

Roots in Ripon

Roots in Ripon

Chuck Roots

03 October 2016

www.chuckroots.com

America – Land of Opportunity

At first it all seemed to be much ado about nothing. But it seems to have gained a life of its own.

The Kaepernick kerfuffle has developed a following of sorts in the wake of this particular football player's choice to not honor the American flag during the playing of the national anthem a few weeks back at the start of an NFL game.

Since then other NFL players have decided to join in this protest against the injustices within the American system of governance. It has now trickled down to colleges and high schools where entire teams kneel in silent protest against a country that gives them the right to protest at all. Try that in Saudi Arabia. Or Iran. Or anywhere else. You'll either be laughed at or killed. Only in America is such a protest not only allowed, but it is taken seriously because we are a freedom loving people.

There has been much ink used and words dithered on the airwaves in attacking or defending this protest, with the focus often citing the disrespect this protest has shown toward those who have fought for our freedoms. It's true that many Americans have laid down their lives for this nation. For that fact alone should cause every American to be thankful. But it is also true that only about two percent of today's Americans have served in the military. And I would dare say that those same Americans who volunteered to serve in our military would be quick to defend anyone's right to protest, even if they disagreed.

To me there is a much bigger picture that is troubling. If you will, allow me to build my argument by stating the obvious so as to be better understood. First of all, I am an American. Being an American has nothing to do with race, creed, religion, gender, ethnicity or any other term used to identify a person. To be an American does not mean you were born in the United States. Nor does it mean one or both of your parents are American. Being an American is about dreams, opportunity, hope, freedom. Being an American means I embody all these concepts in me. In my many travels around this world I have experienced the best and the worst from people as an American. Most people are very excited to have the opportunity to speak with an American. Why? Because of our freedoms and liberties. Few nations in the world's history can even point to a time when such an experience existed in their nation. It is a truly a far-off concept.

Secondly, I have an alarming concern for what is taught, and not taught, through our educational system today. When school children do not have a clear understanding of our nation's history, I'm concerned. How much is taught about George Washington? Thomas Jefferson? Benjamin Franklin? Abraham Lincoln? What do these young people know about the Bill of Rights, the Constitution (and its Preamble), the Declaration of Independence, the Mayflower Compact?

Roots in Ripon

You see, when I hear about protests such as Mr. Kaepernick has engaged in, or any other group that has a beef against this country, then it tells me there is a missing piece, a component of their education that that is lacking that has done them a disservice. Or else, they simply have chosen not to embrace the concept of what it means to be an American.

The book, *The Ugly American*, came out in 1958. My family and I moved to Europe in the summer of 1960. So as a twelve-year-old I was very much aware of this book and its ramifications. Living in the outskirts of Paris, I found myself attending a French school for international students. I remember making a clear decision that I was going to be the best reflection of America and its values and beliefs as was possible. The following year we moved to Oslo, Norway where I continued my goal of being the best American that I could be. Later on while in the Marine Corps, and later in the Navy, I still maintained this focus of representing myself as an ambassador for the ideals of America.

Lastly, when the flag is flown and the national anthem is sung, I stand proudly because the stars and stripes represent the best of America. During our 240-year history, people from all over the world have attempted to come to America because of our freedoms, liberties, and individual opportunities. Many have experienced this for themselves. Many others have died in the process of coming to America.

The Miami Marlins baseball team experienced a tragic loss recently. Their 24-year-old pitcher and rising star, Jose Fernandez, was tragically killed in a boating accident. He and his family apparently made three attempts to leave Cuba for the United States. Each time they failed, Jose was jailed by Cuban authorities. He finally succeeded on the fourth try in 2008. In that last attempt, Jose's mother fell overboard in rough water, whereupon Jose dove in, rescuing his mother from drowning. Here in the United States of America in 2011 he signed a \$2 million signing bonus with the Marlins when he was 19-years old.

My wife was born and raised on the island of San Miguel, the Azores, Portugal. She and her parents and four siblings immigrated to the U.S. in 1966. From the outset, Isaura loved America. It took her several years to gain her citizenship, but in her heart she was an American from the moment she set foot in this great land of opportunity.

For the entirety of our nation's history we have been chipping away at those troublesome concerns that plague our nation, and we will continue to do so. But there is no other country on earth that allows the individual to excel and succeed as does the United States.

I love this land! And I'm proud to be an American! God bless America!