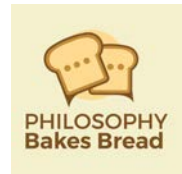


A Slice of Philosophically Baked Bread

A Companion One-Sheet to the “Philosophy Bakes Bread” Podcast

Author: James William Lincoln



Episode 53 – Kneeling and Civil Protest

Guest: [Dr. Arnold Farr](#), The University of Kentucky

As professional player in the NFL, Colin Kaepernick’s protests began in 2016 when he started kneeling during the national anthem at games. His protests were a response to the police brutality and racial injustice faced by black subjects in the United States. Kaepernick’s actions are credited with encouraging a larger social conversation about civil protest, freedom of speech, and social justice. Today, no team in the NFL will hire him.

Dr. Arnold Farr: “One of the things that is most problematic is that at this moment, it seems the most people have forgotten what the initial protest is about, and they made it about something else. They have shifted the narrative away from the real issue, to make it about disrespecting the flag or disrespecting the military, or the country. It has nothing to do with that. They are protesting the way in which a particular group of people, let’s say black people, are grossly disrespected in the United States. Disrespected in terms of, I could give you a long list, but primarily the protest began as a protest against police brutality ... The protest itself is being silenced. In a lot of my work on race I talk about ways in which the black voice is always put under erasure. As soon as a black voice begins to speak, there are mechanisms in place to put it under erasure. What has happened is the protest began as an attempt to draw attention to unnecessary suffering that blacks endure. You get this particular narrative about black suffering. Then it gets covered over, put under erasure or silenced by another narrative—all of this disrespecting the flag or disrespecting the troops.”

I. Bread Baking Questions:

- (1) What makes something a protest? If someone was kneeling to tie their shoe while Kaepernick was protesting, what makes the latter a protest and the former not?
- (2) What is your reaction to the consequences Kaepernick’s faced for his protest (i.e., losing his job and becoming an undesired presence in the NFL)? Does protesting necessarily require being identified as an unwanted presence or killjoy? Is that a problem?
- (3) What do you think it means to put a narrative under erasure? What effect, psychological or otherwise, does covering one narrative with another have on our sense of history and reality in situations like Kaepernick’s protests? What are some ways erasure is accomplished?
- (4) What do you think prompts people to interpret Kaepernick’s protest in the way they do? Why do you think there has been such a strong reaction to these protests?
- (5) What kind of reasons justify disobeying a social custom or expectation like standing for the anthem? What is the difference between a just custom and an unjust custom? How does one determine whether a custom is just or unjust?

1) Solidarity and Transformation – Becoming Something Different

- “Marcuse uses the term ‘new sensibility’. He literally claims that for us to have a new emancipatory society, we must become different people. For me to be in solidarity with people who suffer, whatever social group, means I can’t be the same person that I was prior to entering solidarity with them. That is painful for a lot of people. This unraveling of the self, to put oneself in the place of solidarity with those who suffer. Some people stand to lose something. You stand to lose perhaps friends. You put yourself in a position to be ridiculed by members of your family who still hold onto certain prejudices or whatever.

- Dr. Arnold Farr, University of Kentucky

Questions: Why is **self-transformation** a so difficult? Do you believe such a practice is required to stand in solidarity with those who suffer because of oppression? What kind of **experiences** facilitate solidarity producing transformation? Do you think we **obligated** to seek out transformative experiences of these kinds?

2) Histories, Narrative, and Reality – Unheard Cases

- “There are cases we have heard about, but there are many incidents that we don’t hear about. If you live in the black community, especially in larger cities like Chicago or New York Detroit, Philadelphia, where I lived for 12 years, you know that these are only a few cases of many that we ever hear about. This practice has been around ever since blacks have been in this country. It never stopped. If you are my age and you are from the south, you know stories you have heard from your grandparents and parents about a relative who went to the grocery store one day and ended up missing. ... There’s an experience of black skin or dark skin being a mark of disrespect. This is when a protest begins.”

- Dr. Arnold Farr, University of Kentucky

Questions: What role does **narrative** play in shaping our understanding of history and reality? Why might having one’s experience ignored, erased, invalidated, or marginalized provoke the need for **protest**? What **obligations** do people have to educate themselves about the kinds of marginalized experiences described above?

3) Political Participation and Protest – NFL Anthem Policies

- “1. All team and league personnel on the field shall stand and show respect for the flag and the Anthem. ... 3. Personnel who choose not to stand for the Anthem may stay in the locker room or in a similar location off the field until after the Anthem has been performed. 4. A club will be fined by the League if its personnel are on the field and do not stand and show respect for the flag and the Anthem. ... 6. The Commissioner will impose appropriate discipline on league personnel who do not stand and show respect for the flag and the Anthem.”

- [NFL Commissioner Roger Goodell](#)

Questions: Given the anthem policies endorsed by NFL leadership cited above, what kind of **limitations** do you think can be placed on protesting? What role does **visibility** and space play in protesting? What role does protesting have to play in **political participation** and the democratic process? **Dr. Arnold Farr’s question:** What is **democracy** and how do we achieve it?