PERFORMANCE PRACTICE AND RECEPTION OF THE UNITED STATES NATIONAL ANTHEM IN THE 21ST CENTURY

Alyssa Wlodarczyk

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Committee:

Mary Natvig, Advisor

Ryan Ebright

Katherine Meizel

ABSTRACT

Mary Natvig, Advisor

"The Star-Spangled Banner," which serves as the United States' national anthem, has experienced a flux of controversial attention in the 21st century. The melody, which originates from a British song titled "To Anacreon in Heaven," has been paired with a variety of lyrics in the U.S. dating before "The Star-Spangled Banner," whose poetry was inspired by the War of 1812. Francis Scott Key, who authored the text of "The Star-Spangled Banner," was just one of many U.S. citizens who utilized this melody in the 19th century to express their feelings about the country in regard to a particular historical event. Key, a lawyer and slave-owner, reveals his attitude toward the U.S. specifically in the three later verses of "The Star-Spangled Banner," which depicts the tragedies of slavery in the 19th century.

Scholars such as Mark Clague, Carlos Abril, and William Robin have analyzed the national anthem's lyrics, as well as its performance practices, in context with the history of the U.S., tracing the transformation and function of the national anthem over the 200 years of its existence. This thesis explores the use of the national anthem in racial politics leading up to (and specifically in) the 21st century, the ways in which it does and does not adhere to the ideologies and democracy of the present-day United States, and its implicit representation of systemic racism that is highlighted by the social and political movement "Black Lives Matter." Analyzing the function of the national anthem, its performance practices, and reactions to these practices, this thesis argues that "The Star-Spangled Banner" plays a role in upholding systemic racism by shining a light on its use as a vehicle of protest and political expression, a use that has been a defining characteristic of the original melody since it made its way to the U.S.

This thesis is dedicated to my first teacher and father, who will always be an integral part in the culmination of my study and love for music.

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INTRODUCTION

"The Star-Spangled Banner" and its performance practices have been held in high esteem in the United States of America since before the song's establishment as an official anthem in 1931. The song has served as a symbol of patriotism and has been performed at events of great importance and reach. The singing of its well-recognized melody, full of intervallic leaps and extensive in range, is now often reserved for well-known performers or icons in pop culture, though in the past, audiences participated as well. Whitney Houston's 1991 Super Bowl performance of the national anthem, for instance, is one of the most popular renditions on YouTube even thirty years later. It is admired by many and is not only watched in admiration of her talent, but with a sense of pride in the U.S.:

> "30 years have passed and this remains the gold standard." – Bee Gee
> "For a moment in time, Whitney made me feel like an American…" – Kim Bradbury[1]

During or after certain historical events, whether they be tragic or celebratory for Americans, the anthem is often used to honor significant contributions, occasions, and individuals, whether that be to grieve the death of a war hero or celebrate the inauguration of a new president. "The Star-Spangled Banner" has been used for a variety of events throughout the course of American history, despite the contradictory story it represents.

The "Banner's" lyrics, written by Francis Scott Key, were inspired by a United States' victory during the War of 1812.[2] The first verse, which is the best-known and the one typically performed at events, depicts a scene of triumph over a threat, in a battle whose outcome ensured

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[1] "Whitney Houston- Star-Spangled Banner," YouTube, accessed December 5, 2021, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N_lCmBvYMRs.

[2] Throughout this thesis "The Star-Spangled Banner" will often be referred to as the "Banner."

that the U.S. would ostensibly remain the "land of the free"—a republic free of European rule. Traditionally, the verse instills pride in the values that the broad stripes and bright stars represent. Key, however, wrote three additional verses that further describe the environment of the U.S. during the early 19th century. In particular, Key describes the events and climate of the War of 1812:

> And where is that band who so vauntingly swore,
> That the havoc of war and the battle's confusion
> A home and a Country should leave us no more?
> Their blood has wash'd out their foul footstep's pollution.
> No refuge could save the hireling and slave
> From the terror of flight or the gloom of the grave,
> And the star-spangled banner in triumph doth wave
> O'er the land of the free and the home of the brave.

Here, the lyrics of the third verse refer to the terror of both hireling and slave yet end with the phrase "land of the free and the home of the brave." Contrary to what is suggested by the lyrics, not everyone in the land was free at the time of the anthem's creation. Musicologist Mark Clague, a leading expert in the history and analysis of "The Star-Spangled Banner," brings the tragedies of slavery, addressed in the lesser-known verses of the national anthem, further into light. Clague's work, as well as that of Carlos Abril, Michael Holding, and William Robin, examines the anthem's history, reception, and recent media attention in light of 21st-century racial politics. In particular, the Black Lives Matter movement and Colin Kaepernick's kneeling during the anthem have brought more direct exposure to continuing systemic racism within U.S. society. This has led to an assortment of reactions and controversies regarding the anthem, its historical context, and the response (or lack thereof) to continuing racial inequalities tolerated by the country it represents.

This thesis explores the performance practice and reception of the national anthem with specific attention to the first two decades of the 21st century, highlighting its function as a

primary vehicle of national protest. This is accomplished through the exploration of social media discourse, such as posts from political social media figures on various platforms, Twitter posts, and other current event sources. Additional scholarship that discusses the role of "The Star-Spangled Banner," "Lift Every Voice and Sing," and other patriotic music in U.S. culture is also included. Specific events, especially in the last five years, are examined in cases where the national anthem has yielded controversy due to both its musical performances and its use as a vehicle of protest. Not only do these events include Colin Kaepernick taking a knee during the national anthem and the NFL's initial response, but also the establishment and evolution of Black Lives Matter and the practice of substituting "Lift Every Voice and Sing" (the Black National Anthem) for "The Star-Spangled Banner." In addition, this thesis examines the growing urge to deconstruct U.S. nationalism, implicitly represented by "The Star-Spangled Banner," which continues to oppress Black citizens decades after the song's establishment as the national anthem.

CHAPTER 1: THE HISTORY AND ORIGIN OF "THE STAR-SPANGLED BANNER"

After gaining its independence from Great Britain following the Revolutionary War, the newly founded United States of America began to establish itself as a separate country with its own traditions. However, many of these traditions still had ties to British culture, including music. Several of the most well-known American patriotic tunes come from England, such as "My Country Tis of Thee," which uses the melody of the British national anthem, "God Save the Queen." During the election of the nation's first president, the melody was utilized with different lyrics to create the song "God Save George Washington." This practice of substituting texts without major alteration to the music is referred to as *contrafactum*. Since the late 18th century, *contrafacta* have been historically used in the United States to make political statements, and "The Star-Spangled Banner" is a significant, and ongoing, case of this.

The tune "To Anacreon in Heaven," which serves as the melody of the United States' national anthem, is also British in origin. Composed by John Stafford Smith with original lyrics written by Ralph Tomlinson, it served as the official song of the Anacreontic Society, a group of upper-class men that provided opportunities for exposure to London's realm of professional music.[3] The society's name came from the Greek poet, Anacreon, who was associated with activities and rituals often celebrating the beauty of both men and women.[4] Frequently, the song is portrayed as a "drinking song" due to its associations with, and references to, Bacchus, the god of wine, though this tends to be dramatized in certain narratives. The Anacreontic Society, which was an upper-class gentlemen's club for amateur musicians, was founded in 1766, but the exact

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[3]Katelyn Clark, "*To Anacreon in Heaven*: Observations on Gender and the Performance Practice of London's Anacreontic Society Song (*c.*1773)," *Early Music* 46, no. 4 (November 2018): 675.

[4]Jessie Campisi and AJ Willington, "Behind the Lyrics of 'The Star-Spangled Banner'," *CNN,* 2018, https://www.cnn.com/interactive/2018/07/us/national-anthem-annotated/.

date of the song's composition is not certain.[5] Smith, whose father was an organist, participated in choirs in London chapels and became a published and prize-winning composer in the years 1772 and 1773. He was described by an Anacreontic Society member as leading his fellow brothers in the song later in the 1770s and is therefore credited with the tune's creation and introducing it to the British public.[6] Each concert the Anacreontic Society held ended with the official song. British-published editions of "To Anacreon in Heaven" include *a cappella* four-part arrangements, as well as some with a figured bass and optional flute accompaniment.[7]

Clague found that this popular tune was used with over 500 different sets of lyrics, including "The Star-Spangled Banner" by Francis Scott Key.[8] The tune was used in political and controversial contexts from the very beginning of the U.S. The earliest known setting of Smith's melody in the colonies was "For the Commemoration of the Glorious Fourteenth of July" (1793), which advocated for American aid and assistance to French allies during the French Revolution.[9] The Federalists, not in favor of a French democracy, then responded with their own setting of the tune, "To Genêt in New York, " suggesting that the French Ambassador, Edmond-Charles Genêt, should be hanged.[10] In 1798, Thomas Paine (son of the author of "Common Sense") set the tune to his own lyrics creating "Adams and Liberty," which supported John Adams's

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[5]Jerry Blackstone, Mark Clague, and Andrew Thomas Kuster, "A Star-Spangled Bicentennial: A Conversation with Jerry Blackstone, Mark Clague, and Andrew Kuster," *The Choral Journal* 54, no. 9 (2014): 15.

