

Protest and Patriotism: Understanding Competing Ethical Systems

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A History of Protest

In the 19th century, the lyrics changed constantly and so people inserted social commentary into the lyrics.

In the 20th century, the lyrics became formal and fixed, then social commentary became enacted through the performance – think of Jimi Hendrix at Woodstock.

Mark Clague, a musicologist at the University of Michigan, states the first stanza ends with a question mark that asks if in fact the flag still represents the principles the nation was founded on. The anthem then opens up the opportunity for people who do not feel represented by the flag and song to point out how the nation fails to achieve its own principles.

This makes the performance of the anthem politically charged because it opens up dialogue about the nation and whether or not it achieves its own principles.

Since athletes on the field are part of the performance – their participation in the anthem ritual or non-compliance with the rules of the ritual becomes highly political

I want to emphasize that athletes do not make the performance political – it is the national anthem – they can either reaffirm or rearticulate the politics performed on the field

Two Visions of Human Nature

or John Lennon versus Emile Durkheim*

Unconstrained

Human nature is malleable and can be improved – perhaps even perfected – if social conditions are improved.

Removal of artificial constraints increases human possibility.

People should be freed from petty tribal loyalties that cause mistrust and war.

Constrained

Human being need external constraint in order to behave well, cooperate, and thrive.

Constraints include laws, customs, norms, traditions, institutions, nations, and religion.

Constraints are built over time but can be undone quickly by radicals who don't understand their value.

* Jonathan Haidt (2016) "THE ETHICS OF GLOBALISM, NATIONALISM, AND PATRIOTISM"

Different Visions of Nation

Nation as “Patchwork Quilt”

Jesse Jackson at DNC (1988)

US national history imagined and narrated as multi-origined coming together of diverse groups of people. All stitched together by love of country - patriotism

Nation as Lineage of Great Men

Ronald Reagan at RNC (1988)

US national history imagined and narrated as a descendance of great men. The national as a patriarchal history, linear and hierarchical.

Patriarchal Patriotism & Constructive Patriotism

Patriarchal Patriotism

- Linear and hierarchical
- Respect the *Law of the Father*
 - Authority structures
 - The nation
 - The military
 - The police
- Conservative - welfare rests in order & the status quo

Constructive Patriotism

- Multi-dimensional & cooperative
- Respects rights of individuals and minorities
- Questions authority
 - Citizens must think for themselves
- Fealty based on fulfilled promises
- Progressive - society improvable & a work in progress

The Challenge – Identify Contradictions

"I am not going to stand up to show pride in a flag for a **country that oppresses black people** and people of color... There are bodies in the street and **people getting paid leave and getting away with murder.**"

- Colin Kaepernick (26 August 2016)

The Movement Quickly Expands

- The protest took off like a prairie fire
- Kaepernick identified a contradiction in the social order that is widely experienced
- Kaepernick's words resonate with other people's reality which made him immediately iconic

If You Don't Love It, Leave It

“And Colin, if this country disgusts you so much; **leave.**”

- Tomi Lahren, Conservative Commentator

“If they don't like the country, if they don't like our flag, **get the hell out.**”

- “Iron” Mike Ditka, NFL Hall of Fame Player and Coach

“Perhaps if Kaepernick is such a big fan of Communism then he should give up his \$114 million contract and **move to Cuba.**”

- David Hookstead, Sportswriter for *Daily Caller*

“I have followed it and I think it's personally not a good thing. I think it's a terrible thing, and you know, maybe he should **find a country that works better for him**, let him try, it's not gonna happen.”

- President (then candidate) Trump, Aug. 2016

Deligitimizing Tactics

“And Colin, **who’s getting away with murder?** I’d like to see some evidence to back that up because that’s a pretty strong claim.”

- Tomi Lahren, Conservative Commentator

“Because when I review federal law, what I see is the exact opposite of black oppression. Everyone is treated as equally as they possibly can be by the federal government... If anything, the United States government’s laws **discriminate in favor of black people** based on their skin color.”

- Clay Travis, Conservative Blogger

Harmed By the Protests

“The players should be punished... Go protest somewhere else where it isn’t disrespecting the nation... They are **corrupting our nation** by ruining the patriotic fun before a sports game.”

- Julie Lance, 20 year-old White Female, Sophomore, business and criminology major, from Ohio

“I do have a problem when people in this country don’t respect our flag and national anthem, and all you got to do is look around. This country is getting worse and worse and more and more immoral, and **we’re rotting from within.**”

- Terry Bradshaw, NFL Hall of Fame Quarterback and Fox Sports commentator

White Benevolence & Ungrateful Blacks

“This country that he doesn’t respect by sitting during the national anthem has **afforded him an opportunity in life** that I don’t know many other countries that would.”

