place where Virginians would sell men, women, and children for profit."

Race in state campaigns

Race has played a key role in a number of Virginia's statewide campaigns in the modern era.

In 1989, L. Douglas Wilder became the nation's first-elected African-American governor, an event seen as a milestone of reconciliation in a once-segregated South. Virginia's current lieutenant governor, Justin Fairfax, is the second African-American to hold that role, after Wilder.

In 2006, U.S. Sen. George Allen, a Republican, lost his re-election bid to Democrat Jim Webb after Allen referred to a Webb volunteer of Indian descent as "macaca," considered an ethnic disparagement in some cultures.

Virginia's growing ethnic diversity has helped fuel the Democrats' winning streak in a state where Republicans have not won a statewide contest since 2009.

Kaine was the first governor outside of Illinois to endorse Barack Obama's 2008 presidential campaign. That year Obama became the first Democrat in 44 years to capture Virginia's electoral votes.

The day after Obama's victory, Kaine stood with his wife, Anne Holton, in front of the Virginia Civil Rights Memorial at the state Capitol and said: "Ol' Virginny is dead."

In August 2017, following the deadly white nationalist rally in Charlottesville, Northam - then the Democratic nominee for governor - said in a statement that Confederate statues "should be taken down and moved into museums." He has not pursued that policy as governor.

Prior to his run for governor, Northam twice voted for Republican George W. Bush for president and at one point was nearly convinced by state Senate Republican leader Tommy Norment to flip to the GOP. During his 2017 run, however, Northam moved left to win easily in a Democratic primary against former Rep. Tom Perriello, D-5th.

*Staff writers Bridget Balch, C.Suarez Rojas, Graham Moomaw and Mark Robinson contributed to this report.*

**Analysis: With his long-overlooked display of racial insensitivity, Ralph Northam keeps noted company**

**BY JEFF E. SCHAPIRO**

Bursts of racial, religious and cultural insensitivity have long shaped politics in Virginia, a state once preoccupied with desegregation. But as the controversy threatening Gov. Ralph Northam's governorship shows, they've flared well into the era of competitive two-party politics:

2006 - U.S. Sen. George Allen, R-Va.

Seeking a second term, Allen singled out at a Republican rally in Southwest Virginia S.R. Sidarth, an Indian-American staffer for Democratic nominee Jim Webb, labeling him a "macaca" - a term used by white North Africans to demean black Africans. Sidarth, then a student at the University of Virginia, was a tracker for the Webb campaign, responsible for following and recording Allen's public utterances, which included the racial epithet. Allen initially said he'd made up the word and balked at apologizing.

Allen, a native Californian who also had to answer for his enthusiasm for Confederate history, eventually did say he was sorry, but not before the "macaca moment" went viral, appearing on YouTube and other social media websites. The episode eroded public support for Allen, contributing to his narrow defeat to Webb, whose victory also tipped the Senate to Democratic control.

1982 - Then-state Sen. L. Douglas Wilder, D-Richmond

Threatening an independent campaign for U.S. Senate, Wilder was told by a senior Democrat who was among those pressing him not to run that negotiations over his withdrawal could not be held at the Commonwealth Club, bastion of the city's white-male establishment. Wilder had said he believed talks would be held over lunch at the club, but Del. Alson H. Smith Jr., D-Frederick, a member, refused to take Wilder and other negotiators there because he understood blacks were not admitted there. "I'm not going to spend the rest of my life apologizing to my friends for carrying you all in there," said Smith, according to Wilder biographer Donald P. Baker.

The party, instead, convened - as Wilder's guests - at a predominately Jewish country club, of which Wilder had been the first African-American member. Wilder abandoned his Senate bid, but three years later was elected lieutenant governor and, in 1989, became the nation's first elective African-American governor.

2018 - Corey Stewart

The Minnesota-born Republican nominee for U.S. Senate attempted to forge a Donald Trump-like coalition against Democratic incumbent Tim Kaine with frequent, high-decibel appeals to Confederate heritage, white nationalism and anti-immigrant xenophobia. Stewart's candidacy often focused on what he described as "taking back our heritage," a flourish widely interpreted as an appeal to racial fears. Stewart also had ties, through his circle of advisers and supporters, to Jason Kessler, an outspoken racist who helped organize the violent "Unite the Right" rally in Charlottesville in 2017, the year Northam was elected governor. Though Stewart strenuously rebutted claims he was a racist, he dismissed the term "white supremacist" as a figment of the American liberals. Stewart boasted that he was comfortably provocative; that it attracted interest in his campaigns, which included unsuccessful campaigns for the GOP nominations for lieutenant governor and governor.