[6]Clark, "*To Anacreon in Heaven*," 681.

[7]Ibid., 678.

[8]David Fair and Deb Polich, "'The Star-Spangled Banner' Waves On As It Changes O'er Time," *WEMU*, January 26, 2021.

[9]William Robin, "Colin Kaepernick and the Radical Uses of 'The Star-Spangled Banner,'" *The New Yorker,* August 29, 2016, https://www.newyorker.com/culture/culture-desk/colin-kaepernick-and-the-radical-uses-of-the-star-spangled-banner.

[10]Robin, "Colin Kaepernick."

contentious presidential campaign for a second term.[11] The tune remained popular at the end of the 18th century and into the early 19th century preceding the War of 1812. It is uncertain how many of these settings Key knew. By 1805, however, he certainly was aware of the melody as he used it for the lyrics of "When the Warrior Returns," written in honor of American naval heroes.[12]

Francis Scott Key and the War of 1812

Francis Scott Key entered the world with a distinct advantage. Born in 1779, he grew up in a family of wealthy slave owners from Maryland.[13] His father and uncle were both lawyers of British descent, and his father served in the Continental Army, though his uncle supported the British during the American War for Independence. He began his law studies in 1801 in Frederick, MD, and, according to his great-grandson, was a lawyer who "was equaled by few and excelled by none," reflecting his contribution to American law in the late 18th and 19th centuries.[14] Aside from his roots in law and his eventual career as District Attorney in the country's capital, Key was considered to be an amateur poet as well, one whose words are known by millions of people today. In the 21st century, however, these accomplishments are viewed as tarnished by Key's ownership of slaves.

The circumstances surrounding the creation of Key's poem, which eventually became the words to "The Star-Spangled Banner," are unique, though often dramatized. When the War of

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[11]Naomi Blumberg, "The Star-Spangled Banner," *Encyclopædia Britannica*, November 19, 2019, https://www.britannica.com/topic/The-Star-Spangled-Banner#ref1206704.

[12]Fair and Polich, "'The Star-Spangled Banner."

[13]Jamie Stiehm, "'The Star-Spangled Banner's Racist Lyrics Reflect Its Slave Owner Author, Francis Scott Key," *The Undefeated*, September 6, 2018, https://theundefeated.com/features/the-star-spangled-banners-racist-lyrics-reflect-its-slaveowner-author-francis-scott-key/.

[14]Francis Scott Key-Smith, *Francis Scott Key, Author of "The Star Spangled Banner"; What Else He Was and Who* (Washington, D.C.: Key-Smith and Company, 1911): 23.

1812 began, a decision was made to keep important government documents hidden to prevent them from being destroyed, since similar documents housed in Government buildings were burned by the British during the Revolutionary War. Dr. William Beanes was in charge of transporting the State of Maryland's important government documents and keeping them in a safe, hidden place. In doing so, Maryland's state documents were moved from Annapolis to Upper Marlboro, away from major government and political facilities. Beanes kept a large number of these documents in Upper Marlboro's city jail.[15] Despite British soldiers passing through the city (many of them medically treated by Beanes), they were unaware of the valuable documents that were within their reach. In August of 1814, however, an irritated Beanes arrested two drunken British soldiers, placing them in Upper Marlboro's city jail where some of the important documents he was trusted to protect resided. One prisoner escaped, bringing more British troops into the area and allowing the second prisoner to escape. Beanes was then taken to Baltimore to "be tried as a political prisoner."[16]

The capture of Beanes awakened great concern throughout the city of Upper Marlboro. Therefore, city leaders traveled to Georgetown seeking the help of well-known lawyer, Francis Scott Key, who not only was an army veteran but was quite familiar with British law.[17] The stakes were high—Washington had been burned down by the British at this point and the U.S. was "on the brink of losing the war."[18] Anticipating an attack in Baltimore, Key, with the help of

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[15]Francis Scott Key-Smith, "The Story of the Star-Spangled Banner," 267.
[16]Ibid., 267.
[17]Ibid., 268.
[18]Ace Collins, *Songs Sung Red, White, and Blue: The Stories Behind America's Best-Loved Patriotic Songs.* New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2003, 161.

Colonel John Skinner (an appointed administrator of prison exchange),[19] ventured to Baltimore on a sloop with hopes of negotiating with the British and freeing Beanes.

Key and Skinner, once allowed access, boarded a British ship called *The Tonnant,* docked about eight miles away from Fort McHenry. Here, they pleaded their case for the release of Beanes to Admiral Alexander Cochrane. Though rejected at first, Key presented the Admiral with several letters from British soldiers who had received medical treatment from Beanes, which was convincing enough for Cochrane to agree to release the doctor. However, since Key and Skinner had been exposed to British plans and tactics regarding the upcoming battle, they would not be formally released until the battle's conclusion in order to prevent any leaking of information that would reveal British strategy. This provided the Americans the opportunity to witness the battle of Fort McHenry and its outcome firsthand.

From the *Tonnant,* which was anchored beside the British Navy, Beanes, Cochrane, and Key observed 25 hours of fire from the British, beginning the morning of 13 September 1814. Once the firing ended, they assumed their American soldiers had surrendered. The British were not successful, however, at Fort McHenry, with many bombs blowing up in the air "before they struck their intended targets."[20] The U.S. had previously sunk several British ships, which also prevented the British Navy from getting close enough to their targets. Though Key, Skinner, and Beanes observed what seemed to be intense warfare that would likely defeat their fellow Americans, they would soon realize the victorious nature of the battle.

Following the many hours of brutal, gruesome battling, Key allegedly took out his telescope on the morning of 14 September 1814 and from his little sloop eight miles away from

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[19]Francis Scott Key-Smith, "The Story of the Star-Spangled Banner," 268-269.
[20]Collins, *Songs Sung,* 162.

the shore, saw the American flag waving from Fort McHenry.[21] It is thought that this sighting—a moment of realization that the flag was still standing strong and the U.S. was victorious again against the British—inspired Key to write the poetry that would eventually become the lyrics to "The Star-Spangled Banner." Key, Skinner, and Beanes were officially released by the British on 16 September 1814, allowing Key to finish his poem at the Indian Queen Hotel in Baltimore.[22] A judge by the name of J. H. Nicholson had the verses printed locally with the title "Defence of Fort M'Henry," and as soon as 20 September 1814, the Baltimore Patriot had published the poem, which rapidly grew in popularity along the east coast.[23]

This text was first recorded as being heard with spoken lyrics only one month later in October of that year, when it was performed by Ferdinand Durang at Captain McCauley's tavern in Baltimore.[24] Sung to the already well-known melody of "To Anacreon in Heaven," Key's poetic verses became lyrics that represented great patriotism and pride in the U.S., especially as it followed an American victory. Though older myths have previously suggested that the music was chosen after Key wrote the lyrics, overwhelming evidence points to the belief that he must have intended the poem and tune to be linked.[25] Key had twice set his words to "To Anacreon in Heaven," once in 1805, as well as two years before the "Defence of Fort M'henry[sic]."[26] The first sheet-music edition of "The Star-Spangled Banner" was printed in the fall of 1814 at Carrs Music Store in Baltimore under the title as we know it.[27] The song became so popular that it was

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[21]Francis Scott Key-Smith, "The Story of the Star-Spangled Banner," 269.
[22]Ibid., 270.
[23]Ibid., 271.
[24]Ibid., 271.
[25]Star Spangled Music," Star Spangled Music Foundation, 2012, https://starspangledmusic.org/.
[26]Ibid.
[27]Robin, "Colin Kaepernick."

sung on the streets amongst friends as a form of socializing and expressing pride for the U.S. George Templeton Strong's 1837 diary describes the sight of drunken men singing "The Star-Spangled Banner" together in New York City.[28]

Key's career grew in action and impact after the War of 1812. In his 50s, he was nominated for the U.S. District Attorney for the District of Columbia by President Andrew Jackson, who was also a rich slave owner. Here, he had a great influence on the Supreme Court, which already, according to Jamie Stiehm,"stood strong for slavery."[29] Key was known to be extremely cruel in his role as District Attorney, especially toward abolitionists, whom he "aggressively prosecuted" following the establishment of the anti-slavery movement in 1833.[30] As mentioned above, the last verse in "The Star-Spangled Banner" contains the following lyrics:

"No refuge could save the hireling and slave
from the terror of flight or the gloom of the grave."

