Freedom of Speech: A Recent History of Political T-Shirts in the United States

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Abstract:

Since their invention in the 1930s, t-shirts have become one of the most common styles of casual clothing in the United States—worn by all ages, genders, and social classes. Although 'graphic' t-shirts have existed for decades, twenty-first century technologies have made them much faster and easier to produce. Students protesting the Vietnam War in the 1960s and 70s wore black armbands and grew their hair long; today, students (and activists of all ages) are more likely to wear political t-shirts. In a time when anyone with modest computer skills can design a graphic and get t-shirts professionally printed and shipped in just two or three days, this medium for self- and group-expression is well-suited to the turbulence of politics.

This article explores the recent history of political t-shirts in the United States in two parts. The first focuses on legislation and legal rulings, including a case heard by the US Supreme Court in 2018 regarding whether activists can wear political t-shirts in polling places (a space where any kind of campaign activity is generally forbidden). The second part explores the definition of a 'political' t-shirt. This section is grounded in a study of t-shirts that are currently turning up in thrift shops in Bloomington, Indiana—a small, politically-active community in a conservative state that voted for Obama in 2008 and then Trump in 2016.

Keywords: politics, activism, free speech, t-shirts, laws, United States

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In preparation for a protest to mark the third anniversary of the 2003 US invasion of Iraq, a group of artists known as 'The Critical Voice' designed a t-shirt. Borrowing a phrase from the White Rose movement that defied Nazi Germany (Hanser 1979), the shirts said simply, 'We will not be silent' in both Arabic and English. Later that year, the group distributed more of the shirts to speakers at a conference in Washington, DC, which Raed Jarrar—an Iraqi-born US resident—attended as an expert on Iraqi culture and economic development. For his flight home from the conference he decided to wear the t-shirt, carrying only his cell phone, wallet and boarding pass through security. As he quietly ate his breakfast near the gate, a TSA inspector told him that he needed to change his shirt because it was offensive, like a bank robber 'wearing a shirt saying "I am a robber" into a bank' (Amandus 2008: 124). After some interrogation in which Jarrar began to fear that he would be arrested or deported for insisting on his constitutional right to freedom of speech, an airline employee proposed a 'compromise.'

> When the crewmember offered to purchase an "I love New York" t-shirt, [the TSA inspector] protested that Jarrar should not be forced to wear a t-shirt with a message so opposite that of his previous t-shirt. Jarrar asked why they would assume that he hates New York, but received no response. The crewmember left to purchase a t-shirt and returned with a grey t-shirt saying "All Original New York Authentic Brand;" Jarrar immediately pulled this t-shirt on over the one he was already wearing and reiterated that he would pursue his legal rights regarding the matter.' (Amandus 2008: 125)

Two years later, with legal representation from the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), Jarrar was awarded a settlement of $240,000 for the violation (Schwartz 2009).

That was not the end of the t-shirt, however. Weeks later, a rider on the Staten Island ferry was stopped by a security guard who told her that the t-shirt was not appropriate for 'high-security' locations. In protest, dozens of activists rode the ferry wearing versions of the t-shirt, printed not just in the original Arabic and English, but also in Spanish, Farsi and German. In an interview with a reporter for *The Nation,* one of the artists noted that xenophobia was a problem for many groups in the US. 'We did the Spanish translation because the groups most affected by detention and deportation were Spanish speakers and Arabic speakers.' (Winston 2006).

This case highlights some of the complexities of politics, political protest and t-shirts in the United States. While the first political t-shirt has been credited to Howard Dewey's 1948 campaign for US President (Sewell 2010), twenty-first century technologies for designing, printing, and distributing t-shirts have revolutionized the abilities of campaign staff and activists to make political statements through clothing. Today, anyone with modest computer skills can create a new design and get it professionally printed on a t-shirt in just two or three days. While 'The Critical Voice' collective (re-named the 'We Will Not Be Silent' collective) sells a range of t-shirts through its own website (2019), having a website is not necessary; sellers can reach buyers through a variety of venues with crowdsourcing methods of operation such as eBay, CafePress, and Threadless. Red Bubble, for example, advertises that it connects '700,000 artists and designers across the planet with millions of passionate fans' (2019). With all of its designs created by non-employees and printed strictly on demand, the company can be highly responsive to changes in fashion, popular culture and politics. Typically, the only designs that are censored are those that violate copyright or incite illegal activities. In its list of 'Terms and Conditions,' Café Press urges sellers and buyers to exercise tolerance:

