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OUR VIEW

Oh say can you see?

Last week, President Donald Trump shoved the National Football League and its players into the spotlight. That's normally a place a private enterprise would love to be, but this president's spotlight is often too hot and too harsh.

Trump's comments about what should be done to any athlete using the national anthem as a protest platform — they should be out of a job, put decently — has been what most Americans have been talking about for the past week. And as you sit down to watch sports this weekend (or choose to take a stand and not watch),

consider that sparking a futile debate may very well have been President Trump's goal. Discussing kneeling, the anthem, Black Lives Matter and the American military was a fake handoff — a reverse, a flea flicker, a Statue of Liberty, if you will. It was faux action on one part of the field meant to distract from the real action happening on the other side.

Do you remember that just last week 21 states admitted their voting systems were hacked by Russians in the run-up to the 2016 election? That Republican attempts to repeal Obamacare failed for a third time? That almost all of Puerto Rico's 3.4 million residents remain without power?

By and large, we don't, and we're instead writing about the NFL and the American flag. Trump is a master media manipulator, and he has us chasing the rabbit again.

But as long as we're on the subject, we do think the concept of patriotism is important, especially at a moment when many of our democratic institutions and ideals are shifting radically and our allegiances are under fire.

It is critical — now more than ever — to remember the ideals that made this a nation to be proud

of, and what we must defend. The aspect of forced patriotism — you must stand, you must sing, you must remove your hat and hold your hand over your heart — are being vastly overlooked by the "patriot" crowd. It should be an honor to stand for the flag, not a requirement. It should not be a meaningless gesture, done without thought or purpose.

The places in the world where it is a mandatory exercise are the very opposite of America.

The NFL has backed themselves into this tight spot. For decades, the league has (often cynically) worked to equate itself with America and the U.S. military. That includes flag-waving before, during and after games, military salutes, fly overs and fatigue-clad military months.

Many other sporting events do it too — NASCAR and the Round-Up have made their events a sort of communal celebration of patriotism as much they are about a car race or a rodeo.

This is all good for business: It helps ratings and helps ingratiate football as a nationwide endeavor — America's sport. But it does, however, entangle a private enterprise with patriotism. And when an employee of the NFL wants to protest against police brutality, it gets tied up as an assault against America, our symbols and our military.

We love sports, and see their usefulness as a safe retreat from the complexities and divisions of everyday life. But the spotlight of politics is shining everywhere these days, and don't be surprised if your industry, your union, your ethnicity, your religion, your family is soon labeled by the president as bunch of SOBs.

What then, is the patriotic response?

It is a critical moment to remember the ideals that make this a nation to be proud of.

Unsigned editorials are the opinion of the East Oregonian editorial board of publisher Kathryn Brown, managing editor Daniel Wattenburger, and opinion page editor Tim Trainor. Other columns, letters and cartoons on this page express the opinions of the authors and not necessarily that of the East Oregonian.

OTHER VIEWS

More logging will not reduce forest fires

By GEORGE WUERTHNER

Many people believe if we only logged more forests, we could reduce or halt most large wildfires.

It may seem intuitive that if you reduce fuels, you will have fewer large fires. It's intuitive that the sun circles the earth since any fool can see it rises in the east and sets in the west. Yet, we all know that the earth circles the sun even though it would seem obvious that the sun is circling the earth.

Climate/weather drive large wildfires — not fuels. That is why even though there is more biomass on the Oregon Coast, those forests seldom burn. The reason? Because it's too moist and cool.

On the other hand, a lot of research has found that if you have extreme fire weather, which includes drought, low humidity, high temperatures and most importantly, wind, you can't stop fires. These are the very conditions that have existed with all large wildfires from the Canyon Creek blaze in Grant County to the Eagle Creek Fire by the Columbia Gorge.

Why is this important? Because 95-99 percent of all fires are easily suppressed or more likely simply self-extinguish because the weather isn't conducive to fire spread. But a very small percentage of fires occur during extreme fire weather conditions, and these are impossible to control. And these very few large fires are responsible for 95-99 percent of all the acreage burned in any summer.

Under these extreme weather conditions, fire burns through clearcuts,

thinned forests, and prescribed burn areas. Nothing stops them. For instance, the Eagle Creek fire jumped the Columbia River. Talk about a fuel break — there is nothing there but water, but it couldn't stop fire being driven by 40-50 mph winds.

Worse for the proposed solution of more logging, recent studies have found that fire severity is higher in "actively managed" forests.

For instance, here are the conclusions of a number of recent review studies.

Researchers at the Forest Service fire lab in Missoula concluded: "Extreme environmental conditions ... overwhelmed most fuel treatment effects ... This included almost all treatment methods including prescribed burning and thinning ... suppression efforts had little benefit from fuel modifications."

In addition to the failure of forest reduction projects to effectively limit large wildfires, from a forest ecosystem perspective large, high-severity fires are critical to forest health. Many plants and animals depend on the episodic input of snags and fallen logs that are created by large wildfires. They have the second highest biodiversity found in our forests.

The reality is that we cannot halt these large fires, but must learn to live with them. Reducing the flammability of homes, and not building in high fire locations in the first place are the only proven measures that can save communities.

George Wuerthner is an ecologist and has published 38 books including "Wildfire: A Century of Failed Forest Policy." He lives in Bend.



OTHER VIEWS

The empty culture wars

The secret of culture war is that it is often a good and necessary thing. People don't like culture wars when they're on the losing side, and while they're losing they often complain about how cultural concerns are distractions from the "real" issues, usually meaning something to do with the deficit or education or where to peg the Medicare growth rate or which terrorist haven the United States should be bombing next.