According to Clague, these words likely demonstrate Key's frustration toward enslaved people who fought for the British with the hope that they would be free from American slavery, and his political actions in the 1820s and 1830s reflected his racist sentiments.[31] Though Key eventually did free some of his slaves, he became involved in the American Colonization Society, a group of people who strove to send free Black people back to Africa, which influenced the eventual formation of Liberia.[32]

Key's southern political agenda would be further enforced and even more embraced when his brother-in-law, Roger Taney, became chief justice of the United States in 1836, holding

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[28]Robin, "Colin Kaepernick."
[29]Stiehm, "'The Star-Spangled Banner's' Racist Lyrics."
[30]Ibid.
[31]Campisi and Willington, "Behind the Lyrics."
[32]Blackstone, Clague, and Kuster, "A Star-Spangled Bicentennial," 12.

this position for almost 30 years until his death. Due to his authorship of the Dred Scott Decision, Taney is often considered responsible for fueling the fire that would geographically and politically divide the nation, eventually leading to the Civil War in 1861. The 1857 Dred Scott Supreme Court opinion ruled that living in a free state and territory did not entitle enslaved persons to their freedom.[33]

"The Star-Spangled Banner" After Key's Death

In the years between Key's death in 1843 and the start of the Civil War, "The Star-Spangled Banner" became increasingly controversial. In 1844, "A New Version of the National Song" was published by the abolitionist newspaper, *The Liberator,* with anti-slavery lyrics by E. A. Atlee.[34] Atlee was a Baptist minister who titled this new version "O Say Can You Hear?" His lyrics contain references of slavery, similarly to Key's. However, Atlee's verses expose the mistreatment of slaves as opposed to "The Star-Spangled Banner" which instead exposed Key's political opinion regarding slavery during the War of 1812. Atlee was challenging whether the U.S. had truly upheld its promise of freedom for "all" during a time when more than a million Black people were enslaved by white Americans.[35]

Upon secession, Northern and Southern states even argued over who had a "right" to "The Star-Spangled Banner," especially considering its author was a native Southern slave-owner. An 1861 publication of the *Richmond Weekly Examiner* made the bold claim: "Let us never surrender to the North the noble song, 'The Star-Spangled Banner.' It is Southern in origin,

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[33]Blackstone, Clague, and Kuster, "A Star-Spangled Bicentennial," 12.

[34]Robin, "Colin Kaepernick."

[35]Sydney Hawkins and Mark Clague, "U-M Professor Discusses Abolitionist Star-Spangled Banner-'Oh Say, Do You Hear?'" *University of Michigan News,* July 2, 2020, https://news.umich.edu/u-m-professor-discusses-abolitionist-star-spangled-banner-oh-say-do-you-hear/.

in sentiments, in poetry, and song."[36] The tension and division that inevitably grew in the 1860s inspired American poet Oliver Wendell Holmes to create an "unofficial" fifth verse to Key's four-verse banner, containing these bold lyrics:

> By the millions unchain'd who our birthright have gained
> We will keep her bright blazon forever unstained! [37]

However, this fifth verse is more reflective of the dangers that were currently present within the United States (such as the lack of union) as opposed to an outside danger, threat, or enemy, which is clearly the point of Key's original poem.[38] Part of this fifth verse, written in 1861, was said to be well known and popular in the North, for it implied the hope of emancipation.

The original tune would continue to be set in the U.S. throughout the 19th century with various lyrics focusing on the political issues and climate of the times, ranging from the French Revolution to Women's Rights.[39] As the 19th century waned and as the value placed on professionalism in musical performances increased, however, the Banner transitioned from being just another patriotic song to one of prominence, with an esteemed tradition that came with particular expectations. It was in 1889 when the U.S. Navy first performed the Banner as the stars and stripes were raised and lowered.[40] Shortly after the turn of the century and during World War I, "official" versions of the Banner, endorsed by the U.S. Department of Education,

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[36]Robin, "Colin Kaepernick."
[37]Ibid.
[38]Ibid.
[39]William Robin, "How the National Anthem Has Unfurled," *The New York Times*, June 27, 2014, https://www.nytimes.com/2014/06/29/arts/music/the-star-spangled-banner-has-changed-a-lot-in-200-years.html.
[40]Blumberg, "'The Star-Spangled Banner.'"

were introduced in effort to "codify" the Banner, such as a "Service Version" for the military as well as a "Standardized Version" for the general public.[41]

Establishment and Evolution of the National Anthem Tradition

President Woodrow Wilson declared "The Star-Spangled Banner" as the national anthem of the U.S. Armed Forces in 1916, prompting the Walter Damrosch harmonization/John Philip Sousa arrangement for the Army and Navy in 1917.[42] Key's popular patriotic tune and text, however, was not officially declared as the national anthem of the United States of America until 1931 under the presidency of Herbert Hoover, perhaps due to the association of the Banner's original melody with drinking that circulated throughout the 1920s prohibition era.[43] The circumstances surrounding this congressional bill are unique. In Congress's declaration of the Banner as the national anthem, there is no inclusion of the specific set of words or what particular music should be used. The bill instead declares that "the words and music known as 'The Star-Spangled Banner'" would be the national anthem. This ultimately allows for flexibility in issues such as meter, ornamentation, and other stylistic or performance practices, and as Mark Clague points out, permits the Banner to be a medium of expression about the country, whether those feelings are positive or negative.[44]

Despite the codification of the Banner, other songs still became nationally significant. In the years leading up to the second World War, Irving Berlin, a Jewish immigrant from Russia who had lived in the U.S. since the age of 5, recycled a tune he had worked on earlier that century, "God Bless America." Originally composed in 1918, Berlin revised his tune in 1938 as

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[41]Fair and Polich, "'The Star-Spangled Banner.'" See also https://www.starspangledmusic.org.

[42]Blumberg, "'The Star-Spangled Banner.'"

[43]Blackstone, Clague, and Kuster, "A Star-Spangled Bicentennial," 16.

[44]Fair and Polich, "'The Star-Spangled Banner."

the threat of large-scale war in Europe yielded concerns about the potential entrance of the United States into such a conflict. Performed and recorded by Kate Smith in 1938, both singer and song quickly became associated with what would serve as a "pre-war" anthem, though Berlin intended it to be a "march toward peace."[45] Entering public spaces just shortly after the establishment of "The Star-Spangled Banner" as the United States' national anthem, however, Berlin and his song faced a great deal of political controversy. When the tune was used in place of "The Star-Spangled Banner" at baseball games due to its musical accessibility to spectators, it was thought that Berlin and Smith were aiming to replace the country's national anthem. Berlin publicly urged institutions to not hold his "God Bless America" in the same light as the national anthem tradition.[46] However, perhaps institutions clung onto this new patriotic anthem due to its simple melody and obvious peaceful message, which during heightened political tensions, likely "suited the public mood."[47]

The events of World War II, particularly the attack on Pearl Harbor, inspired the tradition of playing or singing the national anthem and other patriotic tunes at schools, sporting events, or other significant occasions.[48] Playing a national anthem before sporting events began as a Canadian tradition during hockey games, which the U.S. adopted during the war.[49] Though the earliest instances of Banner performances occurred in World War I, the urge to acquire such a tradition in the 1940's reiterates the importance of the anthem's symbol in the United States during times of conflict.[50] Since then, the Banner has been utilized in a variety of ways that

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[45]Sheryl Kaskowitz, *God Bless America* (US: Oxford University Press, 2013), 42.
[46]Kaskowitz, *God Bless America*, 121.
[47]Ibid., 101.
[48]Blackstone, Clague, and Kuster, "A Star-Spangled Bicentennial," 10.
[49]Ibid., 10.
[50]Ibid., 10.

demonstrate the evolution of political expression and protest in the U.S. An obvious example is Jimi Hendrix's Woodstock performance in 1969, which has often been interpreted as a musical reflection of the injustices that Black people faced during the Vietnam War. Played on the electric guitar, many understood the sound of Hendrix's accompanying musical features as a reflection of bombing or machine guns. When Hendrix was asked about the "controversy" that resulted from his stylistic choices, however, he vaguely replied "I don't know man, all I did was play it. I'm American so I played it – I used to have to sing it in school, they made me sing it in school, so… It was a flashback." Perhaps his response was meant to avoid controversial speculation.[51] Yet Hendrix performed the banner, according to Clague, over sixty times between 1968 and 1970, so his Woodstock performance was hardly an impromptu affair.[52] Though he served in the military and was outwardly proud of the U.S., Hendrix's anthem performances evolved into expressions of "frustration," or "call(s) to action" as racial tension and discrimination surrounding then-President Nixon's War on Drugs grew.[53]

The national unrest of the 1960s continued to prove itself as a significant period in the Banner's performance practice history, much like the years leading up to and including the Civil War. Whereas the Banner in the 19th century was performed with a variety of alternative *lyrics*, the political conflict in the 20th century engendered alternative *musical* practices and styles in reaction to political conflict. Around the same time that Hendrix was experimenting with new performance practices for the national anthem, Puerto Rican pop artist José Feliciano also received controversial media attention after his performance of "The Star-Spangled Banner" at

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[51]Mark Clague, "This Is America: Jimi Hendrix's Star Spangled Banner Journey as Psychedelic Citizenship," *Journal of the Society of American Music* 8, no. 4 (December 2014): 462.

[52]Clague, "This Is America," 469.