> AN IMPORTANT NOTE ABOUT TOLERANCE IN A DIVERSE WORLD:
> CafePress has millions of users, from varied backgrounds and cultures, who differ

> in their beliefs and views about what is considered acceptable and what is considered offensive. We recognize that along with such diversity comes differences which may result in some individuals being offended by the opinions, perspectives and creative expressions of others within our user group. (2019)

Similar to CafePress, Red Bubble restricts 'graphic depictions of violence, works that trivialize violent acts, and work or behavior where the intent of the artist is to incite hatred or violence.' ('Community and Content Guidelines' 2019). Any political content is clearly the generated by the artist who designed the graphic and not by the company itself.

Although t-shirts have become one of the most common styles of casual clothing in the United States—worn by all ages, genders, and social classes—scholars have only just begun to scratch the surface of this rich topic. In an article focusing on t-shirts worn by LGBTQ activists with the goal of making gender and sexual identities more visible, Joel Penney argued that,

> The graphic printed T-shirt, a widely popular cultural form since the 1970s, is one of the most inexpensive and accessible communication technologies available for groups looking to gain entrance into public discourse. Graphic T-shirts can cost only a few dollars to create, and can be exhibited to literally thousands of people in public space as wearers transform themselves into exhibition screens for the words and images stretched across their chests (2013: 290).

While there is a sizeable body of scholarly literature about clothing as a medium for symbolic communication (Davis 1992, Crane 2012, Eicher et. al 2008)—and even some focusing on the politics of dress (Akou 2011, Behnke 2012, Welborne et. al 2018) and the use of clothing as a tool for political coercion and rebellion (Parkins 2002, Allman 2004)—little attention has been paid specifically to political t-shirts.

In an article published in 2006, Margaret Maynard made a similar observation about the lack of academic literature on this topic, describing the role of t-shirts within the context of an important protest in Australia:

> The daytime protest march was dominated by the colours of the Aboriginal people—red, yellow and black on flags, huge banners and clothing. There were logo-inscribed T-shirts, red, yellow and black hatbands around black Akubras, as well as red headbands. Some T-shirts were yellow, with images of the Australian continent in red, others had inscriptions like 'White Australia has a Black History' and 'Our Land Our Life'. Still others were inscribed 'Mourn 88'. Participants were also in customary dress with body paint. Older Indigenous people wore headbands inscribed with the words 'Our Land', and tribal elders from the Northern Territory, in loin cloths, carried spears and clapping sticks, their bodies marked with feathers, white clay and red ochres. Without question, at this most significant event for Aboriginal peoples, their dress was a highly visible and cohesive aspect. (110)

While not the only style of dress (or even the most significant) at the protest, the t-shirts were an affordable means for protestors to amplify the message and demonstrate unity.

Focusing on what makes a t-shirt ‘political,’ this article explores some of the range and depth that is possible on this subject. The first half explores legislation and legal rulings related to clothing as freedom of speech, focusing on two cases heard by the US Supreme Court in 1969 and 2018. The second part is a case study of t-shirts that are currently turning up in thrift shops in a single, politically-active city in the Midwestern United States (Bloomington, Indiana). This case highlights the range of statements that are being made on t-shirts in what is arguably one of the most turbulent periods in US history since the Civil War.

T-Shirts as Free Speech: Legislation and Legal Rulings

Although clothing is not mentioned in the US Constitution, many legal rulings regarding clothing and other aspects of dress have hinged on the First Amendment, which states:

> Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion or prohibiting the free exercise thereof, or abridging the freedom of speech or of the press, or the right of the people peaceably to assemble and to petition the government for a redress of grievances (National Archives 1789).

In 1969, the US Supreme Court made a landmark ruling in the case of Tinker v. Des Moines Independent Community School District (393 U.S. 503), describing the use of clothing to make political statements as an act of 'pure speech.' Five students in the district had been suspended from school for wearing black armbands to protest the Vietnam War. Although administrators argued that the suspension was necessary to avoid disruption of instruction—and a district court in Iowa had agreed (S.D. Iowa 1966)—the Supreme Court overturned the decision, arguing that the protest had been a 'silent, passive expression of opinion, unaccompanied by any disorder or disturbance' that might warrant limiting the students' freedom of speech (paragraph 508). The court also found that school administrators had allowed other students to wear political symbols such as campaign buttons and even the Iron Cross, which was associated with Nazi ideology.

