

# Streaking Under the First Amendment

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George F. Will

## *Streaking Under the First Amendment*

DURHAM, N.C. — Any modern thinker worth his salt can divine social significance in even the most trivial things (elections, senators, etc.). So let's buckle down to an examination of streaking, than which *nothing* could be more trivial.

Streaking is the latest permutation of student activism. It is the art of dashing naked through public places. Streakers of the male gender seem partial to streaking near girls' dormitories. In such cases the girls are streekees. Here at Duke University buds are on the branches, the sap is rising in spirited college blades, and streaking is rivaling basketball for the attention of all the young scholars.

Duke, founded on Methodism and tobacco money, had an historic streak the other night involving 400 free spirits of both genders. So Duke now knows what viewers of television newscasts are learning: a streak is a ghastly sight. I fancy myself a connoisseur of ugliness. I have seen Colfax Avenue in Denver, Colo. I have seen the Albert Memorial in London. I have seen the Rayburn Building on Capitol Hill in Washington. But I have never seen *anything* uglier than a mob of lumpy

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*"I have never seen anything uglier than a mob of lumpy undergraduates gamboling naked in the North Carolina moonlight."*

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undergraduates — most of whom have washed down too many french fries with too much beer—gamboling naked in the North Carolina moonlight.

But aesthetic judgments are, I'm told, irrelevant. Streaking is a serious political event, a form of free speech. My source (himself a streaker), says clothes represent the dead hand of our "puritan past" on the vibrant present. Clothes represent our "Victorian hangups." But naked prancing by simple children of nature represents the triumph of wholesome spontaneity over stultifying inhibitions. Etc.

Maybe. But you know the kind of fellow who unites such ponderous theory with such dreary practices: he is the kind who leaves flecks of asparagus in his beard to protest the shallowness of bourgeois values.

More censorious observers lament that streaking proves that students are less serious today than in the 1960s

when disruptive political demonstrations were in fashion. I disagree. Streaking is frivolity but so were most disruptive demonstrations. I spent every year of the last decade on university campuses as an undergraduate, graduate student, and professor. I believe that demonstrating then, like streaking today, was primarily a way for students to keep their minds off the grim business of studying. But today's students are markedly less sullen and pompous, so they have turned from demonstrating to streaking. Two cheers for today's fad: it at least is victimless frivolity.

And who knows? Maybe these hump-tious cheerful streakers will "bring us together" by bridging the generation gap: they could swallow fistfuls of goldfish and then streak into telephone booths. That is just what America needs to become a land fit for heroes: nostalgia buffs in the buff.

Duke streakers have not adopted such refinements, but they are gracious to their elders. The streakers may not be direct spiritual descendants of the ebullient Robert E. Lee, but they practice Southern hospitality. Appraised of the fact that an august group of journalists—including some intergalactically famous Washington pundits—was visiting Duke, the students made it clear that the journalists would be welcome to participate in the streak.

The journalists declined but not, God knows, because they are too sedate. On the contrary. The streak was scheduled for 1 a.m. By that hour the journalists, true to the rigorous code of their profession, were in their seventh straight hour of communion with that amber Southern liquid that makes Southern branch water so nourishing. Indeed, the journalists reveled each night until their ribs squeaked. So in response to the streakers' invitation, an authorized spokesman for the journalists, a luminary known from sea-to-shining-sea, declined, expressing the quiet pride of the group: "We could not streak well on our hands and knees."