[53]Ibid., 468.

the 1968 World Series.[54] Accompanying himself with guitar, an unusual instrument to pair with the anthem at that time, Feliciano performed the work in common time rather than the standard triple meter, and he also evoked a Latino, soulful musical style. In her book *Idolized: Music, Media, and Identity in American Idol*, Katherine Meizel writes that Feliciano's performance opened the door for additional interpretations of the national anthem for future popstars.[55] Marvin Gaye, for instance, performed the national anthem at the 1983 NBA All-star game, just a year after the release of his single "Sexual Healing," accompanied by a pre-recorded "sexy drum-track" that contributed to an overall "funk/soul" rendition of the tune.[56] Meizel further notes that Mark Anthony Neal, Professor of Black Popular Culture at Duke University, implies Gaye's performance "suggested that African-Americans had a right to 'African-Americanize' the national anthem."[57] Though there were audience members present who reacted positively to Gaye's embellishments and personal inflections of the melody, controversy surrounding the standardized performance expectations of the national anthem in regards to Gaye's performance persisted.

Eight years later, a less contentious, but equally influential example is Whitney Houston's iconic 1991 Super Bowl performance which, according to musicologist William Robin, may have helped Black citizens to resonate with their nation's anthem.[58] Houston's performance, bold in its musical characteristics and political statements, featured F-14s flying over the stadium, likely as a reaction to the Gulf War, according to Meizel. Throughout her

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[54]Robert Edwin, "Popular Song and Music Theater. The Star-Spangled Banner—A Tutorial," *Journal of Singing* 68, no. 1 (September 2011): 65.

[55]Katherine Meizel, *Idolized* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press 2011), 76.

[56]Edwin, "Popular Song," 65.

[57]Meizel, *Idolized*, 76.

[58]Robin, "Colin Kaepernick."

performance, which is accompanied by a symphony orchestra in common time, Houston demonstrates a stylistic feature that Meizel calls "Afro-melisma," which has also been referred to as "runs" or "riffing."[59] The term refers to a practice present in both gospel and pop music that invokes African-American music yet is often utilized and appropriated by pop artists regardless of racial background.[60] Houston's performance was so inspiring that it made its way to the top of the popular music charts and was used at the beginning of the 21st century to honor the lives lost from the attacks on 9/11 on radio stations and benefit albums.[61]

In the 21st century in particular, the national anthem has highlighted racial divisions and created conversation, whether positive or negative, just as the song had once been used to highlight political controversies in the U.S. as early as the late 18th century (see page 5). As scholars, students, researchers, and citizens alike continue to contextualize the history of "The Star-Spangled Banner" and how it corresponds to America's dark past of systemic racism, a drastically changing relationship between the national anthem and the American people has developed since the start of the 21st century.

[59]Meizel, *Idolized*, 63.
[60]Ibid., 63.
[61]Ibid., 76.

CHAPTER 2: NATIONAL ANTHEM DISCOURSE IN THE 21ST CENTURY

The early 21st century has proven to be a politically active time in U.S. history. In just twenty years, the country has experienced a terrorist attack, the election of its first Black president, the worst recession since the Great Depression, a record number of mass shootings, a global pandemic that disproportionately affected people of color, worldwide protests affiliated with Black Lives Matter in response to American police brutality, and an insurrection in our nation's capital. The extensive advances in technology and the Internet since 2000 have not only yielded a variety of media and social networking outlets, but have impacted the way we receive and distribute information, what information is received and distributed, and by whom.

The surge in feelings of patriotism (devotion to or support of one's country) following the terrorist attacks on 11 September 2001 generated a fervid response that inevitably brought "The Star-Spangled Banner" into a positive light, but one that has since then continued to change shades and colors. After 9/11, there was an urgent desire across the United States for people to come together, heal, honor and express love for the lost American lives and their families, and give gratitude for the individuals in uniform who aided in the rescue process on the day of the attacks. The country's symbols, such as the flag, the national anthem, and other patriotic tunes, were revered more than ever. Additional efforts as a result of the tragedy that led to a more patriotic attitude toward the national anthem, included the National Anthem Project in 2005 and the passing of laws in states such as Wisconsin requiring children to sing the national anthem (or recite the "Pledge of Allegiance") every school day.[62] This chapter discusses issues surrounding the national anthem's traditions in tandem with events of the 21st century, such as the call for its

[62]Carlos Abril, "A National Anthem: Patriotic Symbol or Democratic Action?" in *Patriotism and Nationalism in Music Education*, ed. David Hebert and Alexandra Kertz-Welzel (New York: Routledge, 2012), 77 and 90.

regulation and the emergence of alternative performance practices, and how these issues have transpired over the last two decades in light of recently-highlighted racial inequities. In addition, this chapter argues a need for unity and equity that can be facilitated through national anthem discourse, protest, and new conventions.

Difficulties of the National Anthem

Unfortunately, "The Star-Spangled Banner" is notoriously difficult for the average person to sing. Not only does its range span an octave and a half, but it has some rather large leaps that can be tricky even for trained musicians. In addition, some of its poetry is somewhat complex for early learners and especially students whose first language is not English. In fact, in 1928, the National Association for Music Education (NAfME) originally opposed "The Star-Spangled Banner" becoming the national anthem for those reasons (in addition to being "too war-like," and because it was the result of only one significant event in history).[63]

According to Sheryl Kaskowitz, the tragedy of 9/11 yielded a similar craving for peace and unity as the one that occurred around the time of the Second World War, when Irving Berlin's "God Bless America" became a pre-war "anthem" in the U.S. Singing its simple melody yielded the possibility for individuals of all backgrounds to unite. In addition, Kaskowitz notes that "God Bless America" is written in a more familiar American vernacular recognizable and similar to speech used in the 21st century, especially compared to the text of "The Star-Spangled Banner."[64] Aside from the vernacular, the subjects of "The Star-Spangled Banner" such as the "bombs bursting" was an odd or inappropriate association for some grieving the 9/11 events.[65]

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[63]Abril, "A National Anthem," 80.
[64]Kaskowitz, *God Bless America*, 101.
[65]Ibid., 101.

Major League Baseball (MLB), with two teams whose home city had been attacked, established a new ritual less than a week after the attacks to take place during each game, asking each team to play "God Bless America" either before the start of each game or during the seventh-inning stretch.[66] Even though Berlin's tune is not played as often at MLB games in 2021 (especially after discussion reached the media about Kate Smith's racist song-recording career), "God Bless America," for more than a decade, shared the same sonic space as the national anthem. However, while the national anthem maintained its prestige and was usually performed by a soloist, "God Bless America" was simply a recording to which the public could sing along, creating an opportunity for unity due to its musical accessibility.[67]

The beginning of the 21st century was met with an urge to reinforce the significance of "The Star-Spangled Banner" and its role as both a national anthem and patriotic symbol in various institutions, especially schools, despite its challenging nature. The task of increasing awareness and understanding of the national anthem among younger generations was a responsibility that fell heavily on music educators. Teresa K. Preston's book *It Works for Me!* is a compilation of several teachers' various experiences and methods teaching "The Star-Spangled Banner"—its musical characteristics, the behaviors and rituals often associated with it, and its history. Published by NAfME in 2005, Preston's book is reflective of the common urgency to shed a brighter light on the national anthem, and the country it stands for, in a period of time when the United States faced an increase in post-9/11 nationalism.

The national impetus to facilitate discussion and understanding of the Banner prompted a variety of approaches and attitudes among educators in the U.S. One school established the

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[66]Kaskowitz, *God Bless America*, 117.
[67]Ibid., 133.

tradition of singing both the first and fourth verses at homecoming in response.[68] Another school taught not only "The Star-Spangled Banner," but "Lift Every Voice and Sing," and it was estimated that 80-90% of the students knew both.[69] There were, of course, several comments in Preston's book regarding the performances of "The Star-Spangled Banner" by pop stars whose stylistic choices, inflections, or embellishments have not been praised. For instance, the tendency of performers to allude to soul or gospel music when singing the national anthem, which are African-American genres of music, is often done so by the use of melisma (see page 14). This is heard not only in Whitney Houston's 1991 rendition but has been appropriated by white performers in various national anthem performances as well as in pop music.[70] Performers often use melisma on particular words in the Banner, such as "wave" in "O say does that star-spangled banner yet wave," which not only expands the musical phrase but obviously alters the original melody that many believed should be maintained.[71]

Those with attitudes that opposed these sorts of embellishments encouraged a simple, standard way of performing the national anthem in schools.[72] Both musical and behavioral expectations of the national anthem were more strongly enforced as a result. For instance, Abril notes the conventions, both musical and behavioral, of the national anthem that are generally present and expected: 1) the music is in triple meter with a melody remaining more or less faithful to the original 2) it should be accompanied by a "traditional ensemble," such as an orchestra, concert band, or piano, 3) audience members are expected to face toward the flag with

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[68]Teresa K. Preston, *It Works For Me!: The National Anthem and Other Patriotic Music in the Classroom* (Reston, Virginia: The National Association for Music Education, 2005), 28.

[69]Preston, *It Works For Me*, 23.

[70]Meizel, *Idolized,* 76. See discussion on American Idol performances of "The Star-Spangled Banner."