> In our system, state-operated schools may not be enclaves of totalitarianism. School officials do not possess absolute authority over their students. Students in school as well as out of school are "persons" under our Constitution. They are possessed of fundamental rights which the State must respect, just as they themselves must respect their obligations to the State. In our system, students may not be regarded as closed-circuit recipients of only that which the State chooses to communicate. They may not be confined to the expression of those sentiments that are officially approved. (paragraph 511)

Although armbands have fallen out of fashion—replaced by awareness ribbons (Moore 2008) and t-shirts—this case has been cited more than 2,000 times in the last fifty years.

Schools have continued to be battlegrounds over dress codes and freedom of expression, involving various aspects of dress such as uniforms (Littlefield v. Forney 2001), hairstyles (A.A. v. Needville 2010) and religious jewelry (Nichol v. ARIN 2003). In an article on 'Gays, Dueling High School T-shirts, and the Perils of Suppression,' Michael Curtis observed how students in schools around the country have used t-shirts to make profoundly contrasting statements:

> Students who are supportive of gay students… wear supportive t-shirts: "gay: fine by me" or 'its o.k. to be gay," or a purple square with a yellow equal sign in it, or the legend, "Be Who You Are." The message of the t-shirts often goes beyond tolerance (with its many virtues) to acceptance, which of course is what all of us crave. The acceptance message is that it is fine to be gay. Gay is o.k. …
>
> But to others this message is deeply troubling. Some students accept and build their view of who they are on the basis of (perhaps selective) Biblical literalism. Propagation of the idea that it is just fine to be gay threatens beliefs they see as central to who they are. A few of these students respond with counter-assertions emblazoned on t-shirts: It is not fine to be gay; to be gay is shameful, sinful, and contrary to revealed Biblical truth. One shirt proclaimed that "Homosexuality Is Shameful," citing Romans 1:27. (2008: 432-33)

Although some Americans would argue that gender and sexuality should not be a political issue, LGBTQ rights come up frequently in court cases and the rhetoric of politicians, notably around issues such as same-sex marriage (Obergefell v. Hodges 2015), employment (Glenn v. Brumby 2011) and denial of services to LGBTQ customers (State v. Arlene's Flowers 2019).

The *Oxford English Dictionary* (2019) defines 'political' as an adjective in several ways, all related to exercising (or questioning) authority.

> 1. a. Of, belonging to, or concerned with the form, organization, and administration of a state, and with the regulation of its relations with other states.
>
> 3. Involved, employed, or interested in politics; that takes a side, promotes, or follows a particular party line in political debate. Also (somewhat *derogatory*): having regard to or affected by the interests of a party or parties rather than principle; partisan, factious.
>
> 5. Relating to or concerned with public life and affairs as involving questions of authority and government

Inherent to these definitions is the idea that politics coalesce into positions or 'sides.' While individuals make political statements, groups are necessary to exercise authority and to provoke significant change (Lofland 2017). Considering the range of political activities that are possible, such as voting, demonstrating, filing a lawsuit against the government, or committing an act of violence (Moskalenko and McCauley 2009), wearing a political t-shirt is quite passive. Even so, clothing can be a powerful tool to raise awareness and signal group identity.

In 2010, a small group of voters in Minnesota filed a motion in federal district court, seeking an injunction against the state that would allow them to wear two types of political symbols while voting: buttons with the slogan 'Please ID Me' (campaigning for a voter ID law, which does not exist in Minnesota) and t-shirts identifying them as members of the 'Tea Party' (Martin 2018). Although all US states prohibit campaign materials within a certain distance of polling places (Woodruff 2014), Minnesota had written a law that was more broad:

> 211B.11 ELECTION DAY PROHIBITIONS.
>
> § Subdivision 1. Soliciting near polling places.

