

OPINION

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NFL Anthem Policy is Pure Hypocrisy

A variation of an old, familiar theme

BY JEFFERY ROBINSON

The NFL's new "anthem policy" requires players to "respect" the flag and the national anthem or stay in the locker room until it is played. The NFL refers to this as a compromise — it was anything but.



This was a mandate, not a decision arrived at through a collaborative process. Despite claiming that they would consult with the players before making a decision on this issue, the National Football League Players Association said, "The NFL chose to not consult the union in the development of this new 'policy.'" So the league and owners will decide what shows "respect."

Kneeling is out. The Pittsburgh Steelers indicated that raising a fist or linking arms is out. If one team decides a gesture or posture is respectful but another team doesn't like it, what will happen? One of the NFL officials actually said, "We will know it when we see it."

Players who want to kneel (or raise a fist or link arms or do some other kind of gesture) are told, "If you do that on the field we will take money away from you." This is simply a variation of an old, familiar theme. Don't demonstrate in the street be-

cause you block my commute home. Don't demonstrate downtown, I have shopping to do. Don't demonstrate at a sporting event because you take away from my entertainment. Why can't you all just shut up and dribble?

Telling players to stay in the locker room also rings familiar as well — get to the back of the bus. Get to the other water fountain. Do not appear in public in ways that will threaten or displease white people in America. If you want to protest, do it in a way that white folks don't have to see it or deal with your claimed injustices.

And with the collusion to keep Colin Kaepernick out of the league combined with teams asking free agents if they will stand during the anthem, another message is being delivered. Be thankful you are making all that money — you play a game for a living. If we didn't allow you to be making this money, you would be out there with the rest of "them."

President Donald Trump weighed in on players staying in the locker room saying, "Maybe you should not be in the country." In a country that claims to value free speech and expression, you should be fined or forced to leave the country if you "speak" in a way some don't like. Orwell would have loved it.

John Elway and other NFL officials have said that we should "take the politics out of football." Really? What about the

millions of dollars paid to the NFL by the Department of Defense to promote the military? If encouraging people not to serve in the military is a political act, then encouraging them to serve is equally political. What about the show of military aircraft flying overhead and flags streaming across the field? Kneeling during the anthem has nothing to do with being for or against military recruiting, but the Pentagon paid for the NFL to promote the military — an overtly political act — and the NFL has been delivering. There is nothing wrong with that, but it is what it is. The NFL gave up being non-political a long time ago.

The NFL said the new policy would change "a false perception among many that thousands of NFL players were unpatriotic." Think about that for a minute. There was a false perception that players were unpatriotic, meaning the players kneeling were patriotic. The cure for this false perception is to force players to stand when they would prefer to kneel. By forcing them to stand, the fans will now know they are patriotic. This makes no sense.

Only one team has said they will stop selling concessions during the anthem. It does not appear that the suspending the selling of beer, hotdogs, banners, and the like was even considered by the group. I guess it is not disrespectful to leave your seat and miss the anthem in order to get a dog and a beer. After all, there is money to be made. And no disrespect is shown by

the fans at home who go to the bathroom, grab another beer, or set up the snacks during the anthem. The respect that must be shown must come from the players.

Houston Texans owner Bob McNair told players last year, "You fellas need to ask your compadres, fellas, stop that other business, let's go out and do something that really produces positive results, and we'll help you." Much has been made of the NFL setting aside money for social justice. The money was not new money to support communities, but re-allocating already designated charitable funds from one issue (breast cancer) to another (social justice). This is what caring means to an institution which was forecast to hit \$14 billion in gross revenue last year.

If people are serious about making a difference, they use whatever platform they have to make that clear. The NFL released its new policy at the same time news was breaking about NBA player Sterling Brown being abused and tased by officers of the Milwaukee Police Department. This is the kind of incident that started the protests. The NFL did not mention this incident in any of its messaging. Apparently speaking out about police abuse in the Black community isn't something they are interested in during the offseason either.

Jeffery Robinson is a deputy legal director for the American Civil Liberties Union and director of the Trone Center for Justice and Equality.

Immigration Debate Needs a Lot More Humanity

Calling people 'animals' devalues lives

BY JILL RICHARDSON

I don't think I'm alone in believing there's an intrinsic value to human life.

That is, any human, no matter who they are or what they're like, has worth simply because they're human. On some basic level, all of us are equal and precious.

That's why many of us would save a human from a burning building before we'd try to save a dog. And why we'd go to extreme lengths to save the human if it's at all possible.

No doubt you have people you love, people you like, and people you dislike. There are people you wouldn't want to have as a neighbor, co-worker, or friend. But even when you dislike someone personally, and wish to avoid them, you wouldn't deny their fundamental



humanity.

Or at least, I like to think most of us wouldn't. Apparently, though, some of us would.

I've been deeply uneasy with some trends that seem to rank some people as more valuable and others as less. One of them is the idea that immigration should be based on "merit."

What does merit mean? Merit as a human being?

What's actually meant by proposals to allow immigration based solely on "merit" is that only the wealthiest and most educated people can come to the U.S.

Calling that "merit" implies that one's worth as a human is dictated by their wealth and education. I don't believe that's true. I believe the poorest and most destitute refugee has equal worth to the wealthiest billionaire.

Beyond their intrinsic worth, immigrants who lack money and education make tremendous contributions. Not least, they put food on America's tables.

Immigration crackdowns in

Alabama, Georgia, and California led to crops rotting in the field when undocumented immigrants were unavailable to pick them, and nobody documented was willing to do the job under the pay and working conditions being offered.

An even more troubling, the devaluation of human life that

He's done this from when he first entered office, when he created a phone line for people to use to report crimes by immigrants.

First of all, we don't need a phone line for that. We already have a phone line. It's called 911. Or, in a non-emergency, you report crimes to your local police.

Second, immigrants actually

them, dehumanizing Jews by calling them "rats," and then gradually more extreme steps like forbidding intermarriage or forcing Jews into a ghetto.

Let's not go there. Immigrants have an intrinsic worth as human beings. We can debate how many people to let into the country, how best to do it, or what sensible pre-

"Nobody, even the Nazis, began with concentration camps. They began by creating an idea of us vs. them, dehumanizing Jews by calling them "rats," and then gradually more extreme steps like forbidding intermarriage or forcing Jews into a ghetto.

was behind Trump's assertion that Central American gang members are "violent animals."

Obviously, few of us would defend or invite members of a violent gang into the United States. The problem here is that Trump has routinely tried to associate all immigrants — and particularly those from Latin America — with criminality.

commit crimes at a lower rate than native born citizens.

Third, and most troublingly, calling human beings animals is one of the steps toward genocide. (Specifically, according to Greg Stanton of Genocide Watch, it's step three: dehumanization.)

Nobody, even the Nazis, began with concentration camps. They began by creating an idea of us vs.

cautions to take.

But whatever we do, our immigration policy — and our politics — should recognize every person's common humanity.

OtherWords columnist Jill Richardson is the author of Recipe for America: Why Our Food System Is Broken and What We Can Do to Fix It. Distributed by OtherWords.org.