[71]Ibid., 77.

[72]Preston, *It Works For Me*, 3.

right hand over the heart, 4) and people should express appreciation for the country by singing along or showing respect in some way.[73]

Another convention of singing the national anthem is the expectation that it should be sung in English. One teacher mentioned in Preston's book gave prizes to students who could explain the meaning of the words: "This year I offered a prize to any student who would be willing to give a summary of what the lyrics of 'The Star-Spangled Banner' mean in plain English (especially important for our English language learners). I had a taker, and it was a wonderful summary everyone could understand."[74] The emphasis on an English language understanding of the anthem was similarly expressed by then-President George W. Bush in reaction to a Spanish version of "The Star-Spangled Banner" performed in 2006: "I think the national anthem ought to be sung in English, and I think people who want to be a citizen of this country ought to learn English, and they ought to learn to sing the national anthem in English."[75] Political commentator Michelle Malkin reacted as well, referring to the Spanish version as "anti-American."[76] Despite the long history of foreign language versions of "The Star-Spangled Banner" in the United States, such as the German translation in 1894, "Das Star-Spangled Banner," or the Spanish version, "La Bandera de las Estrellas," commissioned by the U.S. Bureau of Education in 1919, conservative attitudes discouraged the permeance of multi-language renditions into mainstream culture in the early 21st century.

As the notion that the national anthem was to be performed in a particular way in order to properly display respect for the U.S. became even more prominent at the beginning of the 21st

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[73]Abril, "A National Anthem," 81.
[74]Preston, *It Works For Me*, 8.
[75]Abril, "A National Anthem," 78.
[76]Ibid., 84.

century, the tangled history of "The Star-Spangled Banner" moved farther into the distant past. Schools emphasized the Banner's importance, giving it a more significant part of music and history curricula that has, over the last 20 years, systemically instilled the importance of respecting the U.S. According to Abril, the urge to regulate the Banner after the attack on the Twin Towers led to an increase of "blind patriotism" in America, which he described as "an unquestioning and unwavering loyalty to country."[77] This inspired what Abril calls "absolutist" views of the national anthem from some of those who advocated for a single official version that could not be modified, which in turn prevented students from being exposed to the different traditions and cultures of their own fellow citizens.[78] Abril goes as far to say that an official version essentially goes against the original ideas behind "The Star-Spangled Banner," such as substituting its lyrics and using it to bring national awareness to various political issues (see Chapter 1). He goes on to say that teaching students the tune's roots, can "help them uncover the explicit and implicit values it serves to propagate."[79] "The Star-Spangled Banner," which was created through *contrafacta*, has been flexible and adaptable since its origin, serving as a form of communication for those it unites. Considering the history of the anthem over 200 years, Abril's comment is valid: the melody comes from another country (Britain) and has been set to a variety of lyrics long before Key's, meaning there has never been one official version.

Maintaining the Flexible Nature of "The Star-Spangled Banner"

According to Abril, national anthems, in any country, are generally supposed to be "dynamic symbols of the collective unity of a country."[80] "The Star-Spangled Banner" is already

[77]Abril, "A National Anthem," 88-89.
[78]Ibid., 90.
[79]Ibid., 91.
[80]Ibid., 81.

the most protected song in United States history, with efforts to enforce particular standards made by the U.S. Department of Education in 1942, and later in 1971.[81] The establishment of such codes defies the purpose of the national anthem remind us mentioned above. preventing it from being dynamic by declaring boundaries to maintain. An absolutist attitude towards the national anthem, therefore, prevents the use of the "The Star-Spangled Banner" as a medium of expression in both times of celebration and times of injustice, and several examples of both (such as the victory of the War of 1812, or the fight for abolition leading up to the Civil War) can be traced since the tune first made its way to the United States.

Abril notes that music plays a role in societal activities and events which rely on people's involvement and cooperation at some level, and the national anthem is a primary example of this.[82] For instance, each part of a sporting event heavily relies on communities for the proper execution of that event. In the 21st century, spectators are expected to stand respectfully during, and cheer and applaud after a performance or playing of the national anthem as a way of showing support for the performer(s) as well as the military. This expectation to cheer and applaud is similar to instances when a player's name is announced, when a team scores, during a halftime performance, or when a player is injured. All of these essential components that are associated with attending a sporting event are the responsibility of those who wish to attend and be entertained, as well as those who are entertaining (either by performing the national anthem or competing). Audience members in a stadium and watching at home cheer for their own favorite teams, but they are all meant to be united as countrymen in the singing and/or hearing of the national anthem. In short, the playing or performing of the national anthem at such events

[81]Abril, "A National Anthem," 82. See discussion on codes.
[82]Ibid., 87.

ostensibly provides an opportunity for present athletes, musicians, students, parents, teachers, officers, and anyone of any race, gender, sexuality, or socioeconomic status to unite, even if it is just for that instance.

When it comes to facilitating and maintaining this sense of unity among people in other settings, without the unifying context of sports, the national anthem, on its own, cannot realistically integrate those who come from individual, unique backgrounds. John Philip Sousa even wrote to the *New York Times* in objection to "The Star-Spangled Banner" becoming the national anthem in 1928, urging "U.S. citizens to recognize the need for a musical hymn that represented the collective (not selective) identity of the country."[83] This idea that an anthem was to serve as a hymn for the nation implied a national sacred identity, giving the concept of the national anthem and the song itself a religious association. The role of patriotic music is to validate the contributions members make to their society, facilitate integration, and express, almost semi-sacredly, devotion to one's country. [84] Relying on a singular piece of music ("The Star-Spangled Banner") is not enough on its own to facilitate inclusion and equity, and furthermore, cannot always be the most appropriate and resonant choice of patriotic expression amongst Americans. Black people, indigenous people, and people of color in the U.S. have addressed this issue in multiple ways: through the creation of new anthems and through new performance practices for the established anthem.

Teaching the national anthem's historical contexts, the ways in which it reflects foundational U.S. ideologies, and the continuous emergence of new anthems and performance practices, can help create a common understanding among students and people from diverse

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[83]Abril, "A National Anthem," 80.

[84]Kimberly Sena Moore, "Patriotic Music and Cultural Identity," *Psychology Today*, June 30, 2016.

backgrounds, cultures, and experiences. As Abril concludes, there is a better connection and respect formed between the members of a group when there is an overall awareness of the function of the United States' national anthem. The focus must not lie in enforcing the importance of loving one's country and unhesitating loyalty to its flag and anthem, but the teaching of the anthem's roots, whether or not its idealization of democracy has been realized in the U.S., and why that may be.[85]

But "The Star-Spangled Banner" can't do the job of unifying the country when systemic divisions remain. Other songs are needed for many to feel part of a larger community. One, "Lift Every Voice and Sing," is a musical force that has historically facilitated hope among African Americans. The song was composed before "God Bless America" and has served as what is often called the Black National Anthem for over 100 years. The most notable instance of this song being held in an esteem similar to that of the national anthem during the 21st century took place at the Democratic Convention in 2008, when Renee Marie sang the lyrics of "Lift Every Voice and Sing" to the melody of "The Star-Spangled Banner." The Democrats had just declared Barack Obama as the official candidate for the 2008 election, marking a significant point in American history—there was a possibility for an African American to become the president of the United States. As Shana Redmond remarks, "Marie's performance drew into discomforting and productive tension the social and political divergences between these two songs and their histories. Her anthem was a composite of traditions that celebrated the nation of her birth through a critique that articulated the still-held, yet unfulfilled, promises of Western democracy."[86]

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[85]Abril, "A National Anthem," 91-92.

[86]Shana L. Redmond, "Indivisible: The Nation and Its Anthem in Black Musical Performance," *Black Music Research Journal* 35, no. 1 (2015): 101.

Sebastian De La Cruz's 2013 performance is another example in which a minority performer brings an aspect of their own culture or experience in the U.S. to national platforms through the addition or modification of standardized national anthem traditions or conventions. The 11-year-old native of San Antonio performed the national anthem at the Miami Heat vs. San Antonio Spurs third NBA final game, prompting an unfortunate series of racist social media reactions, which highlights the growing role of social media regarding debates over the Banner. User TJ THA DJ shared his thoughts, posting this tweet following De La Cruz's performance on June 11, 2013: "Who dat lil #Wetback sangin the national anthem at the #Heat game????"[87] De La Cruz performed in a mariachi suit as a way to honor his and his family's culture and origins as a first-generation American. Though a separate individual anthem was not performed, altering particular performance aspects of the national anthem allowed De La Cruz to assert himself in his own country while honoring his ancestral roots that were essential to the foundation of the United States.[88]

The creation of new anthems and new performance practices by people of color are a response to the white supremacy that "The Star-Spangled Banner" supports. While "Lift Ev'ry Voice and Sing" serves an anthem that is shared by those belonging in a broad Black American community, performing "The Star-Spangled Banner" as a mariachi is a way those of Mexican descent can assert a belonging in the U.S. community while keeping sight of the Mexican and Chicanx musical practices. In either case, it is essential to understand the influences and political climates that contextualize these performance choices.