> A person may not display campaign material, post signs, ask, solicit, or in any manner try to induce or persuade a voter within a polling place or within 100 feet of the building in which a polling place is situated, or anywhere on the public property on which a polling place is situated, on primary or election day to vote for or refrain from voting for a candidate or ballot question. A person may not provide political badges, political buttons, or other political insignia to be worn at or about the polling place on the day of a primary or election. A political badge, political button, or other political insignia may not be worn at or about the polling place on primary or election day. (Minnesota Legislature 2008)

While their motion was initially denied, after seven years of appeals the US Supreme Court ruled that the state law was a violation of the First Amendment (Minnesota Voters Alliance v. Mansky 2018). The judges recognized the difficulty of determining whether a button or t-shirt should be allowed or disallowed by counting it as 'political insignia.'

> Any number of associations, educational institutions, businesses, and religious organizations could have an opinion on an "issue confronting voters in a given election." For instance, the American Civil Liberties Union, the AARP, the World Wildlife Fund, and Ben & Jerry's all have stated positions on matters of public concern. If the views of those groups align or conflict with the position of a candidate or party on the ballot, does that mean that their insignia are banned? (paragraph 1890)

Even with good intentions, election workers would likely make inconsistent decisions based on their personal views of what is or is not political, resulting in the very 'distraction and disruption' of voting that the state was trying to avoid.

Case Study: T-Shirts in Bloomington, Indiana

In the state of Indiana, the law is more specific. Anyone who enters a polling place on election day is forbidden to wear or display any 'article of clothing, sign, button, or placard that states the name of any political party or includes the name, picture, photograph, or other likeness of any currently elected federal, state, county, or local official' (Indiana Election Division 2018: 129). Campaign t-shirts and buttons are easy to recognize. For example, figure 1 shows a t-shirt for the campaign of Penny Githens, a Democrat who ran unsuccessfully for State Representative of District 60 in 2016 and 2018. The shirt includes her name intersected by a symbol from the state flag—a golden torch with radiating stars (State of Indiana 2019)—which was designed by a member of that district in 1916. It also includes the text, 'For State Representative District 60' and in much smaller letters, 'Paid for by Penny Githens for Indiana.' Although the state does not require campaign finance disclaimers on t-shirts, they are required to appear on billboards, yard signs, advertisements, and mailings (Indiana Election Division 2011).

District 60 includes a small portion of Bloomington (as do 46 and 62), however most of the city is located in District 61. As a small urban area with 85,000 residents—dominated by a major research university with 48,000 students—these divisions are significant. While District 61 consistently votes Democrat, the surrounding districts consistently vote Republican. Indiana voted for Barack Obama in 2008, Mitt Romney in 2012, and Donald Trump in 2016. Although there are many conservative voters in rural and suburban areas, these are balanced by voters in the city of Indianapolis and urban areas around Chicago, Cincinnati, and Louisville. Indiana is more of a 'purple' state than a 'red' state (Rao 2017) when viewed as a whole. There is a sense that political activism makes a difference and that votes are not always pre-determined.

When I began collecting t-shirts at two Goodwill thrift shops in Bloomington in 2019, I quickly realized that I should think much more broadly than just political campaigns. Although there are other thrift and resale shops in Bloomington—part of a much larger movement towards environmental sustainability in fashion consumption (Bianchi and Birtwistle 2011, McNeill and Moore 2015), decluttering (Zappavigna 2019), and interest in shopping vintage or second-hand (Cervellon, Carey and Harms 2012; Yan, Bae and Xu 2015)—these two Goodwill stores are by far the largest in Bloomington. Donations come from an array of both short-term and long-term residents, including students, university employees and their families, residents of Bloomington who have no affiliation with the university, retirees, and residents of the surrounding area (many of whom visit Bloomington for entertainment and shopping).

Out of 90+ graphic t-shirts with a political theme that I collected during a three-month span, only four were from political campaigns: three local and one for Bernie Sanders's 2016 campaign for US President (figure 2). In fact, most of the hundreds of t-shirts that I searched through had little or no political content. Some of the common themes included brand names (Old Navy, Abercrombie), names and logos of schools (Indiana University, Edgewood High School), references to popular culture (Marvel characters, Internet memes), flora and fauna, humor ('TACOCAT spelled backwards is… TACOCAT' with an image of a cat wearing a taco like a turtle shell), holidays (Santa Claus), events (Hoosier Half Marathon) and travel souvenirs (Miami Beach). I found plenty of signals of group identity, such as 'players and fans of sports teams' (Indianapolis Colts) and 'patrons of popular local businesses' (Kilroy's on Kirkwood).

