

POLITICAL FIGURES BASEBALL DONALD TRUMP

The World Series Winners Should Not Visit the White House

The Washington Nationals' values are not Trump values.

By Peter Dreier

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Washington Nationals manager Dave Martinez and his team hoist the Commissioner's Trophy after defeating the Houston Astros in game seven of the 2019 World Series. (Reuters Pictures / Erik Williams-USA Today Sports)

It's only three miles from Nationals Park to the White House. But if President Donald Trump invites the World Series champions to celebrate their victory at his home, they

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■ should say “no thanks.” In fact, they should announce in advance that they would reject any invitation to celebrate with the president. They should stand up to, not next to, the president.

It all comes down to the message that the

Nationals—who won the

seventh and deciding game of the World Series against the Houston Astros on Wednesday—want to send. The Nationals’ values are not Trump values. In 2016, 91 percent of Washington, DC, voters supported Hillary Clinton over Trump. Voters in the suburban counties outside DC also gave Clinton landslide margins—76 percent in Montgomery County, Maryland; 89 percent in Prince George’s County, Maryland; 76 percent in Arlington County, Virginia; and 63 percent in Fairfax County, Virginia.

Do the Nationals want to allow Trump—whose presidency is rooted in appeals to racism, sexism, and immigrant-bashing—to bask in the glow of their victory? This year’s Nationals’ 40-man roster included 11 immigrants from four different countries (Anibel Sanchez Asdrúbal Cabrer, and Adrian Sanchez from Venezuela; Wander Suero, Victor Robles, Fernando Rodney , Juan Soto, Wilmer Difo, and Raudy Read from the Dominican Republic; Yan Gomes from Brazil; and Roenis Elías from Cuba) as well as three African Americans

(Howie Kendrick, Joe Ross, Michael Taylor), three American-born Latinos (Anthony Rendon, Tres Barrera, and Javy Guerra), and one Japanese American (Kurt Suzuki). Does it really make sense to ask those players to ignore Trump's divisive comments and policies that degrade immigrants and people of color?



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The Nationals' ace relief pitcher Sean Doolittle is probably the most outspoken Trump critic among today's professional athletes. In 2016, after Trump dismissed his vulgar "grab their pussy" comment as just "locker room talk," Doolittle denounced Trump on Twitter. He tweeted: "As an athlete, I've been in locker rooms my entire adult life and uh, that's not locker room talk."

In 2017, in response to Trump's executive order banning Syrian refugees from seeking sanctuary in this country, Doolittle tweeted: "A refugee ban is a bad idea.... It feels un-American. And also immoral." Doolittle and his then-girlfriend (now wife) Eireann Dolan organized a Thanksgiving meal for 17 Syrian refugees and got Chicago's

then-mayor Rahm Emanuel and several aldermen to serve as greeters and waiters to get publicity for the refugee cause. After the Nazi rally in Charlottesville, Virginia, Doolittle, who went to the University of Virginia, tweeted: “The C’Ville I knew from my time at @UVA is a diverse and accepting community. It’s no place for Nazis.”

Nationals manager Dave Martinez was born in New York City to Puerto Rican parents. Last year, Alex Cora, the Puerto Rican-born manager of the World Series champion Boston Red Sox criticized Trump for his mishandling of relief efforts in Puerto Rico after Hurricane Maria and refused, along with many of his players, to visit the White House. Does Martinez have the same attitude toward Trump? When asked his opinion of Trump’s attending the fifth game of the series on Sunday at Nationals Park, he was diplomatic. “We haven’t really talked about it,” he told the *New York Post*. “We’re focused in on playing baseball.”

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The Nationals’ owners—no fans of Trump—were more forthcoming.

Ted Lerner, who became the Nationals’ first owner in 2006, is a wealthy real estate developer and a major donor to Democrats. In 2015, accepting an award from the Urban

Land Institute, the son of immigrants recalled his days as an usher at Griffith Stadium, the ballpark of the old Washington Senators. He said,

“I never could’ve dreamed of owning a baseball team. And I never could’ve imagined...I would build over 200 million square feet of commercial and residential space and that very few people would know my name. I guess I have a different approach to real estate development than Donald Trump.”