1982 - Speaker of the House A.L. Philpott, D-Henry

During an appearance at the Shad Planking, a spring political gathering in rural Sussex County for the segregationist Democratic machine that controlled Virginia for nearly a century, Philpott told a reporter that he got along well with his African-American colleagues - "boys," as he called them. Philpott said he meant nothing by it, even though "boy" historically was a widely used and demeaning term for addressing black males.

The incident occurred during a flare-up in tensions in the General Assembly over Wilder's proposal to create a state holiday for the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr., the slain civil rights leader. The legislation had cleared the Virginia Senate, but was derailed in the House, in part because of Philpott's hostility to it.

1981 - Mills E. Godwin

Godwin, who retired after two terms as governor but was still a force in conservative politics, balked at endorsing the Republican nominee for governor, Marshall Coleman, apparently in part in retaliation for Coleman's attack on a Godwin ally, Democrat Edward Lane, in the 1977 attorney general's race for his role in battling court-ordered public school desegregation in the 1950s.

Massive Resistance, as the state's policy of defiance was known, was also supported by Godwin, then a state legislator.

When Godwin, under pressure from Republican leaders, finally endorsed Coleman against Democrat Charles Robb, he invoked a number of racially charged themes to energize his conservative allies.

During a rally at a Richmond hotel, Godwin didn't as much plump for Coleman as he did associate Robb - a son-in-law of "Great Society" President Lyndon Johnson - with statehood for then-majority black Washington, D.C., and an extension of federal civil rights protections that Johnson had won in 1964 and 1965, helping lock in the African-American vote for Democrats.

1973 - Former U.S. Rep. Watkins Abbitt, D-4th

A wheel horse of Virginia's hard-right political organization, Abbitt wrote a letter to his hometown newspaper in Appomattox County warning that the campaign of Democratic gubernatorial nominee Henry Howell was financed by a "liberal, left-wing millionaire Jew from Richmond." It was a reference to Sydney Lewis, a retailing pioneer and prominent arts benefactor, who - with his wife, Frances - had backed numerous Democrats whose comparative liberalism alarmed many in the conservative establishment that in the 1970s still held sway over Virginia's politics and economy.

The Abbitt letter was intended as a boost for his longtime ally and Howell's opponent, Mills Godwin. He was the Republican nominee, having left the Democratic Party, which had selected him for governor in 1965, when he was elected with robust African-American vote.

The Godwin campaign disavowed the Abbitt letter. However, it apparently helped invigorate Godwin's core vote in rural Virginia, home to many in the state's white Protestant majority.

1957 - Lindsay Almond

The Democratic nominee for governor moved to fully mobilize the anti-desegregation vote against Republican Ted Dalton, a future federal judge and father of the Republican elected governor in 1977, by vowing, "I would rather lose my right arm than see the first negro child admitted to the white schools of Virginia."

As governor, Almond and the Democratic-controlled General Assembly adopted the Massive Resistance policy to preserve racially segregated public schools, which had been outlawed by the U.S. Supreme Court in a 1954 ruling in a case that included a challenge to Virginia's separate schools for blacks and whites.

After a protracted legislative and legal battle, Virginia surrendered in 1959, though in one Virginia locality, Prince Edward County, public schools remained shuttered for five years, finally reopening under the supervision of a presidential commission,

On Friday night, Taikein Cooper, chairman of the Prince Edward Democratic Committee, was among the first political leaders to call for Northam's resignation as governor. Prince Edward County fell to Northam for governor in 2017 against Republican Ed Gillespie.

**UR professor details history of blackface, says 'outrage is an appropriate response'**

**BY MICHAEL PAUL WILLIAMS**

Students perusing a course catalog at the University of Richmond a few years ago might have done a double take at such offerings as "American Blackface" and "Blackface in Post-Soul Literature and Culture."

Bertram Ashe, a professor of English and American Studies at UR, taught both courses - the first in the spring semester of 2010, the second in 2012.

"Surprisingly, it was not controversial," Ashe recalled Friday, shortly after news broke that Virginia Gov. Ralph Northam was one of two people wearing racist costumes in a 1984 medical school yearbook photo.

"I honestly do not recall it being uncomfortable, mostly because I guess we were taking it seriously," Ashe said of the courses. "We weren't looking at if as, 'Hey, isn't this funny?'"

Northam's statement left it unclear whether he was wearing the blackface or a white robe and hood.

"Earlier today, a website published a photograph of me from my 1984 medical school yearbook in a costume that is clearly racist and offensive," the governor said in a statement. "I am deeply sorry for the decision I made to appear as I did in this photo and for the hurt that decision caused then and now."