I also found two types of graphic t-shirts that were clearly political: shirts adorned with government symbols (such as flags) and shirts designed to raise awareness of political issues. A good example (figure 3) shows a version of the US flag. The text written on the stripes includes

phrases from the US Constitution ('Free Speech'), the pledge of allegiance ('Justice for All') and the song 'America The Beautiful' ('Purple Mountains Majesty'). Another (figure 4) displays the torch from the Statue of Liberty with the slogan 'Freedom First.' These two shirts are not tied to a specific date or event, advocating for a particular change, or defending a controversial aspect of the law; they may have been donated because the owner was changing to a different size, moving to a new home, reclaiming some storage space, or had simply grown tired of the style.

In contrast is a more activist t-shirt (figure 5) that describes the Second Amendment of the US Constitution as 'my gun permit.' While it is certainly possible that the owner was just making space in his or her closet by donating the shirt to Goodwill, it raises new questions: did the owner outgrow the message? Did a spouse or parent give the shirt away without the owner's permission? Did the owner donate the t-shirt in hopes that someone else would appreciate and help spread the message? An example of a shirt from the opposite end of the political spectrum (figure 6) says, 'I Stand with Standing Rock,' referring to a protest by activists for indigenous rights and clean water (Brady 2018). The owner might have travelled to the site of the protest (North Dakota) or received the shirt from someone who did, but activists in other states also wore the shirts to show their solidarity and raise awareness. Other causes appearing on t-shirts include Black Lives Matter (figure 7), Planned Parenthood, safe sex ('Safe Sex = Great Sex'), LGBTQ rights (#OrlandoUNITED, referring to a mass shooting at a gay nightclub in Florida), opposition to human trafficking ('Forgotten Children Worldwide'), support for breast cancer research ('Never Give Up'), the environment ('Earth Day' and 'Millions Against Monsanto'), Christian evangelism ('Christians in Action'), atheism ('Truth Over Faith'), Blue Lives Matter ('Law Enforcement' with images of handcuffs, a baton, police tape, a generic police badge, etc…) and a mixture of causes ('AIDS is a Civil Rights Issue'). A few of these are tied to a

specific event (#OrlandoUNITED) or recurring event (Earth Day), but most would not look out of place if worn by a new owner. Donating political t-shirts to Goodwill could be viewed as an act of spreading the message and/or making it more affordable to wear. Whereas a new t-shirt might cost twenty dollars or more, Goodwill resells them for two dollars. Some political causes (for example, campaigns) sell t-shirts to raise funds, so it would be easy to imagine an enthusiast buying new t-shirts and then donating the excess from his or her closet.

In a study of people who wear items of dress that display a strong opinion or affiliation with a political cause, Jean McElvain found that her research participants were 'overwhelmingly concerned about offending others' (2008: ii). While I think this might be an artifact of the site of her research and/or method of study[1], a few of the t-shirts I collected (such as figures 5 and 7) do show a strong opinion and would likely be read as 'political' regardless of the social context. I also found some that were more ambiguous; they have political symbols, but soft-pedal the tone with humor or by making references to popular culture. For example, figure 8 shows the front of a t-shirt from the Monroe County Beef Club, a group where members raise cattle for competition at county and state fairs. The shirt says, 'We Used to Have Money, Now We Have Show Cattle.' In the center is a cow superimposed with the US flag. Why include this symbol of the national government? While the wearer might have denied that the t-shirt makes a political statement, it does take a particular pro-government stance on farming and land ownership. Another t-shirt in this vein (figure 9) depicts 'Uncle Sam,' an unofficial symbol of the US government (Bivins 1987) with the message 'America!! Oh Yeah!!!' The cartoon style is humorous, but so is the text, referring to the catch phrase used by the 'Kool-Aid Man' (an advertising figure from the 1980s that has reappeared in Internet memes). As I waded through the hundreds of t-shirts for sale at the two Goodwill stores I found many travel souvenirs, but I paused when I found a shirt

for the Cherokee Nation (figure 10). While it seems like just another travel souvenir—and may have been purchased and/or worn with that intention—the seal on the back is an official symbol of the Cherokee tribal government (Cherokee Nation 2019). Similarly, a souvenir shirt from the Newseum in Washington DC (figure 12) doubles as a statement about freedom of speech and the responsibilities of citizens in a democracy.