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[87]Melita M. Garza, "Legacy Media as Twitter Referee: Reframing Reaction to Sebastien De La Cruz's Anthem Singing at the 2013 NBA Finals," *Howard Journal of Communications* 28, no. 3 (May 2017): 263.

[88]Garza, "Legacy Media," 275. See more on discussion about non-Anglo White contributions to United States.

CHAPTER 3: BLACK LIVES MATTER: USING THE NATIONAL ANTHEM TO BRING CHANGE

The effects of and the energy that have fueled horrid acts of racism and oppression still linger in our society, systemically targeting Black citizens. A Harvard study concluded that Black people are six times more likely to be shot and killed by police depending on the area of the country. Though only 3% of the population, Black people account for 8% of the deaths in police custody.[89] Thirteen percent of our country's population is Black, yet 40% of the U.S. prison population is Black.[90] These statistics alone inarguably prove that Black lives suffer and are targeted at a disproportionate rate compared to other groups of people in America, and there are countless others that could further support the fact. However, the issues at hand, including the educational, judicial, and governmental systems in place that disfavor Black citizens, are not resolved by the presentation and understanding of numbers and percentages. They are resolved by an urgency to demand a major societal change, one that, as we have seen throughout history, is often inspired by protest, the spread of knowledge and information, and a common awareness that facilitates unity.

Circling back to Carlos Abril's main point in "A National Anthem: Patriotic Symbol or Democratic Action?," unity can be achieved when there is common understanding and mutual respect among members of a group, and this can be applied on an even larger scale to American society. Using the national anthem as just one medium to spark conversation about U.S. democracy and history can help facilitate this unity, at the very least, in educational institutions. Unity on a larger scale, however, has in the last decade been impeded by the empowerment of

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[89]Michael Holding, *Why We Kneel, How We Rise* (London, UK: Simon & Schuster, 2021), 11.

[90]Holding, *Why We Kneel*, 106.

political thinking in certain circles that lacks the understanding, acknowledgement of, and respect for society's disenfranchised, those who have faced systemic oppression since the landing of Christopher Columbus. Therefore, national unity cannot and will not be achieved solely by restructuring the way the U.S. national anthem is taught. Inspecting the "why" behind the utilization of the national anthem as a vehicle of protest and how in 2021 Black citizens are still systematically targeted is essential in tracing the disconnect between American mythology and real history.

As mentioned previously throughout this thesis, "The Star-Spangled Banner" has been used to facilitate national unity in various ways since the 19th century in the United States. Even before its establishment as the country's national anthem, the popularity and significance that the tune held in American society ignited passion and patriotism as in the case of the victorious results of the War of 1812, but also served as a medium of political expression during the growing tensions between Northern and Southern states proceeding the Civil War. Newly penned lyrics reflected the feelings and goals of the time, inevitably leading to controversy and discussion between opposing sides, as in the case of Atlee's setting (see pg. 11).

A more recent example of political messaging occurred in the 1968 Olympics, when athletes Tommy Smith and John Carlos raised their fists during the playing of the national anthem in solidarity with the Black Power movement, a moment in history that is not commonly discussed or brought up in post-secondary curricula.[91] That incident highlights the importance, in the context of music, of extramusical practices such as gesture, body language, and silence in the performance of resistance. The most famous example of this in the 21st century began in 2016 with Colin Kaepernick, an NFL quarterback for the San Francisco 49ers, who sat during the

[91]Robin, "Colin Kaepernick."

performance of the national anthem during pre-season games and knelt at all games beginning in September. This eventually sparked media attention and new conversations surrounding the anthem, the flag, and the country they symbolize, as well as the role of athletes and spectators during performances of the Banner.

Black Lives Matter

Preceding Kaepernick's motion to bring awareness to racial injustice was the rise of the Black Lives Matter movement, founded in 2013 following the murder of Trayvon Martin, a 17-year-old Black teenager, by neighborhood watch volunteer George Zimmerman. Martin, who was on his way back from picking up some snacks at a convenience store, appeared suspicious to Zimmerman, who shot and killed the innocent boy. The ineffectiveness of the United States' judicial system was highlighted particularly by organizers of the Black Lives Matter movement after Zimmerman's eventual acquittal. Hashtags began trending on various social media platforms, calling for justice for the Martin family and other families who have suffered the loss of loved ones at the hands of those who were meant to protect them. The hashtag #BlackLivesMatter appeared on Twitter on 13 July 2013, sparking media attention to and discussion about social issues that went neglected for too long, and were becoming harder to avoid in a technologically advancing world:

> "black people. I love you. I love us. Our lives matter." – Alicia Garza
> "declaration: black bodies will no longer be sacrificed for the rest of the world's enlightenment. i am done. i am so done. trayvon, you are loved infinitely #blacklivesmatter" – Patrisse Marie Cullors-Brignac[92]

"Black Lives Matter" is a social and political movement consisting of a variety of organizations and groups of people, as well as a slogan used by those advocating against police

[92]Black Lives Matter, "Herstory," 2021, https://blacklivesmatter.com/herstory/.

brutality toward Black people. Though there is no authoritative leader or structured form of power, the original project began with three Black women organizers—Alicia Garza, Patrisse Cullors, and Opal Tometi—who eventually created the Black Lives Matter Global Network. This decentralized network established grounding principles for anyone driven to fight against racial injustices and uplift Black voices, while also allowing the movement to be led freely, with emphasis on local chapters, protests, and organizations.[93] Though Kaepernick did not state that his act of protesting the national anthem was affiliated with any particular movement, he quickly became associated with Black Lives Matter once he began to be frequently questioned by the media: "I am not going to stand up to show pride in a flag for a country that oppresses Black people and people of color. To me, this is bigger than football and it would be selfish on my part to look the other way. There are bodies in the street and people getting paid leave and getting away with murder."[94]

Kaepernick, who inspired teammates as well as other professional athletes to use their televised platforms, began kneeling instead of sitting during the national anthem following a discussion with Nate Bayer, a former player for the Seahawks as well as a Green Beret. Bayer, a big supporter of the military, convinced Kaepernick that kneeling may be a more respectful way to demonstrate his protest against racial injustice and to honor those who have died from police brutality, as well as military soldiers who have died protecting the country.[95] Once the 2016 pre-

[93]Black Lives Matter, "Herstory."

[94]Charles Curtis, "A Reminder of What Colin Kaepernick Actually Said, and a Timeline of His Actions," *USA Today*, June 4, 2020, https://ftw.usatoday.com/2020/06/colin-kaepernick-anthem-protest-timeline-message.

[95]Tadd Haislop, "Colin Kaepernick Kneeling Timeline: How Protests During the National Anthem Started a Movement in the NFL," *Sporting News*, September 13, 2020, https://www.sportingnews.com/us/nfl/news/colin-kaepernick-kneeling-protest-timeline/xktu6ka4diva1s5jxaylrcsse.

season concluded, Kaepernick and other teammates began demonstrating in this new way as the historical Presidential election of 2016 quickly approached.

The act of kneeling as it relates to African-Americans stems as far back as the Civil War era when enslaved peoples were drawn or visibly depicted in the media being in kneeling positions when performing tasks or engaging with their white owners.[96] A Boston statue that has been removed as of the end of 2020 showed a slave kneeling at the feet of Abraham Lincoln, almost as if he were to be honored as the slave's white emancipator. Kaepernick's decision to kneel during the performance of the national anthem, when discussed in tandem with the historical connotations of kneeling in the U.S. in addition the Boston statue removal, can therefore, be seen as a reclamation of that gesture of kneeling that once represented a dynamic between a slave and his owner.

Discourse Surrounding Black Athletes and National Anthem Protests

The last five to six years have been some of the most divisive in the history of the United States, especially as debates broke out regarding the nature of Kaepernick's actions and those who followed him. Conservative commentator Tomi Lahren has been one of Kaepernick's harshest critics since August 2016, implying that 1) he should not think that white people are racist since he was adopted by white parents ("Didn't two white parents adopt you after yours weren't willing to raise you?"), 2) fans of his football team are white and the people who pay him are white ("Maybe you should also decline the paycheck from the white owner of your team, or the white fans that buy your merchandise and fill the stands to watch you play"), and 3) that he should leave the country if he does not like it ("…and Colin, if this country disgusts you so

[96]Kirk Savage, *Standing Soldiers, Kneeling Slaves: Race, War, and Monument in Ninteenth-Century America* (Princeton University Press), 38.

much, leave. I guarantee there are thousands and thousands of people around the world that would gladly take your spot.").[97] Lahren also suggested that Black communities should take responsibility for their own struggles that they face:

> Please tell me how you're oppressed. Is it because the Black unemployment rate is double what it is for whites, or the homicide rate, or the dropout rate, or the percentage of minority communities on food stamps? Well, we've had a Black president for almost 8 years now. Maybe he failed you. We also have a Black woman in charge of the justice department. Maybe she failed you too. Or maybe it's the liberals—your saviors which have run your communities into the ground. Where does the buck stop? When will those in black communities take a step back and take some responsi-damn-bility for the problems in Black communities? Because it seems to me that blaming white people for all of your problems might make you the racist.[98]

A Republican U.S. Congressman also contributed to the slander of Kaepernick, claiming that people who look like him should be lucky that they have freedom of speech in this country, as if he and his fellow Black teammates and citizens were not United States citizens.[99] The backlash Kaepernick received from the political-right demonstrated a broader reluctance to acknowledge the validity of the protests of Black athletes. Then-president Barack Obama, however, showed his support for the athlete and his method of protest: "He's exercising his constitutional right to make a statement. I think there is a long history of sports figures doing so. I think there are a lot of ways you can do it when it comes to the flag and national anthem."[100]

Though it cannot be denied that protesting during the national anthem or using "The Star-Spangled Banner" as a vehicle of protest is a centuries-old tradition in the U.S. (see pp. 11 and 21), society struggles with addressing this concept, especially when it comes to sports. Rachel Allison, Chris Knoester, and B. David Ridpath attribute this to what they call "Sacred Sports

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[97]"Tomi Lahren DESTROYS Colin Kaepernick," *The Blaze,* August 30, 2016, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qq0_nyWVXCI.

