

## **“O Say Can You See?”: Patriotism, Performance, and Sport**

Before it was *the* anthem--the sound of a nation--it was wedded to sport. Recognized as the moment in which “The Star-Spangled Banner” first became interwoven with America’s sporting fabric, the song was played in 1918 during the 7th-inning stretch of a Major League Baseball World Series game between the Chicago Cubs and Boston Red Sox. In 1919, the song’s performance became the opening act of every Red Sox game; other MLB teams and sporting leagues quickly followed suit. In 1931, President Hoover officially designated “The Star-Spangled Banner” America’s national anthem.

The tradition of playing “The Star-Spangled Banner” before athletic competitions continues at amateur and professional events across the country. What do these public performances of patriotism communicate? How can we understand popular conceptions of citizenship through the anthem’s presentation at sporting events? How does the anthem’s performance serve as the contested ground upon which questions of nationalism, naturalization, belonging, and “home” are actively communicated and negotiated? How can we understand the “boundaries” of citizenship through renditions of--and reactions to--anthem performances that remix, re-arrange, and transcribe it from its “original” form?

Recently, “The Star-Spangled Banner’s” place in sport has received a groundswell of attention. From the Women’s National Basketball Association, to the National Football League, and National Basketball Association, athletes have used its ninety-second performance as an opportunity to engage and respond--kneeling, raising fists, linking arms; these physical responses are enacted to recognize and oppose ongoing injustices in America. In the wake of these responses, a recent poll by HBO’s *Real Sports* and Marist College’s Center for Sports Communication found 54% of Americans believe professional athletes should be required to stand for the national anthem. Most Americans (67%) believe the anthem symbolizes American rights and freedoms, and 27% believe it symbolizes military sacrifice. Of those polled, 8% believe the anthem should not be played at sporting events.<sup>1</sup>

We invite you to consider:

- Which anthem performance is most memorable to you?
- How do you respond during the anthem (physically/mentally/emotionally)?
- What elements characterize a “quality” anthem performance?
- What does the national anthem signify?
- Who should perform the anthem?

“The Star-Spangled Banner” serves as just one entry point for examining the intersections of music and sport. Responses received from this exhibition will contribute to future research, investigating the cultural interstices where the sound(s) of sport can be heard.

### **Multimedia Sample**

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<sup>1</sup> This HBO Sports/Marist Poll titled “Protesting the National Anthem: Disrespectful or an Expression of Freedom?” was released on Tuesday, September 27, 2016 and can be found at: [http://www.maristpoll.marist.edu/wp-content/misc/usapolls/us160915\\_MCC\\_RS/HBO%20Real%20Sports\\_Marist%20Poll\\_Summary%20of%20Findings\\_Nature%20of%20the%20Sample%20and%20Tables\\_September%202016.pdf](http://www.maristpoll.marist.edu/wp-content/misc/usapolls/us160915_MCC_RS/HBO%20Real%20Sports_Marist%20Poll_Summary%20of%20Findings_Nature%20of%20the%20Sample%20and%20Tables_September%202016.pdf)

Please visit the following link for a sample of this exhibit: <https://vimeo.com/189883776>

### **Collaborator Bios**

**Courtney M. Cox** is a doctoral student at the University of Southern California's Annenberg School for Communication and Journalism. She is fascinated with the obstacles and opportunities located at the intersections of race, gender, class, and sexuality in sport and sports media. She is intrigued by online dialogues of these intersections across social media platforms and how storytelling is adapted to new media. Her mantra and motivation in regards to this work is to "render the invisible visible," a phrase that describes her purpose as both a scholar and advocate within the world of sport. Courtney previously worked at ESPN, NPR affiliate KPCC, and with the Los Angeles Sparks.

**Perry B. Johnson** is a doctoral student at the University of Southern California's Annenberg School for Communication and Journalism. Her work is rooted in the critical examination of popular music, where she seeks to investigate the circulation, construction, and (re)presentation of identity. Her work focuses primarily on the representation(s) of such categories as race, gender, and sexuality. In addition to her ongoing doctoral work, Perry is currently working with the Popular Music Project at the USC Annenberg Norman Lear Center to design and implement a series of interdisciplinary efforts dedicated to investigating gender inequality and diversity in popular music and the contemporary music industries. Perry previously interned at the Concord Music Group, and worked as a communications consultant with clientele spanning the entertainment industry.