

The NFL, Tolerance, and Inclusiveness – Part 1

An Arizona Senate Bill (SB 1062) made the news in 2014. Called the “Religious Freedom Restoration Act,” the bill passed the legislature but was vetoed by the governor before it became law. According to “The Center for Arizona Policy” website, the bill “strengthens protections in Arizona law to defend against religious discrimination.” Defenders claimed it prevented legal actions from religious bakeries and photographers who choose not to be a part of same-sex weddings. Critics charged that the bill discriminated against LGBT customers.

In the early 1990s, the NFL moved a Super Bowl out of Arizona because the state failed to establish a holiday commemorating the Reverend Martin Luther King Junior. Eventually, Arizona acquiesced, and many credit the NFL for providing the necessary economic and social pressure for the holiday to be enacted.

On the more current controversy, the Arizona’s Religious Freedom Restoration Act, the NFL issued a statement. From NBC Sports Pro Football Talk’s website:

“Our policies emphasize tolerance and inclusiveness, and prohibit discrimination based on age, gender, race, religion, sexual orientation, or any other improper standard,” the NFL said in a statement issued to Albert Breer of the NFL Network. “We are following the issue in Arizona and will continue to do so should the bill be signed into law, but will decline further comment at this time.”

It is noteworthy that the NFL is “following” issues that run counter to its policies. While, there was little doubt that the Super Bowl would have been relocated if the bill become law, you could also credit the NFL for once again intervening and coercing a state to act as it wished.

If the bill became law, it was rumored that the Super Bowl would be moved to Tampa, Florida. And this brings up another hot-button opportunity for the NFL.

Florida is where George Zimmerman shot and killed Trayvon Martin. It is also the state of the infamous “Stand-your-ground law.” While the defense never used that law in the trial, civil rights leaders still weighed in on that controversial law after the verdict freed George Zimmerman:

Rev. Al Sharpton: “Just like we raised the temperature to get the trial we’re gonna keep raising the temperature to get Civil Rights

Legislation and to turn around Stand-Your-Ground.” Sharpton added, “We cannot have our sons and daughter’s lives on the line for anybody that wants to pursue them, follow them, and kill them and say it’s in self-defense.”

Rev. Jesse Jackson: “The killing has to stop. We seek to pull down the walls. We want laws that incentivize peace, not incentivize war. Stand your ground laws must end.”

Martin Luther King III: “Our children are targeted. Our community is targeted. That’s why you got sixty percent – almost – of people of color in jail.”

In Arizona, the alleged discrimination was in the form of businesses opting out of same-sex weddings – largely on religious grounds. Discriminatory? Possibly. But deadly or oppressive? Hardly.

In Florida, civil rights leaders claim that the “Stand-your-ground” law allows young blacks to be targeted, pursued, and killed.

Why would the NFL even consider moving the Super Bowl from Arizona to Florida? Are young black lives worth less than same-sex wedding cakes and pictures? Does the NFL support “Stand-your-ground” laws? Or does the NFL agree with Al Sharpton, Jesse Jackson, and Martin Luther King III’s critics who claim the Civil Rights leaders are lying or exaggerating?

The NFL’s selective intervention, and inconsistent use of its enormous economic leverage is puzzling to say the least.

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