[98]"Tomi Lahren DESTROYS Colin Kaepernick."

[99]Holding, *Why We Kneel,* 37.

[100]Haislop, "Colin Kaepernick Kneeling Timeline."

Nationalism," a theory they developed in a study of opinions from mostly white, Midwestern women regarding the right of athletes to protest during the national anthem.[101] Noted in their study is the fact that Americans differ from citizens of other countries regarding national anthem rituals as the flag and anthem are present at nearly all sporting events at every level: for children, grade school and high school, college, and professional. Other countries typically reserve performances of the national anthem for international competitions. The study points out that in the United States, it is almost as if there is a "duty" to give "proper" respect to the flag in fear of facing backlash for not doing so.[102]

The constant presence of the flag, military personnel, dramatized performances of the Banner, and the expectation of the community present to interact with these symbols at sporting events further promote sacred sports nationalism. The rituals associated with sporting events have obtained a societal-wide sacred value that is designed to drive citizens to support and respect the military, love America, and recognize the prestige of being American.[103] It is no wonder, then, that the image of a Black man kneeling during the national anthem made (and continues to make) many white Americans confused and uncomfortable; the rituals that have been practiced for decades that promote unquestioned respect to the country, the military, and the flag had been challenged by a Black man and therefore, were seen as disrespectful. The lack of an ability to question and challenge the traditions of the national anthem among many Americans may reflect any number of issues—lack of critical thought, fear of change, and systemic racism.

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[101]Rachel Allison, Chris Knoester, and B. David Ridpath, "Should Athletes Be Allowed to Protest during the National Anthem? An Analysis of Public Opinions among U.S. Adults," *Sociology of Sport Journal* (September 1, 2021): 8 and 20, https://doi.org/10.1123/ssj.2020-0153.

[102]Allison, Knoester, and Rdipath, "Should Athletes," 5.

[103]Ibid., 7.

Kaepernick gained the attention of media outlets, inspiring not only similar demonstrations and protests from additional groups and organizations in other sports and entertainment industries, but also retaliation from those concerned with the increased exposure of a systematically oppressive society that favors white people. Kaepernick, too, experienced retaliation. As the 2016-2017 season progressed, the 49ers' starting quarterback found himself on the bench, and eventually his contract with San Francisco was terminated. In less than a year, a star player who inspired protests around the country, as well as political controversy, became unable to attain an NFL contract. He still has not been signed since the season in which he began protesting. Then-president Donald J. Trump encouraged people not to attend football games as long as the NFL allowed players to kneel during the National Anthem. In May 2018, the NFL added a new rule that allowed players to stay in the locker room for the performance of the national anthem instead of kneeling, to which the president responded positively: "You have to stand proudly for the national anthem or you shouldn't be playing, you shouldn't be there, maybe you shouldn't be in the country."[104]

The former president is just one of many political figures who have contributed to the dehumanization of minorities, including Black athletes who choose to protest during the national anthem. This has, in turn, created an environment where injustices and discrimination against this particular group of Americans are seen as acceptable. During his campaign, Trump remarked: "Wouldn't you love to see one of these NFL owners, when somebody disrespects our flag, to say, 'Get that son of a bitch off the field right now. Out! He's fired. He's fired!"[105] Trump's dehumanizing rhetoric appealed to and invigorated his political base. This act of

[104]Haislop, "Colin Kaepernick Kneeling Timeline."

[105]Stephen M. Utych, "Race, Dehumanization, and the NFL National Anthem Protests," *Journal of Experimental Political Science* (2020): 1.

dehumanizing a group of people is unfortunately not a new phenomenon. The United States' history of enslaving Africans and their descendants exposes the roots of such dehumanization. Though some language surrounding athletes is intended to positively highlight their abilities, calling them "beasts" or "monsters" strips athletes of their human value and traits. When people are described as inhuman, it decreases empathy for marginalized groups.[106]

Steven Utych confirms in a 2020 study how effective dehumanizing language toward Black athletes is regarding the disapproval of athletes' protests against police brutality during the national anthem. His study found that when dehumanizing words such as "beast" as opposed to "great player," or "rat" as opposed to "jerk" were used to describe a real or fictional Black athlete (in one case, he used Dallas Cowboys quarterback Dak Prescott, and in another, he used a hypothetical high school player named Deandre Washington),[107] participants were less likely to support the athlete's stance, and more likely to believe that they were deserving of some sort of consequence for protesting during the national anthem. When considering the names of a white athlete (like Oakland Raiders quarterback Derek Carr in one case, and hypothetical high school player Jacob Schmidt in the other), the use of dehumanizing language was not as effective in producing an unsupportive response from participants. Thus, his study concludes that dehumanizing language, when used to describe athletes, contributes to the lack of empathy and support of athletes protesting, but only those who are Black.[108]

The NFL eventually softened their rules as the 2018-2019 season began, stating that during the preseason it would not punish those athletes who wished to protest during the national anthem, though the policy implemented in May earlier that year, stating that players would be

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[106]Utych, "Race, Dehumanization," 4.
[107]Ibid., 6.
[108]Ibid., 12.

expected to stand, would still be enforced.[109] However, some could argue that Kaepernick was most harshly punished by the NFL given the fact that he was never re-signed, though he has been commercially successful in bringing awareness to the racial injustices he highlighted both on and off the field during his last season. Nike signed him at the beginning of the 2018 season as the new face of the "Just Do It" slogan, in which Kaepernick appeared, in black and white, with the words "Believe in something. Even if it means sacrificing everything."[110] This prompted a variety of reactions on social media—some admirable and positive, and others as drastic as video posts of people burning $100 shoes from a once-enjoyed shoe brand. Nonetheless, Kaepernick continued to use the platform he created to establish himself as an activist and to inspire societal change and conversation surrounding the discrimination that Black lives and other minorities experience in America.

Black Lives Matter in the 2020s

Kaepernick and the act of taking a knee or kneeling during the national anthem became a frequent topic of conversation in the media yet again in the early months of the COVID-19 pandemic. George Floyd was murdered on 25 May 2020 by Officer Derek Chauvin of the Minneapolis Police. During a time when citizens were responsible for each other's health and safety—expected to stay in their homes and completely modify their lifestyle to protect one another—and as many conservative government leaders downplayed the severity of the virus that disproportionately affects Black communities,[111] these communities were faced with another reminder of the dangers associated with being Black in the U.S. Floyd was accused of using a counterfeit bill to purchase cigarettes and ended up being murdered, a consequence immensely

[109]Haislop, "Colin Kaepernick Kneeling Timeline."
[110]Ibid.
[111]Holding, *Why We Kneel,* 111.

unjust and clearly unwarranted for the crime, whether he was guilty or not. The scene was filmed and rapidly circulated in the media, making millions of people in America and around the world eyewitnesses of Floyd's murder by a Minneapolis police officer. Though it was sadly not the first case of police unjustly murdering a person of color in America, it sparked a series of Black Lives Matter protests around the globe that became a defining moment in history in 2020. Chauvin eventually was convicted of second-degree murder, third-degree murder, and manslaughter in 2021.