- Joe Theismann, Former-NFL Quarterback and Sportscaster

“An NFL football game is not the one to do it at. I feel like it’s rather ridiculous to protest the US when you’re being **paid millions of dollars to throw around a football**, life sounds so hard for these people.”

Mike Chef, 18 year-old white Male, Freshman, Sociology and Criminology major, from Ohio

“Ungrateful is the new uppity.”

- Jelani Cobb, Writer

Desire For “Strict Father”

“If you ride the bench during the Star-Spangled Banner, you should ride the bench for the rest of season. It would be a **ballsy move** – but unlikely – considering the **lack of man-parts** in the National Football League”

- Todd Starnes, Conservative Blogger

I personally think **Roger Goodell needs to stand up** as the commissioner and make an **executive decision** about the idea of protesting the national anthem.

- John Gard, 18 year-old white Male, Freshman, Exercise Science major, from Ohio

“**Freedom of speech goes out the door when you are under contract** by a corporation because you technically represent them... It’s pretty fucked up, I know, but that is how it is. Freedom of speech becomes limited when you are now representing something much bigger than yourself.”

- Mike Chef, 18 year-old white Male, Freshman, Sociology and Criminology major, from Ohio

Protest is Patriot

“Once again, I’m not anti-American. **I love America.**”

- Colin Kaepernick, Former-NFL Quarterback

“It should go without saying that **I love my country** and I’m proud to be an American. But, to quote James Baldwin, ‘exactly for this reason, I insist on **the right to criticize her perpetually.**’”

- Eric Reid, NFL Safety

“If anything, someone with the right intentions is **showing more respect, hope, and adoration for the country** in doing this act because they want it to be a more inclusive place to live and work.”

- Darren Becko, 20 year-old Latinx Male, Junior, Journalism major, from Ohio

Sacrifice & Heroism

“This passion of his [Kaepernick] **cost him his public reputation and millions of dollars** in endorsement opportunities. It may end up costing him longevity in his football career. He is even prepared for the possibility **it could cost him his life.**”

- Marcus Thompson II, Sportswriter

“[Seattle Seahawks players] **risked nothing and sacrificed even less.** The bravery of speaking out about a cause is in recognizing **there might be ramifications and moving forward anyway** because you know the message is necessary.”

- Kara Brown, Writer for *Jezebel*

Hypocrisy

“People upset with those who kneel seem to be **more angry about black ‘disrespect’ than black death.**”

- Charles Blow, Writer

“[Trent Dilfer is] telling me that my position as a backup QB and being quiet is more important than people’s lives. I would ask him to really have a conversation with the families of people that have been murdered and see if he still feels that way. Because I bet that he doesn’t, just because **he hasn’t experienced that type of oppression.**”

- Colin Kaepernick, Former NFL Quarterback

“Often times when Black people critique or resist America, a certain label gets put on us... [That label] does not get put on other people. When Trump says he wants to **make America great again, he does not get accused of hating America...** [The national anthem] itself was created in the midst of slavery.”

- Marc Lamont Hill, Academic

Military as Preeminent Institution

“#VeteransForKaepernick [16] because I didn't volunteer to defend a country where police brutality is swept under the rug. ”

- Baltic Avenue (@Baltic_Avenue) August 31, 2016

“However, they are utilizing the freedom that has been won by those who fight, have fought for our country. **They would not have the rights of free speech or peaceful protest if it was not for those veterans' sacrifices.**”

- Allie French, 18 year-old White Female, Freshman, Sociology & Criminology, from Ohio

“De Oppresso Liber ("To Free the Oppressed") is the Army Special Forces motto... I didn't enlist to fight for what we already have here; I did it because **I wanted to fight for what those people didn't have there: Freedom**”

- Nate Boyer, Former Army Green Beret & NFL Player

Criticism of Patriotism

“The protest does not need to be recast as patriotic. **Patriotism is not a higher virtue than justice.**”

- Mychal Denzel Smith, Writer

“Colonial powers are violent and racist by their very nature. **America’s military is not a protector of peace. It is an enforcer of colonialism.** Indeed, black Americans have died in America’s wars but do not fully experience the freedom that comes with that sacrifice as white people do.”

- Terrel Jermaine Starr, Writer

“As I write this twenty years later, **I cannot stand and sing the anthem. I cannot salute the flag; I know that I am a black man in a white world.** In 1972, in 1947, at my birth in 1919, I know that I never had it made.”

- Jackie Robinson, Hall of Fame Baseball Player

Packaging Patriotic Protest

“Nike knows Kaepernick has become one of the most recognizable faces in America. He moves the needle. He’s become an icon. **He represents the very culture that Nike wants to continue to monetize.**”

- Jemele Hill, ESPN Sportscaster

Thank You