But in the sweep of American history, it's the battles over cultural norms and so-called social issues — over race and religion, intoxicants and sex, speech and censorship, immigration and assimilation — that for better or worse have often made us who we are.

Still, even a proud culture warrior should be able to concede that not all culture wars are created equal. A good culture war is one that, beneath all the posturing and demagoguery and noise, has clear policy implications, a core legal or moral question, a place where one side can win a necessary victory or where a new consensus can be hashed out. A bad culture war is one in which attitudinizing, tribalism and worst-case fearmongering float around unmoored from any specific legal question, in which mutual misunderstanding reigns and a thousand grievances are stirred up without a single issue being clarified or potentially resolved.

Unfortunately for us all, Donald Trump is a master, a virtuoso, of the second kind of culture war — and a master, too, of taking social and cultural debates that could be important and necessary and making them stupider and emptier and all about himself.

He is not the only figure pushing American arguments in that direction — cable news, reality TV, campus protesters and late-night political "comedy" all have a similar effect these days. But he is the president, which lends him a unique deranging influence, and he is unique as well in that unlike most culture warriors — who are usually initially idealists, however corrupted they may ultimately become — he has never cared about anything higher or nobler than himself, and so he's never happier than when the entire country seems to be having a culture war about, well, Donald Trump.

The NFL-national anthem controversy, the latest Trump-stoked social conflagration, is a quintessential bad culture war. It was trending that way already before Trump, because the act of protest that Colin Kaepernick chose to call attention to police shootings of unarmed black men — sitting and then kneeling for "The Star-Spangled Banner" — was clearer in the calculated offense it gave than in the specific cause it sought to further, clearer in its swipe at a Racist America than its prescription for redress. (That Kaepernick sported Fidel Castro T-shirts and socks depicting cops as pigs did not exactly help.)

But in his usual bullying and race-baiting way, Trump has made it much, much worse, by multiplying the reasons one might reasonably kneel — for solidarity with teammates, as a protest against the president's behavior, as a gesture in favor of free speech, as an act of racial pride — and

then encouraging his own partisans to interpret the kneeling as a broad affront to their own patriotism and politics. So now we're "arguing" (I use the term loosely) about everything from the free-speech rights of pro athletes to whether the national anthem is right-wing political correctness to LeBron James' punditry on the miseducation of Trump voters ... and the specific issue that Kaepernick intended to raise, police misconduct, is buried seven layers of controversy

deep.

You could say, it's always thus with culture wars and racial battles, but in fact it isn't and doesn't need to be. Arguments about race were often toxic in the 1970s and 1980s, but there were core policy issues that could be argued and ultimately compromised over — crime and welfare and affirmative action — and across the 1990s they were, to some extent, and as they were overt racial tensions eased considerably. In 2001, two-thirds of Americans (and more blacks than whites) described race relations as somewhat good or very good, and while the white view was usually slightly rosier thereafter, the two-thirds pattern held for more than a decade — until Ferguson, Missouri, and Black Lives Matter and the other controversies of the late Obama years, followed by the rise of Trump, sent racial optimism into a tailspin.

For hope to resurface, we need specific issues and potential compromises to re-emerge. In particular, we need a public argument clearly tethered to the two big policy questions raised by police misconduct and the broader crime and incarceration debate.

First, can we have the greater accountability for cops that activists reasonably demand, in which juries convict more trigger-happy officers and police departments establish a less adversarial relationship to the communities they police, without the surge of violence that's accompanied the apparent retreat of the police in cities like Baltimore and Chicago?

Second, can we continue the move toward de-incarceration — supported, not that long ago, by Republicans as well as Democrats — without reversing the gains that have made many of our cities safe?

These are hard questions that can be answered only gradually, through trial-and-error and with various false starts. But they are questions that could have answers, that could point to a stable policy consensus around race and criminal justice, in a way that our present "Make America Great Again" versus "You're All White Supremacists" culture war does not.

For those answers to matter, for them to depolarize our country, we need a social and cultural debate focused on the substance that Colin Kaepernick's choice of protest unfortunately obscured, and Donald Trump's flagploitation has deliberately buried. Not an end to culture war, but a better culture war — in which victory and defeat can be defined, and peace becomes a possibility.

Ross Douthat joined *The New York Times* as an Op-Ed columnist in April 2009. Previously, he was a senior editor at the *Atlantic* and a blogger for *theatlantic.com*.

YOUR VIEWS

Trump has contempt for ordinary people

A wise man once said, "There are no great men, only ordinary men rising up to do great things." The ordinary men, in my opinion, are the ones in uniform, not only in our military but in football uniforms across this country who have peacefully protested the ongoing inequality and injustice that their families and friends have continued to be subjected to, as if the Civil Rights Act of the 1960s had never been enacted. The veterans and civilians that have the education to realize that our flag represents freedom and nothing more.

The hypocrisy of the phony patriots that have wrapped themselves in the flag, that spend Memorial Day half drunk with not a thought in their heads or a care in the world

about the sacrifices made by veterans and then all of a sudden become incensed when someone protests peacefully and totally within their rights, brings me deep shame.

While I will always stand for the anthem and place hand over heart, it will be along with a prayer for the still-suffering Americans so callously disregarded because of the color of their skin and not the content of their character.

One last thought: Less than ten players in the entire league were kneeling during the anthem at the beginning of the season. After the latest episode of diarrhea of the mouth by our dim bulb of a leader, it ballooned to more than 200. When our bigot-in-chief speaks, extreme controversy and divisiveness always follows.

David Gracia
Hermiston

LETTERS POLICY

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