

UNDERSTANDING GLOBAL SOCIAL JUSTICE ISSUES CRUCIAL FOR NFL EXPANSION

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By **Shaun M. Anderson**

Since 2005, the National Football League has hosted games outside the United States in an effort to increase the popularity of the sport across international borders. This slew of games has been titled the NFL International Series. After the launch of the series in Mexico City, most of the games have been played in London. Despite its growing popularity in other parts of the world, a U.S. issue may have the league questioning its global expansion efforts: the nationwide protest against racism and social injustices.

San Francisco 49ers quarterback Colin Kaepernick became a topic of controversy when he decided to protest the U.S. national anthem during a preseason game earlier this year. Since his initial protest, Kaepernick has either sat or knelt during the national anthem for every game—gaining support from teammates, players from other teams, and individuals across the country.

The purpose of Kaepernick's protest is to give a voice to people of color, reasoning that if the U.S. continues to ignore issues of racism, then he will continue his protest. The problems that Kaepernick has brought forth must not go ignored, and the U.S. must continue to work toward progress. For the NFL, the issues of race and politics have been a point of

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consternation because the league has yet to determine the best ways to address uprisings regarding racial injustices.

According to an [article](#) on the NFL's website, the first step in the organization's push for globalization is to establish a team in London by 2022. The U.K., however, is facing numerous socioeconomic, racial, and political problems. If the NFL is looking to expand globally, it must first recognize racial tensions and political issues in the countries where it is seeking to establish new franchises, including the U.K.

As it continues to explore this expansion, the NFL will face issues related to the political uprising of people tired of the status quo. Therefore, it is imperative for the organization to understand how effective communication and strategy is key to its global growth. The NFL should liaise with members of Black Lives Matter United Kingdom (BLM U.K.) as a way to show unity in the effort to eradicate racial injustices. Following the July 2016 shooting death of Chicago native Paul O'Neal at the hands of the police, BLM U.K. participated in its first protest in an effort to show solidarity to black victims in the U.S. Since this time, BLM U.K. has fought against injustices toward marginalized groups throughout the country. Some of the group's more recent protests include blockades of the M4 near the London airport, roads in Nottingham, and the A45 near Birmingham. Natalie Jeffers, co-founder of BLM U.K., explained that the protests stemmed from the exorbitant number of black men killed or imprisoned by British police. In fact, according to a [report](#) by the Prison Reform Trust, black Britons make up 10 percent of the prison population but only 2.8 percent of the general population. It is imperative for the NFL to engage in discussion with this group to ascertain the breadth and depth of social injustices toward marginalized groups within the U.K. If it is successful in understanding and addressing these issues, then it could avoid future player uprisings that would deter future growth and could create an image of the NFL as a global organization indifferent to the rights of the people.

The recent Brexit vote could also impact the NFL's ability to successfully expand across the Atlantic. Although the NFL should bear in mind the direct economic ramifications of the U.K.'s withdrawal from the European Union, it should consider the social injustice ramifications as well. Civil unrest could have direct ties to the economic growth of a business. More specifically, individuals may be more likely to withhold financial support from an organization that they do not perceive as engaging in corporate social responsibility. According to a [report](#) in *The Guardian*, hate crimes have increased 58 percent since the Brexit referendum passed. Additionally, it was mentioned in a report by *The London Post* that black Britons were over 17 percent more likely to be [stopped and searched](#) than their non-black counterparts. One glaring pattern in these hate crimes is that majority-white U.K. residents are telling non-white residents to go back to their countries of origin. The NFL must consider the history of racism pre- and post-Brexit. If it ignores the social issues that have been magnified by the Brexit vote, it could face protest from people tired of being used and abused by corporate entities that prey on the weak.

Furthermore, the NFL must be careful not to market the expansion in a way that would be perceived as imperialist by U.K. citizens. Soccer and rugby are two of the most popular sports in the U.K., and the NFL is highly aware of the need to develop football's popularity before its initial investment into that market. The expansion should not be seen as an effort to force U.S. culture onto U.K. citizens. Therefore, the NFL must be as transparent as possible about the true purpose of establishing a

franchise in London. Given the bewilderment that has followed the Brexit vote, citizens are not ready to become embroiled in another political war in which they perceive that their rights have been violated. Therefore, making sure individuals understand the benefits and challenges of establishing a football franchise within their borders is crucial if the NFL is willing to gain buy-in from U.K. citizens.

Finally, the NFL must gain an understanding of the complexities and communication patterns of globalization. Globalization is not a static construct, but a dynamic construct with constant ebb and flow. Like other businesses, the NFL should focus primarily on the economic aspects of globalization. Its mission is to provide entertainment to its fans, but still recognizes that in order for its value to grow significantly, its International Series must expand.

Even if economic imperatives come first, the NFL must not ignore avenues of social globalization, such as the ways cultures are now augmenting their voices through advanced communicative platforms. Everyday citizens are no longer waiting for major media outlets to decide how the news is disseminated. Rather, individuals are taking matters into their own hands through the internet and other means to challenge, critique, and demand change. For the NFL, understanding social globalization means it must take into account the turbulence and uncertainty in any country caused by shifting cultural and technological dynamics. By providing an open forum of communication for both the organization and individual stakeholders, the NFL can ensure that these people have a say in its efforts to address racial injustice and other social issues. This ethos should extend beyond just establishing a franchise in London, but in the near term, establishing and maintaining itself as an ally to U.K. citizens as they navigate the turbulence of social unrest will help the NFL find success in its global expansion.

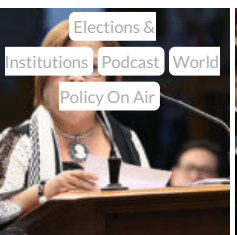
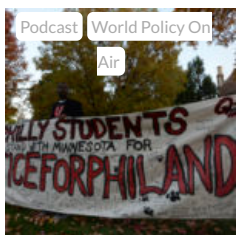
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[Photo courtesy of [Austin Kirk](#)]

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