Following the increase in protests, many brands and companies such as LEGO, Ben and Jerry's, Walmart, and several others, released statements in support of the Black Lives Matter movement, pledging to donate and implement programs for action in late May and early June of 2020. The NFL had a comparatively delayed response in showing their solidarity with the movement, considering it was many of their players who, four years earlier, protested the very system that allowed Floyd to be murdered. The NFL finally released the following statement on their official Twitter page on 5 June 2020: "We, the NFL, condemn racism and the systematic oppression of Black People. We, the NFL, admit we were wrong for not listening to NFL players earlier and encourage all to speak out and peacefully protest. We, the NFL, believe Black Lives Matter."[112]

The protests following George Floyd's murder inevitably shed light on other Black individuals, such as Breonna Taylor who, in her sleep, was shot and killed by police officers in her own home, and Ahmaud Arbery, whose murderers were just found guilty on 24 November 2021. For some white Americans, there was a new level of awareness regarding just how

[112]Chase Anschultz, "NFL Makes Statement on Black Lives Matter Movement" *ESPN,* June 9, 2020, https://www.wruf.com/headlines/2020/06/08/nfl-makes-statement-on-black-lives-matter-movement/.

frequently these tragedies have occurred in Black communities; others were moved to react with "all lives matter," "blue lives matter," and other phrases that redirected the focus away from the Black Lives Matter movement itself. Nonetheless, communities in various states and countries held protests, organized memorial events, and created opportunities for gestures of solidarity, as well as opportunities to grieve and bring awareness.

The societal transformations in response to the tragedies brought to light by Black Lives Matter protests signaled a change in attitude toward the national anthem; an attitude whose goal was not to simply change its words or musical characteristics, but to offer alternatives to the anthem itself. Liana Morales was a junior selected to sing the national anthem at the Urban Assembly School for the Performing Arts high school 2020 graduation. She reflects on the difficulty she had accepting such a task in an article published by the Urban Assembly, a New York City-based organization responsible for the creation of several public middle and high schools with specific attention to providing opportunities and quality education to those from impoverished communities:

> In my heart, I knew I could not do it. I knew I had a greater obligation to Ahmaud Arbery. To Breonna Taylor. To George Floyd. To my fellow students. To my people…. As an Afro-Latina, to sing a song like this and ignore its history, a history wrapped up in racism, would make me complicit in a system that has oppressed people — my people — for years. The author of its words, Francis Scott Key, himself owned slaves even as he fashioned himself a man who cherished freedom.[113]

Even though being selected to sing the national anthem at her high school's graduation was considered to be a very high honor at a performing arts school, Morales decided she would not sing "The Star-Spangled Banner," even if it meant singing nothing. With the support of her

[113]Lisa Morales, "Why I Wouldn't Sing the Anthem: 'The Star-Spangled Banner' Has a Racist History, Explains a High-School Student," *Urban Assembly*, June 25, 2020. https://urbanassembly.org/news-press/why-i-wouldnt-sing-the-anthem-the-star-spangled-banner-has-a-racist-history-explains-a-high-school-student.

teacher and school board, Morales was granted permission to sing “Lift Every Voice and Sing,” often considered to be the Black national anthem, in its place. That a song originally intended to unite Black people in efforts to create a community of belonging was used in place of “The Star-Spangled Banner” highlights the historical significance of the Black national anthem and its resurfacing in 2020.

“Lift Every Voice and Sing” is a hymn composed by J. Rosamond Johnson with lyrics by James Weldon Johnson that was declared the “Negro National Anthem” by the NAACP (The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People) in 1919. Over 100 years later, the song maintains its title as the Black national anthem and has been increasingly incorporated in events or environments that feature patriotic performances and representations. Elated performances of “Lift Every Voice and Sing” such as ones by famous artists such as Beyoncé, or ones that take place in the White House (during the Obama administration) have become more common in the 21st century. Several franchises during the summer of 2020 released advertisements, promotions, or other media highlighting this song, including the NFL featuring Alicia Keys. The official NFL YouTube channel contains a video of Keys and other Black citizens singing in unity on city streets and in a football stadium. Certain shots also include Colin Kaepernick and his 49ers teammates kneeling four years prior. Most of the public reactions on YouTube to the video are negative, with many comments suggesting that the addition of another national anthem is divisive and that, if there is a Black National Anthem, there should be national anthems played for all ethnic groups. Some of the naysayers argued that the official national anthem is supposed to be for everyone, and certain groups do not need their own national anthem:

> "I want a Sicilian national anthem"—Antonio Latona
> "The national anthem is for every American. We are all Americans despite skin color."—Chase Seay[114]

Despite the inevitable negative reactions that came from this gesture, the NFL released a statement after the 2020-2021 season declaring that they would play "Lift Every Voice and Sing" in addition to "The Star-Spangled Banner" before games for the 2021-2022 season.[115] A uniquely American franchise and entertainment industry modifying the pre-game tradition of the most watched sport in the country was bound to spark conversation among sports fans and non-sports fans alike. The urge to bring awareness to the injustices faced by people of color, however, is not uniquely American. The 2020 Tokyo Olympic Games that took place in the summer of 2021 experienced its own share of controversies and backlash regarding national anthem etiquette. Over 150 athletes and activists, including Laila Ali, signed a letter addressed to the International Olympic Committee asking not to punish athletes who wished to demonstrate by raising a fist or kneeling during events. This resulted in the change of Rule 50, which originally banned political demonstration at the games, but would allow it if it came before the start of the game or event.[116] However, this did not change the ban on demonstrating on the medal stands, which left it up to individual sports associations whether or not their athletes were allowed to demonstrate during the playing of their national anthem.[117]

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[114]"Lift Every Voice and Sing," performed by Alicia Keys and Anthony Mackie, NFL, 2020, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i30SdcfEpSE.

[115]Muib Shefiu, "Black National Anthem: The NFL's Bold Step to End Racism in Sport," Applied Worldwide, July 2021, https://www.appliedworldwide.com/topical/black-national-anthem-nfl.

[116]Eddie Pells, "Smith, Carlos, Berry Demand Change in Olympic Protest Rule," WKMG, July 23, 2021, https://www.clickorlando.com/sports/2021/07/22/smith-carlos-berry-demand-change-in-olympic-protest-rule/.

[117]Pells, "Smith, Carlos, Berry."

The circulation of videos among social media platforms that display the murderers of Black people in the United States (and the increase of political demonstrations or gestures that have inevitably resulted) has forced white Americans to see the impact of racism that still lingers. Though it has prompted several contrasting groups to come together, communicate, and allow voices that are often silenced to be heard, the backlash of Black Lives Matter still threatens the safety of Black Americans. When looking at those who protested with Martin Luther King Jr. in the 1960s, where the majority of the people were Black, and comparing it to the Black Lives Matter protests in 2020 where there were many white, brown, and Black people protesting together, it is evident that progress has been made in the last 60 years.[118] However, when Black people (between the ages of 35-44) are three times more likely to be infected by Covid-19 than white people, as well as nine times more likely to die from the virus, it becomes even more evident that change still needs to be made.[119]

[118]Holding, *Why We Kneel,* 231.
[119]Ibid., 111.

CONCLUSIONS

As Michael Holding states in his book *Why We Kneel, How We Rise*, "laws don't change attitudes."[120] Lyndon B. Johnson signed the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which he called the "n**** act," making segregation and discrimination based on race, religion, and ethnicity illegal. Yet, Black people are murdered at a higher rate by police than white people in 2021. They are portrayed in the media as "thugs" and "looters."[121] The average white family owns 700 percent more wealth than the average Black family.[122] Black parents still have to sit down with their children to teach them what to do and what not to do if they get pulled over by a police officer. Clearly, not enough attitudes have changed.

New laws did not eliminate racism. The addition of a new national anthem, or modifying the one already in place, will not get rid of it, either. However, facilitating a common understanding among society's diverse members by bringing attention to the injustices that people of color face can get the ball rolling. In a world where information spreads faster than ever, it has become increasingly hard to deny the existence of systemic racism rooted in the U.S., which citizens are expected to praise and show respect to during the playing or singing of the national anthem. How can more Americans become empathetic, then, toward not just those who protest these injustices during the national anthem, but to those who disproportionately experience injustice?

The addition of singing or playing "Lift Every Voice and Sing" at events where the national anthem occurs will inevitably raise questions and comments like: "Where's the national anthem for Italian-Americans, then?" or "There is only one true national anthem!" But, it may

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[120]Holding, *Why We Kneel,* 91.
[121]Ibid., 103.
[122]Ibid., 104.

also prompt some to ask “Is there a reason that the national anthem does not resonate with all Americans right now?” Sparking large-scale conversations surrounding the latter question is the quickest way to make Americans aware of systemic racism, and this can be done using both the Black national anthem and “The Star-Spangled Banner” in tandem with decolonizing history curricula. Teaching how “The Star-Spangled Banner” has served societal change for American minorities in the past by serving as a method of protest helps to reveal the missing pieces in the United States’ historical narrative that have contributed to the discrimination of Black citizens, people of color, and other minorities who still face inequality and bigotry in 2021.

Scholars must continue to reevaluate the meaning and role of the United States’ national anthem, especially when its traditions and conventions are challenged in times of conflict, whether that be outside of the U.S. or conflict in our own society. The tradition of and rituals surrounding the national anthem still have the potential to be a unifying force for Americans, but only if the concerns of marginalized communities are allowed, and able, to be expressed, heard, and understood. Further discussion regarding the accessibility of “The Star-Spangled Banner” (such as its challenging melody and outdated American vernacular) in relation to financial support of music education in diverse communities may be beneficial in identifying additional obstacles that people of color in the U.S. face when it comes achieving a feeling of belonging and freedom that this country promises its citizens.

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