Of course, the context that shirts are worn in can matter a great deal. In 2019, activists discovered that one of the farmers selling produce at the city-run farmer's market was a white supremacist and active member of the 'American Identity Movement' (Hogan). After a series of protests and the arrest of one activist who was holding a sign outside of the designated 'protest zone,' a group decided to protest by wearing purple shirts printed with a quote from professor and activist Cornel West: 'Justice is what love looks like in public.' Worn as part of a group, the shirts (which had been quickly designed and printed for that particular event) had a strong visual impact. The activists were allowed to wear them throughout the market since they were clothing and not just 'protest signs.' By the time activist t-shirts appear at Goodwill, they are almost all decontextualized from the original designer, owner, and reason(s) for wearing.

While the First Amendment forbids Congress from establishing a national religion or restricting religious freedom, many politicians in the US, particularly evangelical Christians, have made a point of describing how religion influences their decisions on legislation (Wilcox and Robinson 2018). This gives shirts with messages like 'Unashamed of the Gospel' and 'I ♥ My Church' (figure 12) a political tone. It also explains why an atheist shirt like, 'In Science We Trust' (figure 13) twists the language printed on US currency ('In God We Trust'); these t-shirts represent two competing positions on the issue of religious freedom. Dietary choices can also be political. While most of the t-shirts sold by Herbivore Clothing advocate for veganism, a more

provocative design (figure 14) says, ‘Praise Seitan’ over a pentagram made of red forks—a pun that draws double attention to the politics of both dietary choices and religion. The company’s website notes, ‘We believe [that veganism and social justice] are linked and the oppression of one is the oppression of us all. We believe in animal liberation and human liberation are the same cause, so we fight for both (2019).

Many mainstream retailers (especially those with physical stores) are reluctant to make overt political statements. After Macy’s, for example, stopped carrying a line of Donald Trump menswear in 2015, the company’s CEO said that the move was not about anything Trump had said, but simply about his status as a candidate for President, arguing ‘I just think we don’t want to be a politically associated company, we sell to everybody at Macy’s and have a broad and diverse customer base’ (Wahba 2016). One of the few shirts that I found at Goodwill from a mainstream retailer (Zara, based in Spain) has a simple message embroidered in child-like script: ‘i miss barack.’ In most cases, the tags on these t-shirts are for the companies that manufactured the blanks (Hanes, Anvil, Gildan, Next Level Apparel, etc…), not the individuals that designed the graphics or the retailers that sold them.

Further Research

As activists and entrepreneurs, the ‘We Will Not Be Silent’ collective is conducting a sort of on-the-ground research about who buys, wears, and engages with political t-shirts. Instead of inviting customers to ‘Shop,’ the website encourages visitors to ‘Embody the Message.’

> The power of displaying and embodying language has proven, again and again, to raise social awareness and consciousness, forging solidarity and determination among multitudes of people in the ongoing struggle against injustice.

This article is just the metaphorical ‘tip of the iceberg’ on exploring political t-shirts. How do individuals decide to wear them? How do they affect their interactions and relationships with other people, whether negatively or positively? Do they represent a watering-down of political protest through capitalist consumption (Miles 2014) or does their affordability and everyday use make them a valuable tool for advocacy? How does the US context compare to other countries? Keeping in mind the broad range of positions that can be represented through t-shirts, this should be an intriguing area for further research.

Figure 1: Campaign t-shirt for Penny Githens, who ran for the Indiana House of Representatives in 2016 and 2018 (all shirts owned and photographed by the author)

Figure 2: 2016 campaign t-shirt for Bernie Sanders

Figure 3: Example of a t-shirt with a government symbol (the US flag)

Figure 4: Another example of a government symbol (the torch from the Statue of Liberty)