Northam isn't the first politician to face controversy this year after old photos resurfaced. Florida's secretary of state, Michael Ertel, resigned last week after a newspaper obtained photos of him wearing blackface while dressed as a Hurricane Katrina victim at a 2005 Halloween party.

But Ashe said anyone attending college in 1984 should have been aware that wearing blackface was offensive. After all, there was pushback during the 1950s to the show "Amos 'n' Andy," a radio and TV sitcom set in Harlem, largely because of its stereotypical portrayal of African-Americans, he said.

"Blackface was way more offensive than 'Amos 'n' Andy' was," he said.

Ashe said the history of blackface dates far back to about the 1830s and extended well into the 20th century. He described it as "a weird obsession with blackness that grows out of that master-slave relationship."

"What folks don't know is it was primarily a Northern entertainment," he said. For Northerners who had never set foot in the South, it was a way for white audiences "to imagine what they thought black life was in Southern spaces," he said.

An alternating fascination and disgust with black bodies leaves some white people unable to resist physically embodying blackness, he said.

"It's a portal. It's a space through which they can behave and act in a way that is not like ordinary middle-class whites behave," Ashe said. "It appears to be irresistible to a certain type of person who cannot keep themselves from blackening their skin and imagining a type of black persona."

But blackface was also performed in the South. And even black people got into the act, including Bert Williams, the Bahamian-American vaudevillian who was one of the most famous black actors of the early 20th century.

Williams, smart and handsome, "made his name by rubbing dark coal on his face and performing in the blackface minstrel tradition," Ashe said. "It's not something he wanted to do. But it's something he felt he could do and would do to be a part of popular American entertainment."

Spike Lee's 2000 film "Bamboozled" includes footage of Bing Crosby, Judy Garland and Mickey Rooney applying blackface. And African-American actors appeared in blackface in "Stormy Weather," although two of its stars, Lena Horne and Richmond native Bill "Bojangles" Robinson, did not, Ashe said.

But for at least six decades, blackface has been universally viewed as offensive by the black community, he said. And any person who viewed it as acceptable behavior in the 1980s "is impossible to be believed."

Still, it persists.

In 1993, Actor Ted Danson showed up in minstrel blackface at a Friars Club roast of comedian Whoopi Goldberg.

And in 2016 in Richmond, Chris Bopst, who booked music for Balliceaux, a restaurant and music venue in the Fan District, resigned amid social media outrage over his dressing in blackface as part of a Halloween costume.

The restaurant closed two months later, though its owner would not connect the closing to the controversy.

"That's how volatile these things are," Ashe said. "That's the best example of just what a tinderbox blackface representations are."

And with the controversy involving Northam: "I think outrage is an appropriate response," Ashe said. "We as citizens are responsible for what we do."

**Editorial: Northam must resign**

Gov. Ralph Northam has served his nation and commonwealth with admirable distinction and dedication. So it gives us no pleasure to see his rapid fall from grace. He is by all accounts a decent and considerate man. And yet, his poor judgment has undermined his standing with Virginians in ways that we believe will permanently impair his ability to act as an effective governor. He should resign and return to his profession as a physician, with the thanks of those he has served as a state senator, lieutenant governor, and for the past year, governor.

Earlier this week, Northam made remarks about late-term abortion that troubled many of his constituents. Some of the attacks against him were cynical and misleading. But the governor's remarks on such a sensitive subject were intemperate and careless. We deserve better from our leaders, especially given the current national political environment.

But it is the revelation of a photo from his medical school yearbook page, showing a man in blackface standing next to someone dressed in Ku Klux Klan robes, that injures his standing and reputation beyond repair. We all act foolishly in our youth. But a college graduate, studying to be a physician, in a state with Virginia's troubled racial history, should know better than to reduce that history to a callous joke. The photograph reveals a lack of adult judgment that is disturbing. It does not erase Northam's service in the military or his compassion as a physician. It does, however, strongly suggest that he should, for the good of Virginia, step down from its highest office and allow Lt. Gov. Justin Fairfax to succeed him.

In tomorrow's Commentary section, Frank Atkinson, a one-time aide to former Gov. George Allen, discusses the Virginia Way, which in very recent memory placed a high value on bipartisan accomplishment. Atkinson even mentions Northam's efforts to bring greater comity to Capitol Square. We do not doubt the governor's sincerity. He is an able and amiable man. But the photograph - not from his youth but from his days as an accomplished young man - harkens back to an uglier Virginia way, one tainted by the unpardonable stain of Jim Crow - and the physical, economic, and social injustice of segregation and racism. It is a past that still haunts us.