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… ALL FOLKS AIN'T KIN FOLK

The Badge Was Real. The Oath Was Decorative.

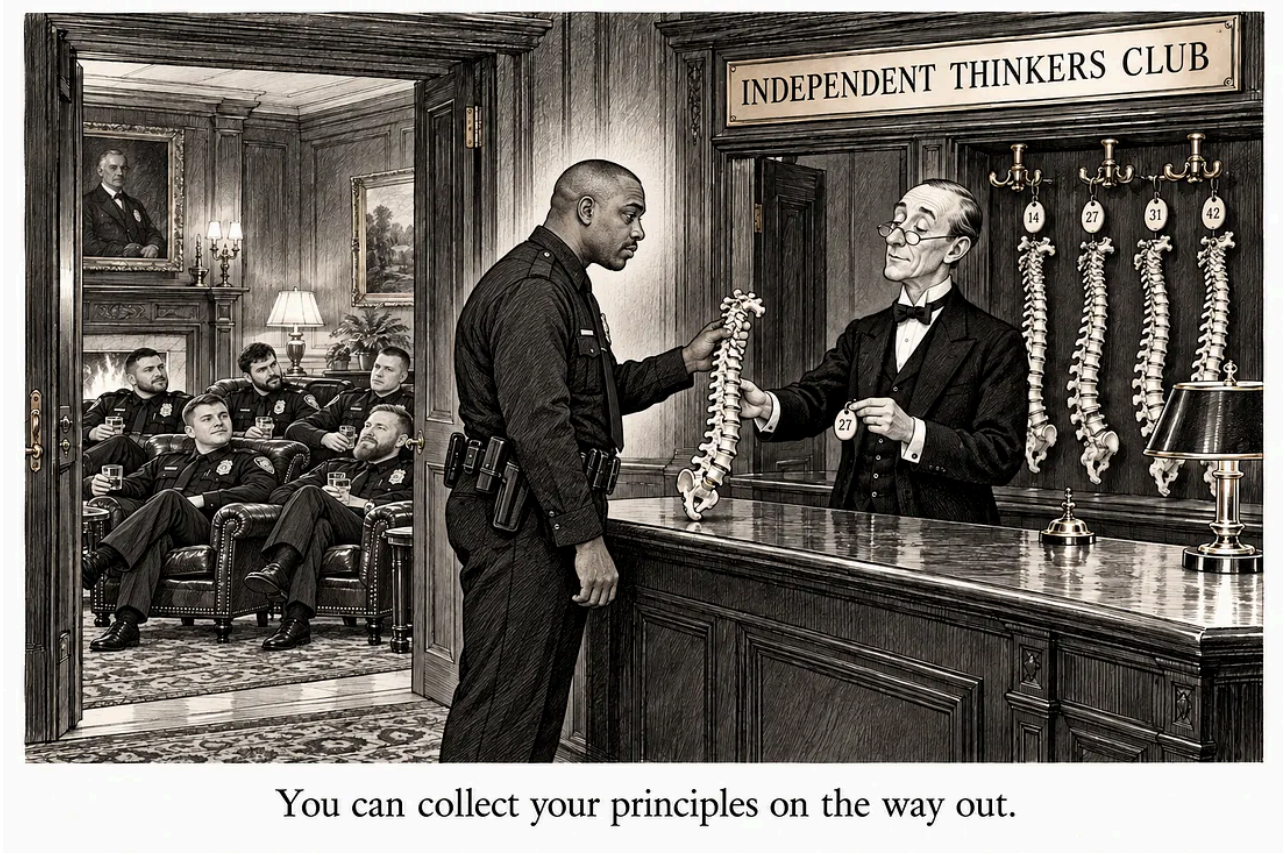
In Charlotte, an alleged competition to stop Black drivers raises an ugly question: how much conscience are you willing to surrender to belong?



Malik Shakur | The Color of My Politics Follow 5 min read · 20 hours ago

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By Malik Shakur®



You can collect your principles on the way out.

Malik Shakur®

A badge is an extraordinary thing to mistake for a personality. It grants public authority, then leaves the wearer responsible for developing private judgment. When officers allegedly turn stopping Black drivers into a competition, equal protection appears to have acquired a leaderboard. Apparently, serving the public needed a little something to keep it interesting.

A Public Service, Apparently With Points

According to sources cited by WBTV, a Charlotte-Mecklenburg police text thread included a competition over who could pull over the most Black drivers, along with racist slurs. By October 22, six of seven officers connected to the matter had resigned, including one who departed earlier amid a separate investigation. One remained suspended—the alleged conduct concerned traffic stops, not a systematic effort to make arrests. Precision matters. We are discussing people allegedly selected for reasons that were not sufficiently precise.