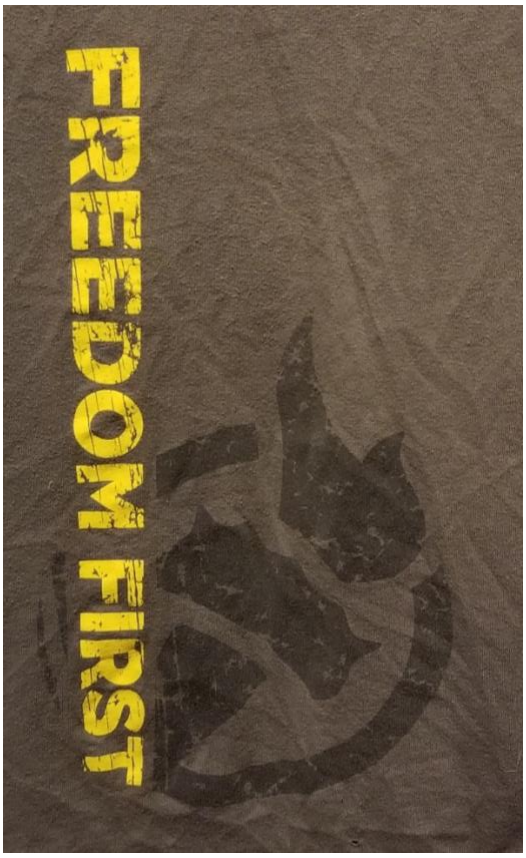

Figure 5: A more controversial t-shirt referring to the Second Amendment of the US Constitution (which provides the right 'to keep and bear arms')

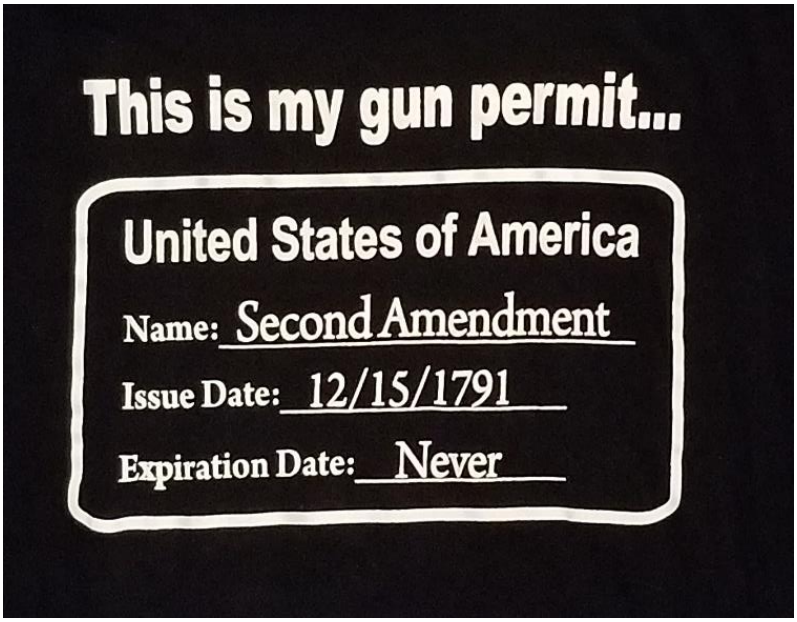

Figure 6: An example of an activist t-shirt, designed to protest the construction of the Dakota Access Pipeline ('Mni Wiconi' means 'Water is Life' in Lakota Sioux)