Last year, he handed control of the team to his son Mark, who is also a big donor to Democrats. Mark Lerner refused to invite Trump to throw out the first ball at the World Series games at Nationals Park. “The first pitches are our call, and we felt there are many other candidates that should be considered before [Trump],” Lerner told *The Washington Post* last Friday.

Instead, Lerner invited chef and humanitarian José Andrés, who is a longtime Trump critic, to toss the first ball. Andrés is admired around the world for founding World Central Kitchen, a nonprofit that serves meals to victims of natural disasters. In 2016, he withdrew from plans to open a restaurant in Trump International Hotel in Washington, after then-candidate Trump’s racist comments about Mexican immigrants. Later that year, he spoke at a “get out the vote” rally for Hillary Clinton in Tampa, Florida. After Trump took office, Andrés criticized his policies on immigration and his response to Hurricane Maria. Earlier this year, he opened a World Central Kitchen on Pennsylvania Avenue, not far from the White House, to feed federal workers who were furloughed during the government shutdown.

Moreover, the Lerner refused to sit with Trump when he went to the fifth game of the World Series on Sunday. Trump and his wife, Melania, sat in a luxury suite away from the owners' box, along with his most loyal Republican supporters, Senator Lindsey Graham and Representatives Steve Scalise and Matt Gaetz.

When Trump was shown on the video board between the third and fourth innings, he was met with a loud chorus of boos and chants of "lock him up."

Since Trump took office, many professional athletes on championship teams have refused to provide the president with a photo opportunity. In 2017, Trump withdrew his White House invitation to the NBA champion Golden State Warriors after players criticized him. The next year, after the Warriors' Steph Curry and the Cavaliers' LeBron James said they wouldn't go to the White House if they won the championship, Trump didn't even bother extending an invitation to the victorious Warriors. After most of the 2018 NFL Super Bowl champion Philadelphia Eagles announced that they were skipping the White House victory celebration in protest, Trump proclaimed that they were no longer invited. In May of that year, Houston Astro players Carlos Beltrán and Carlos Correa, both natives of Puerto Rico, skipped the team's visit to the White House to celebrate their 2017 World Series victory as a way of expressing their dismay with Trump's recovery efforts after the hurricane devastated the island.

In May of this year, nine African American and Latino members of the 2018 World Series winners Boston Red Sox—Mookie Betts, Jackie Bradley Jr., Rafael Devers, Hector

Velazquez, Xander Bogaerts, Sandy Leon, Christian Vazquez, Eduardo Nunez, and David Price—refused to join Trump at a White House celebration. The University of Virginia men’s basketball team—who won the 2019 NCAA championship—also turned down an invitation to Trump’s White House, in part over their outrage over Trump’s response to the white supremacist rally in Charlottesville. In June, members of the US women’s soccer team—including Megan Rapinoe, Ali Krieger, and Alex Morgan—announced that they wouldn’t accept an invitation from President Donald Trump to visit the White House after they won the World Cup.

In the wake of former San Francisco 49ers quarterback Colin Kaepernick’s kneeling during the national anthem to protest racism, Trump has taken every opportunity to malign the mostly African American NFL players who have joined the protest. During a political rally in Alabama in 2017, Trump goaded the crowd by asking them, “Wouldn’t you love to see one of these NFL owners, when somebody disrespects our flag, to say, ‘Get that son of a bitch off the field right now?’” Trump even called for the deportation of any player who refused to stand for the anthem. They “shouldn’t be in this country,” he declared.

While some millionaire ballplayers may appreciate Trump’s tax cut for the wealthy, those same players might also consider how the president has sought to deny professional athletes their First Amendment rights and used them to fuel racial resentment.

Last year, Hall of Fame slugger Hank Aaron expressed his support for athletes who speak out on social and political issues. Asked if he would visit the White House today if he

were part of a championship-winning team, he said, “There’s nobody there I want to see.”

The Nationals should follow Aaron’s lead. **N**

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