Consider the alleged premise. Public employees, entrusted with the power to interrupt your freedom, found a way to make choosing whose freedom to interrupt a recreational activity.

Most workplaces discourage employees from inventing competitions involving the customers. This becomes considerably more urgent when the customer cannot leave without permission.

If substantiated, the contest would turn a citizen into a unit of achievement. Someone driving home becomes someone eelse'sprogress toward winning. The officer gets material for the group chat. The driver has to calculate how politely they must reach for a registration.

What an efficient arrangement. One person supplies the entertainment and assumes all the risk.

It is difficult to exercise your rights when someone else is keeping score.

Belonging Comes With Benefits

Chief Estella Patterson said the officers were of three races, without specifying which. That does not establish anyone's motive. It does not support the comforting assumption that a diverse roster automatically produces a different institutional conscience.

Representation matters. So does what the representatives do after orientation.

People have more than one affiliation. Some come with a salary, professional standing, and colleagues whose approval makes the working day easier. Shared identity can become negotiable when another identity offers better benefits.

We do not know these officers' private calculations. But the possible bargain is familiar enough: demonstrate that you are different from the people being discussed, preferably by helping discuss them.

The badge can encourage a distinction between "people like me" and "people I have authority over." Once that distinction becomes useful, conscience starts receiving requests to be flexible.

No elaborate racial theory is required. Ordinary ambition can do remarkably ugly work when properly accommodated.

Acceptance, Subject to Conditions

If a Black officer participated, his role deserves particular scrutiny. Going along to get along is already a failure of judgment. Going along while your own people become the entertainment adds betrayal to the qualifications.

And if the bargain is white men's approval in exchange for joining their contempt, please spare us the achievement narrative. You have not overcome a barrier. You have made yourself available.

There is a particular indignity in trying to become the exception for people who need someone to despise. You learn to hear "you're different" as a compliment and somehow miss what they're saying about everyone who raised you.

Then comes the extra effort. Laugh a little harder. Prove you can take a joke. Demonstrate that nobody needs to watch what they say around you. Before long, you are doing unpaid public relations for people who would consider your objection the first disappointing thing about you.

A Black participant can also offer something his white colleagues cannot provide on their own: an alibi. They get cooperation and the reassuring

argument that surely he would object if anything were wrong. His participation can make the conduct easier to excuse, harder to challenge, and more comfortable to repeat.

That is the particular danger. The harm comes with someone available to explain why everybody else is being sensitive.

Your presence becomes their defense. Your silence does the paperwork.

And if acceptance requires being harder on Black people than the men whose approval you want, the public is paying for your audition.

Nobody owes you applause for getting into the room when you helped make it unsafe.

A Resignation Is Not a Receipt

There is a legitimate distinction between racist speech and proof of discriminatory policing. Patterson said the department's initial review had not uncovered evidence of civil rights violations and requested federal scrutiny. That distinction matters. So does the quality of the review.

The public should not have to choose between declaring every encounter corrupt and accepting that an alleged racist competition was merely an unfortunate extracurricular interest.

Review the stops. Examine the footage. Compare the explanations with the evidence. Hear from the people stopped. Tell the public what was examined and what the findings actually support.

This should not require anyone to discover a previously unknown enthusiasm for accountability.

A personnel departure answers who still works there. It does very little for someone wondering why blue lights appeared in the rearview mirror.

Imagine learning that the officer who stopped you allegedly discussed competing to stop Black motorists, only to be told the department is focused on moving forward. Forward becomes an extremely popular direction when the records are behind you.

The resignation ends the employment relationship. It does not settle the account.

Please Hold Your Applause

Institutions prefer a scandal with a manageable cast. Identify the objectionable employees, remove them, issue a statement, and schedule training. Soon, everyone is discussing how difficult this has been for the organization.

The organization, naturally, would like privacy during this challenging time, when people ask what it is doing.

The harder questions concern what made the alleged behavior possible. What did supervisors reward? What drew scrutiny? Did anyone object? Would an officer who refused to participate have felt protected, or merely conspicuous?

Those questions distinguish accountability from an unusually solemn staffing update.

Where the evidence warrants it, affected cases deserve scrutiny. People whose credibility was weighed against an officer's should not have to accept an improved organizational chart as the resolution.

