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Speak Out Now

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Social Justice at the Super Bowl?

Next weekend more than 100 million people in the U.S. are expected to watch the Super Bowl match-up between the New England Patriots and Los Angeles Rams in Atlanta. In preparation, the NFL has funded the painting of dozens of public murals to honor Atlanta's rich history in the Civil Rights Movement and to show the NFL's "commitment to social justice."

Who can believe the NFL's newfound love for social justice, given its record of silencing protest? Over the last two years, NFL owners have prevented former 49er quarterback Colin Kaepernick from being signed to a team, after he inspired a protest movement against police brutality and racism by refusing to stand for the national anthem. After Kaepernick and other players began kneeling, NFL owners asked the NFL commissioner to make standing for the national anthem mandatory. Houston Texans owner Bob McNair voiced the attitude of owners saying, "we can't have the inmates running the prison."

It is not surprising to hear this from the owners. The NFL reflects the racism of this society. It is a league of all white owners, making billions in profits off the crippling labor of athletes—70% of whom are Black. A football career is extremely brutal on players with lifetime effects from concussions and major injuries.

The NFL has done its best to cover up the tensions between players and owners. (They do think they own the players.) Instead of making it mandatory to stand for the anthem and opening themselves up to potential criticism, the NFL has tried to bury the problem by not showing the anthem on live TV for most games. They have also donated money to organizations claiming to work on social justice causes. This mural project is the latest attempt to try to respond to the issues Kaepernick and other players have raised.

These murals will be a nice addition to honor some of those who made up the movement, but we should also understand the hypocrisy of this whole spectacle. What would their attitude have been toward the people who they are supposedly honoring in these murals? The NFL is an organization run by right wing, ultra-wealthy elites. They represent a continuation of the

same forces that brutally opposed the Civil Rights Movement. They represent the same capitalist system that continues to devastate the lives of Black people throughout this country.

In many ways, Atlanta represents the cruelty of this system. In 2018, it was ranked the most unequal city in the U.S., based on distribution of household income. It is home to huge corporations including Coca-Cola and Delta Airlines, while approximately a quarter of the population lives below the federal poverty line. Like in many urban centers in the U.S., Black people in Atlanta have the highest rates of unemployment.

The Super Bowl is yet another display of the wealth and power of those who run this society. The game is run by and for the elites. The NFL and television companies are selling 30 second advertising spaces for \$5.4 million dollars. The cheapest upper deck tickets above the end zone are going for \$2,400.

There is widespread opposition to the NFL's racism. One result is that the NFL has had a hard time finding performers for its half-time show. Rhianna and many other Black artists have refused to perform and instead stand in solidarity with Kaepernick's protest.

The NFL owners control professional football, but this shouldn't detract from the love for sports and respect for the talents of those who play professional sports, that many of us have. Watching and playing sports is one of the important ways we develop friendship and camaraderie with others in this chaotic world. This is something we can celebrate together.

The Fight for Quality Education

Public education is under attack across the country. Teachers and parents in L.A. took a stand and made some gains. Oakland teachers are preparing to resist now. Come to a discussion with activists in this fight about what we can do to stand up to these attacks.

Saturday, Feb. 9th, 7pm
South Berkeley Senior Center
2939 Ellis St. (in Berkeley)

\$5 Admission—no one turned away for lack of funds