

WHILE THE LAND OF THE FREE IS THE HOME OF THE BRAVE.....Mike Goldsby, Oct. 12, 2017

A poll by the Smithsonian Institute shows that less than 40% of American Adults know the words to the Star Spangled Banner. And even fewer know the meaning of those words.

The tune is notoriously hard to sing, since it spans over a full octave range. It started as a poem written by Francis Scott Key, ~~while he was being held as a prisoner on a British warship~~ during the War of 1812. His poem was later set to the tune of a popular British song.

For years, the Star Spangled Banner was used interchangeably with "My Country, 'tis of Thee" and "America the Beautiful." In 1931, it was officially made our National Anthem.

I play trumpet and have played the National Anthem over a hundred times since ~~high school~~, at sporting events and public gatherings. I have also listened to other bands play it, brave vocalists do it acapella or, more often, heard a pre-recorded version. There were some incidences where the crowd was absolutely silent and burst into applause at the end. I remember a crisp, cold night at a Del Norte football game in the week following Nine Eleven.

But, more often, I have heard people talking and joking around. I've seen them sitting, eating, wearing baseball caps. I know there is a sudden wave of politically based patriotism focused on the National Football League, but I have personally observed that a lot of people have been pretty nonchalant when it comes to the Star Spangled Banner.

The performance of the song has at times been controversial. Jose Feliciano played a slow blues version before game 5 of the 1968 World Series. He was criticized that his version showed a lack of respect. But a week later two Black Olympians raised their fists during the National Anthem and everybody forgot about Jose.

Actually, Jose Feliciano and Whitney Houston both did versions of the Anthem that made the Billboard Top 100. Jimi Hendrix did the guitar instrumental version at Woodstock, complete with the sounds of bombs bursting in air. He was making a statement about the Viet Nam War.

Roseanne Barr screeched the National Anthem in 1990, followed by her unsuccessful attempt to be funny, imitating baseball players, spitting and grabbing her crotch.

So, for the Star Spangled Banner, controversy is not new. What is new is the amount of attention our President is giving to this. We have professional athletes demonstrating to bring attention to racial inequity in the criminal justice system. And we have a President devoting considerable time and energy criticizing the NFL for those demonstrations, in campaign rallies and with vulgar tweets. He has sent more tweets about football games than he has the economy, healthcare, the ^{harricane} storm in Puerto Rico or North Korea. Fewer tweets about North Korea is probably a good thing.

Vice President Pence attended a game he knew he would walk out of, a publicity stunt at tax payers expense.

Back to the anthem itself, the original version has five stanzas or verses. The first verse is the only one that is performed. During the Civil War, Oliver Wendell Holmes wrote a fifth stanza, to express his disgust at the South seceding from the Union. Here it is, in part.

“By the millions unchained, who our birthright have gained,

We will keep her bright blazon forever unstained.

And the Star Spangled Banner in triumph shall wave,

While the Land of the Free is the Home of the Brave.”

PLAY BALL!

This is Mike Goldsby for Community Comment.