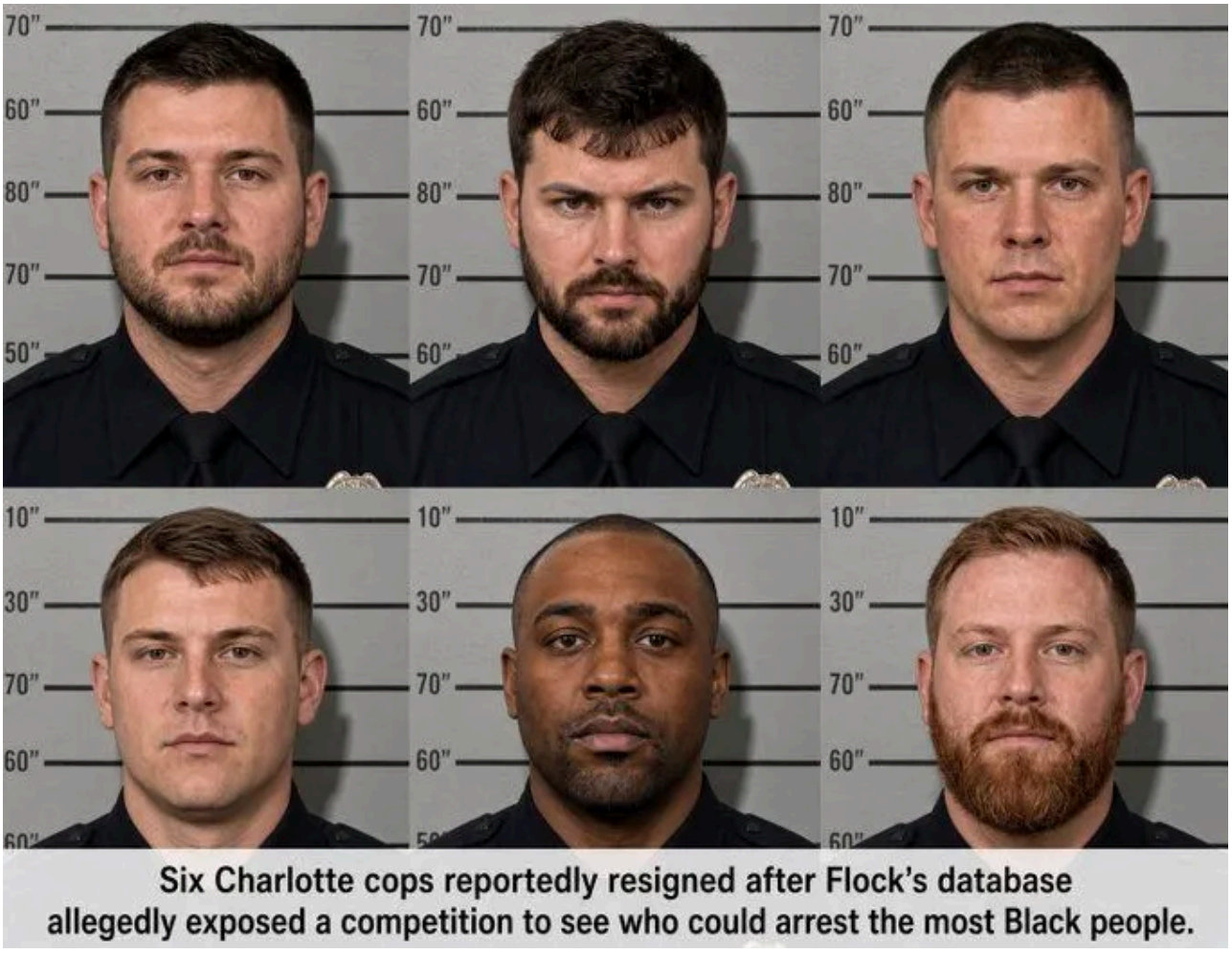
Nor should Black residents be recruited into another round of public reassurance because some of the people in authority happen to look like them. Shared complexion does not answer a question about conduct. Neither does a polished statement about values.

The most unsettling possibility is that contempt could coexist comfortably with professional belonging, provided the right colleagues found it amusing. That arrangement needs no mastermind. A few ambitious people and a well-understood cost for objecting will do.

The oath already explained the obligation. Nobody needs another seminar on whether citizens count as people.

If these allegations are substantiated, spare us the ceremony about restoring trust.

The badge came with an oath. Keeping it shouldn't depend on who was in the group chat.



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Written by Malik Shakur | The Color of My Politics

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Writer, lawyer, producer, and cultural commentator on race, politics, media, masculinity, law, and American power. Creator of The Color of My Politics.