

OPINION

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Protest and Disrespect in Black and White

America's manifestations of white privilege

BY LAURA FINLEY

This country was built on protest, or so we are told. Americans fight for what is right, to correct injustices and to secure the freedoms and liberties we wish to enjoy. We teach our kids to admire Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and the many others who organized non-violent protests like sit-ins as a tool for challenging deep inequality. We talk about the importance of allies, or those who stand up with the oppressed, even if they themselves are not.

Yet when a well-paid professional athlete elects to use that same strategy we allegedly admire so much to call attention to the continued oppression of black people in this country, he is critiqued for his privilege and denounced for being unpatriotic. As has been widely reported, San Francisco 49ers quarterback Colin Kaepernick has been refusing to stand for the national anthem, saying, "I am not going to stand up to show pride in a flag for a country that oppresses black people and people of color."

What really seems to be at play here, then, is not that Kaepernick's cause is unjust or his strategy unsound. Rather, it is that Americans want their athletes, especially those on the new plantations that are our football fields, to do as they're told. Just stay in your place and all will be fine.

It's also interesting to juxtapose the reaction to Kaepernick's protest with the reactions to Donald Trump, who wants "make America great again," which

manifestations of white privilege. And they are further proof that we want to enjoy our brutally violent football without the bother of confronting anything more serious than when to grab the next beer and how many wings to eat. When other black athletes have shown solidarity for the Black Lives Matter movement, supported justice for Trayvon Martin, or engaged in a host of other nonviolent protests in recent years, they too have faced such criticisms. In sum: Rich white men can com-

fact.

Minnesota Viking Alex Boone called the protest shameful and denounced it for being disrespectful. Yet, as others have noted, Boone did not call out the "disrespect" of the Minnesota police who killed a black man, Philando Castile, during a traffic stop. Former 49ers coach Jim Harbaugh also referred to Kaepernick's protest as disrespectful, later claiming it wasn't the position but rather the action to which he disagreed. New Orleans Saint Drew Brees commented

not the strong suit of the NFL, it seems, if a peaceful protestor is being compared to a convicted violent criminal.

Many others have supported Kaepernick, thankfully. White female soccer player Megan Rapinoe knelt during the playing of the national anthem before a game on Sept. 3. She explained, "Being a gay American, I know what it means to look at the flag and not have it protect all of your liberties. It was something small that I could do and something that I plan to keep doing in the future and hopefully spark some meaningful conversation around it. It's important to have white people stand in support of people of color on this. We don't need to be the leading voice, of course, but standing in support of them is something that's really powerful."

Veterans are not all uniform in their response, of course, but the hashtag #VeteransForKaepernick makes it clear that some are not at all disrespected by his action, seeing it instead as precisely what they fight for. And, in an interesting turn of events, sales of Kaepernick's jerseys have skyrocketed since he began the protest. Maybe there's hope he can make Trump-like money after all, and therefore be his criticisms of the U.S. will be more widely applauded.

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The reactions of Trump, his political toadies, and a host of others (generally white) are the very real manifestations of white privilege. And they are further proof that we want to enjoy our brutally violent football without the bother of confronting anything more serious than when to grab the next beer and how many wings to eat.

of course implies it is far from great right now. It can't be, as some have said, that Kaepernick's salary with the NFL makes his complaint less legitimate, since Trump makes a crap-ton more than Kaepernick will ever dream to. Trump slings all kinds of criticism and hate in a far from peaceful fashion, yet is not told to "find a country that works better for him," as he recently recommended to Kaepernick.

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plain. Black men should not, income regardless.

The New York Giants' Justin Pugh, in the very city where Eric Garner and, before him, Sean Bill, both black and unarmed, were killed by police, used Kaepernick's protest to pledge support for "different opinions" but most importantly for the military who risk their lives for the flag. What Pugh sees as an issue of opinion is unclear; it is undoubtedly true oppression of people of color remains a problem in the U.S. This is not Kaepernick's opinion. It is

similarly, despite playing in a stadium close to where Alton Sterling was killed by police and in a state that is generally considered the most unequal for people of color. And his coach Sean Payton's assertion that they have "more important things" they are working on within the stadium is not at all minimizing or disrespectful?

An NFL executive has claimed that he hasn't seen this much dislike for a player since Rae Carruth, who is incarcerated for hiring someone to kill his pregnant girlfriend. Wow. Truth-telling is

When Police Deny the Most Basic Human Concern

Black lives left to die in the streets

BY EBONY SLAUGHTER-JOHNSON

As 18-year-old Paul O'Neal lay face down with a pool of blood collecting at the back of his t-shirt, police officers gathered around. None of the officers attempted to administer first aid. None attempted to call for medical assistance. None evidenced even the smallest degree of concern for the young man dying at their feet.

Instead, they restrained him in handcuffs. But not before one spat at him: "Bitch-ass mother f*****."

So much for "protect and serve."

Paul O'Neal isn't the only black American who has been denied the dignity of medical attention. This trend follows in many of the recently exposed cases of police brutality.

In July 2014, Eric Garner yelled out, "I can't breathe!" to the officer who had him hopelessly restrained in a chokehold. When Garner passed out, the police officers on the scene did nothing more than check his pockets and wait for the EMTs to arrive. The EMTs declined to perform the CPR that might have saved his life.

Less than a month later, multiple bullets entered the body of Michael Brown, an unarmed teenager in Ferguson, Missouri, as he fled from police officers. His body was left to bleed out into the streets for four hours.

In July 2016, a police officer shot Alton Sterling from close proximity. Full of bullets and holes, Sterling bled out onto the pavement and was deprived of any sort of medical assistance. One eyewitness reported that the officer who shot Sterling offered his own callous solution to tending to the dying man: "Just leave him."

A mere 48 hours later, Philando Castile was shot during what seemingly began as a routine traffic stop. As the life drained from his body, and a pool of blood gathered on his white t-shirt, the officers didn't lift a single finger to help him. Instead, they turned their attention to the living, breathing, completely unharmed policeman whose actions ultimately cost Castile his life.

The list of black Americans who have lost their lives following encounters with law enforcement is long and growing. Mean-

while, the list of law enforcement officers who have simply been charged with — let alone successfully convicted of — killing these same black Americans remains infinitesimally small.

Week after week the loss of another black life begs the question: Is black life really so undervalued as to be practically disposable, particularly by the police officers tasked with safeguarding it?

Recent data showed that although black Americans are only 13 percent of the national population, they comprise a startling 24 percent of those killed by police. They are also 2.5 times more likely to be shot and killed at the hands of law enforcement than whites.

This willingness to meet black Americans with fatal force plays out in simulations, too. A study from the University of Colorado Boulder found that in simulated situations of perceived threats in

which force was deemed reasonable, the officers were more willing to shoot black suspects than white ones.

Though these threatening statistics are evidence enough, it becomes especially apparent how little black life matters when we consider how law enforcement officers have refused to take the side of black life even when it is at its most vulnerable—the moments just after an unwarranted attack.

When they've deprived black Americans time and time again of the medical attention — or basic human concern — that might have prevented the unthinkable, the message is clear.

Not only is black life not worth protecting, it's not worth saving either.

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