



Written by [Patrick J. Buchanan](#) on September 26, 2017

## Will NFL Demand Respect for Old Glory?

“America refuses to address the pervasive evil of white cops killing black men, and I will not stand during a national anthem that honors the flag of such a country!”

That is the message Colin Kaepernick sent by “taking a knee” during the singing of “The Star Spangled Banner” before San Francisco ’49s games in 2016. No NFL owner picked up his contract in 2017. But a few players began to copy Colin and to “take a knee.”



Friday night in Alabama, President Trump raged that any NFL player who disrespects Old Glory is a “son of a b—h” who ought to be kicked off the field and fired by his team’s owner. And if the owners refuse to do their patriotic duty, the fans should take a walk on the NFL.

And so the stage was set for NFL Sunday.

Two hundred players, almost all black, knelt or sat during the national anthem. The Patriots’ Tom Brady stood in respect for the flag, while locking arms in solidarity with kneeling teammates.

The Pittsburgh Steelers coach kept his team in the locker room. Steeler Alejandro Villanueva, an ex-Army Ranger and combat vet, came out and stood erect and alone on the field.

For NFL players, coaches, commentators, owners and fans, it was an uncomfortable and sad day. And it is not going to get any better. Sundays with the NFL, as a day of family and friends, rest and respite from the name-calling nastiness of American politics, is over.

The culture war has come to the NFL. And Trump will be proven right. Having most players stand respectfully during the national anthem, while locking arms with other players sitting or kneeling in disrespect of the flag, is a practice the NFL cannot sustain.

The mega-millionaire and billionaire owners of NFL franchises are going to have to come down off the fence and take a stand.

The issue is not the First Amendment. It is not whether players have a right to air their views about what cops did to Michael Brown in Ferguson, or Eric Garner in Staten Island, or Freddie Gray in Baltimore. Players have a right to speak, march in protest, or even burn the flag.

The question NFL owners are going to have to answer soon with a definitive “yes” or “no” is this: Do players, before games, have a right, as a form of protest, to dishonor and disrespect the flag of the United States and the republic for which it stands? Or is that intolerable conduct that the NFL will punish?

Trump is taking a beating from owners, players and press for being “divisive.” But he did not start this fight or divide the country over it.

Kaepernick did, and the players who emulated him, and the coaches and owners who refuse to declare whether insulting the flag is now permissible behavior in the NFL.



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As Treasury Secretary Steve Mnuchin said Sunday, team owners and Commissioner Roger Goodell have strict rules for NFL games. No NASCAR-type ads on uniforms. Restrictions on end-zone dances. All shirttails tucked in. Certain behavior on the field can call forth 15-yard penalties for unsportsmanlike conduct, or even expulsion from the game.

Our Supreme Court has denied coaches of public high school teams the right to gather players for voluntary prayer before games. Why not an NFL rule requiring players to stand respectfully silent during the national anthem, and, if they refuse, suspend them from play for that day?

Or will the NFL permit indefinite disrespect for the flag of the United States for vastly privileged players whose salaries put them in the top 1 percent of Americans?

If watching players take a knee on the gridiron before every game, in insult to the flag, is what fans can expect every week, Trump again is right: The NFL fan base will dissipate.

Sunday's game exposed a clash of loyalties in the hearts of NFL players. Do black players stand in solidarity with Kaepernick? Do white players stand beside black teammates, if that means standing with them as they disrespect the flag under which hundreds of thousands of our soldiers, sailors, airmen and Marines have died?

This conflict in loyalties among NFL players mirrors that of our country, as America divides and our society disintegrates over issues of morality, patriotism, race and culture.

We have been here before. At the Mexico City Olympics of 1968, gold and bronze medal-winning sprinters Tommie Smith and John Carlos each raised a black-gloved fist as a sign of solidarity with Black America, and not the nation they were sent to represent.

A month later, America elected Richard Nixon.

In terms of fame and fortune, no professions have proven more rewarding for young black American males than the NFL and the NBA.

Whether they soil their nest is, in the last analysis, up to them.

*Patrick J. Buchanan is the author of a new book, Nixon's White House Wars: The Battles That Made and Broke a President and Divided America Forever. To find out more about Patrick Buchanan and read features by other Creators writers and cartoonists, visit the Creators website at [www.creators.com](http://www.creators.com).*

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