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**First Place, Rebecca Cunningham
A Divided Past, A United Future**

In the Smithsonian Museum of African American History stands a slave auction block. Thousands of slaves were bought and sold on this stone, but the antique plaque upon it exclusively memorializes two white men for a speech delivered in 1830. Not unlike Confederate statues today, the plaque intentionally glossed over slave history. The past is complex; artifacts and statues at times reflect the views of their creators instead of the whole truth.

The city of New Orleans recently removed four Confederate statues. The process lasted 25 days starting on April 24th, 2017. Mitch Landrieu, the mayor, explained why: “These monuments purposefully celebrate a fictional, sanitized Confederacy; ignoring the death, ignoring the enslavement, and the terror that it actually stood for.” Cities across the U.S. such as Baltimore, Austin, and Annapolis similarly dethroned their statues. Many viewed this action as patriotic, but some voiced strong opinions otherwise.

Americans on one side of the controversy argue that it is patriotic to remove Confederate statues because they were erected to endorse a biased social class system. Confederate statue construction peaked long after the Civil War during the Jim Crow era and again during the Civil Rights Movement. Their purpose was to keep white supremacy flourishing. As of 1900, 90% of African Americans remained in the South. They were often forced into serfdom, commonly indebted as sharecroppers. Removing Confederate statues replaces the defeated morals of the Confederacy with the American value of equality.

However, from the perspective of many Southerners, there are historical and educational benefits for Confederate statues to remain. Roughly the same number of American soldiers died during the Civil War as in every other foreign conflict combined. Confederate statues serve as a public reminder of the suffering on both sides. It is necessary to remember what happens when conflicts disrupt the nation’s unity to avoid repeating the past. Supporters of the statues believe they are acting as patriots by preventing us from forgetting our history.

I have weighed both viewpoints and have come to the conclusion that Confederate statues must be removed. The problem with allowing these monuments to stand in public spaces is that they glorify the oppressors without acknowledging the oppressed. If such offensive figures are relocated to museums, proper education can be provided as to how slavery has shaped our history. When cities remove Confederate statues, they should replace them with memorials of abolitionists. In this way, we are not erasing history but simply changing our perspective.

Ethnicity and race still separate Americans. Leaving Confederate statues in place supports the racial divide further. Our past illustrates who we are as a nation. As patriots, by removing and replacing Confederate statues, we help to establish an inclusive future for everyone. In order to provide a welcoming home for all, now is the time for action. As Abraham Lincoln once said, “The best way to predict the future is to create it.”

Second Place, Dahlia Rubin Huddled Masses Turned Away

“Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free, the wretched refuse of your teeming shore. Send these, the homeless, tempest-tossed, to me.” These lines from Emma Lazarus's poem, "The New Colossus" are found on the Statue of Liberty, welcoming immigrants when they come to America. On January 28, 2017, our 45th president, Donald J. Trump, signed a controversial executive order banning the entry of citizens from eight predominantly Muslim countries into the United States. Some believe that the ban is unpatriotic, contradicting the core values of what our country represents. Others, however, believe that the ban is designed to keep our country safe and therefore it is patriotic.

One strong argument for the travel ban being patriotic is tied to part of Trump's "America First" philosophy. Many Americans believe that the safety of our country should come before anything else. In a recent study, six in ten voters back the ban, and 41 percent of Democrats agree that the ban is the right thing to do. People in the United States are apprehensive; they don't want to live in the fear that at any moment our country could be attacked. In the past year, 105 people have been killed and 609 people injured due to attacks on the United States. Upon taking a closer look, however, many of these attacks were perpetrated by American-born citizens.

Many citizens of the United States believe the ban to be unpatriotic. Former FBI Director James Comey tweeted Lazarus's poem along with his interpretation: "This country's greatness and true genius lies in its diversity." Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi agrees with Comey's tweet: "...the revitalization of America comes from our immigrant population." Comey and Pelosi might be right. Immigrants come to America for a new life, for safety and freedom; they don't come to harm us. It is patriotic to grow our country, especially with people who are going to help our economy. Immigrants make up a significant amount of the United States workforce in a range of industries, accounting for over 41 percent of all farming, fishing, and forestry workers—as well as nearly 25 percent of those working in computer and math sciences. Immigrants are an asset to our society; banning their entrance to our country is unpatriotic.

Though my research has allowed me to see the travel ban from both points of view, I have ultimately decided that the ban is unpatriotic. The United States was built, in part, by immigrants— and the nation has long been the beneficiary of the new energy and ingenuity that immigrants bring. Today, over 13 percent of the nation's residents are foreign-born, and almost half of them are naturalized citizens. Most immigrants who come to America become valuable members of our society. For instance, my great grandfather came to America from Russia; he became a lawyer and started a family. Turning away Lazarus's "huddled masses" is not only unpatriotic but it is obstructing our future.

Third Place, Elise Pricer When We Kneel, We Stand

"We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness." - The Declaration of Independence

A pressing conflict this past autumn has been the controversy about NFL players kneeling for the national anthem. The Declaration of Independence states that all possess the right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. Because the Declaration of Independence illuminates the epitome of American ideals, in order to conclude whether these actions are patriotic we must ask: what does liberty mean to the patriot?

Some argue that it is patriotic to kneel for the anthem because patriotism is expressing great love and devotion to one's country. Therefore exercising the first amendment's right to free expression demonstrates this love for the nation's values, the ideals that shape our country and each and every one of our lives. The passion we have for seeking this right has existed since the founding of our country. Through protests we express our love for our fellow Americans. We love the country for which we battle, striving persistently for an even greater nation under which we can unite.

However, many consider it unpatriotic to refuse to stand for the national anthem. Standing is a time to exhibit respect for our country, to acknowledge the sacrifice that the great men and women in our military have made, and to express gratitude for the privileges we've been granted. Others argue that the NFL football field is the last place for one to display their political agendas. To be patriotic we must show pride in our flag.

My opinion is derived from an inquiry: which is more important, the symbol our flag represents to some individuals or the values we uphold as Americans? I believe that the ideals that our country was founded upon represent notably more than any flag. For what is a country but its people? This fight is for the people and against the injustices from which they suffer. Our military does not fight for a flag or an anthem. They fight for us, and our lives. They battle for our ideals, first and foremost our right to free speech. It can only be patriotic to honor their sacrifice by celebrating it, waging battles on the grounds of our liberties in order to reach a promising future.

What does liberty mean to the patriot? To refer to George Orwell who states: "If liberty means anything at all, it means the right to tell people what they do not want to hear." If liberty is the ability to stand for what one believes in, the NFL players stand by choosing not to. When we kneel, we are the embodiment of our liberties and accordingly the embodiment of root American values. Therefore I will argue that the protests of the NFL are some of the most patriotic actions of all.