

Colin Kaepernick has refused to stand when the national anthem is played before his team's National Football League games. He does this in order to protest the treatment of African Americans in the United States.

Kaepernick is giving voice to a concern in the African American community that the police do not treat African Americans fairly. I would even argue that blacks have another legitimate gripe that, unfortunately, is not being mentioned; namely, the public school systems that serve poor minorities in urban areas are doing an abysmal job, leaving young African Americans without the skills that they need to reach their potential in the job market.

Kaepernick's showy protest is unlikely to be successful because it is missing a key component of all successful social protests.

In order to be successful, a civil rights protest must give people an incentive to change their behavior and stop committing an injustice.

Consider two successful civil rights protests that did bring about change. First, on Dec. 4, 1955, Rosa Parks, while traveling on a bus in Montgomery, Alabama, refused to give up her seat to a white person despite a demand by the white bus driver that she do so.

Her defiance of the bus driver led to her arrest for civil disobedience. In response, the black community organized and agreed among themselves to boycott the Montgomery bus service. Since blacks made up 75 percent of the ridership on these buses their boycott did substantial financial damage to the bus service. The city of Montgomery had an incentive to give-in to the civil rights demands that blacks be treated with respect on these buses — because the bus service could not continue to exist without the black riders.

The bus boycott worked because it gave the oppressors an incentive to end the oppression — simply because they had a financial gain from doing so.

Racial integration in Major League Baseball provides a second example of a successful civil rights story. Until the 1940s Major League Baseball was a sport whose players were white, and black players were excluded and could only play in the negro leagues.

The civil rights champion in this story is not Jackie Robinson, but rather a white man named Branch Rickey. Rickey was the general manager of the Brooklyn Dodgers. He hired Robinson who won the Rookie of the Year Award in 1947 and won the Most Valuable Player Award in 1949. Robinson was a star who helped the Dodgers win baseball games.

Rickey also hired several black players and soon half of the players in the Dodger's lineup were black. Rickey raided the negro leagues and hired many of their best players. Rickey had a financial incentive to hire these black players. The Dodgers got so much talent from the negro leagues that they became the dominant team in the National League for a decade.

As the Dodgers won more games, their attendance increased and the team became more profitable. Blacks were integrated into Major League Baseball, mostly because the teams had a financial incentive to hire the best players that they could find.

While the bus boycott and Branch Rickey were able to end some of the unfair treatment of blacks, Colin Kaepernick's protests are doomed to fail. When he refuses to stand for the national anthem, it upsets some patriotic fans.

If these fans get upset and stop going to games, stop buying club merchandise, or even stop watching games on TV, the football teams will have an incentive to release Kaepernick and he will find himself without a job in the NFL.

The grievances against the police and against the school system cannot be addressed as easily as segregation on the Montgomery bus system was addressed.

Since blacks do not purchase police protection or pay for public school education for their children, there is no way to boycott these services to impose a financial burden on the providers of these services. Rather, policing and education are provided by governments, often local governments.

It would be much more effective if blacks in areas that are unhappy with government services agree to vote against all incumbent politicians, of either party, if the problems are not fixed to their satisfaction. The fear of losing their jobs will give politicians an incentive to fix the problem.

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