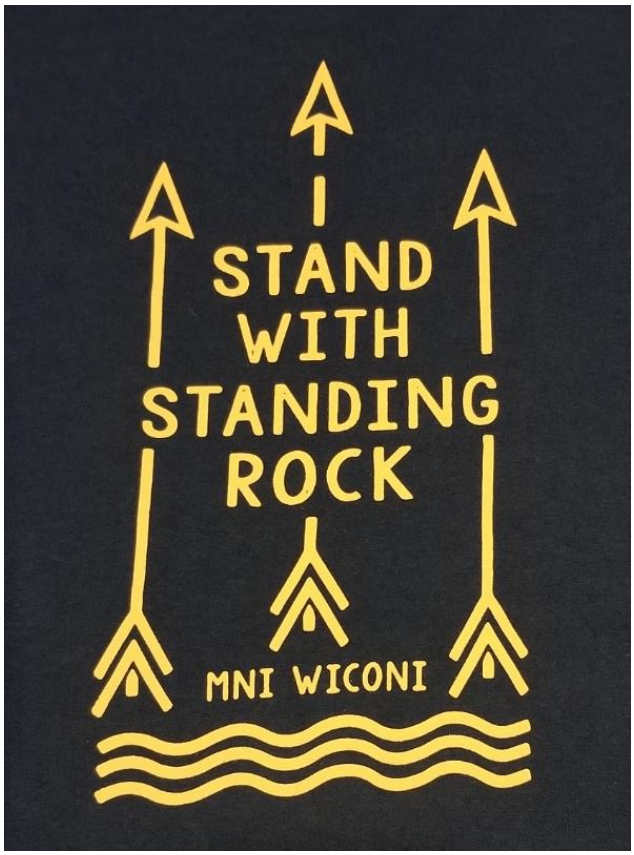

Figure 7: An activist t-shirt representing the Black Lives Matter movement

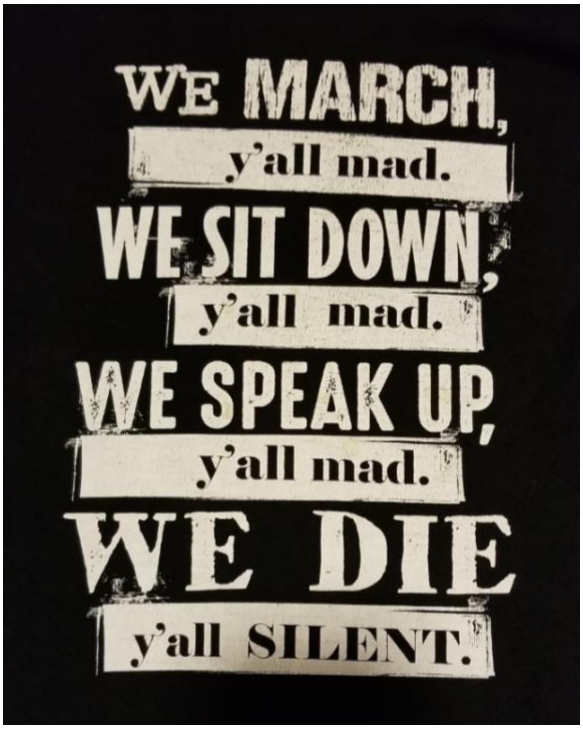

Figure 8: Example of an ambiguous t-shirt combining political symbols with relatively non-political issues, in this case the Monroe County Beef Club

Figure 9: Another example of an ambiguous t-shirt depicting ‘Uncle Sam’ in a humorous way

Figure 10: T-shirt for the Cherokee Nation; although it looks like a travel souvenir, it should also be read as a (tribal) government symbol

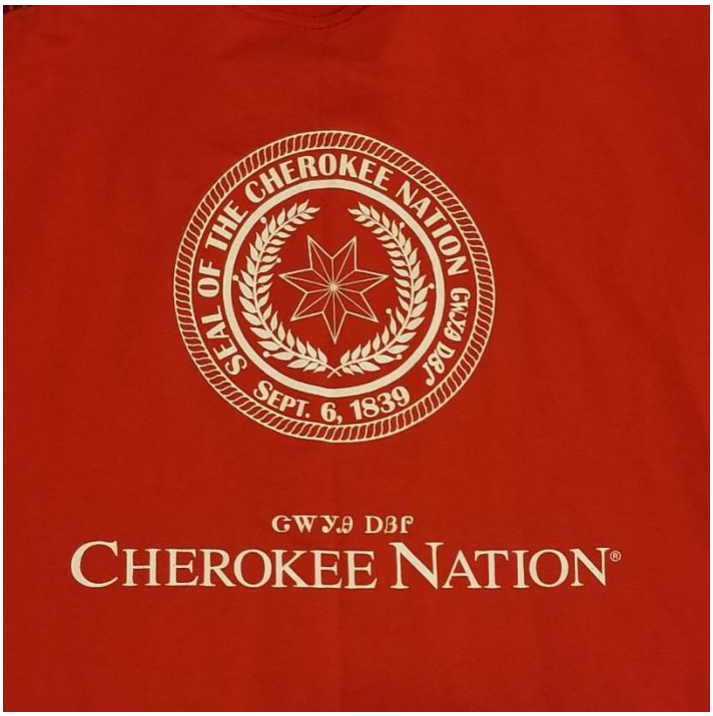

Figure 11: A travel souvenir t-shirt that makes a statement about freedom of speech

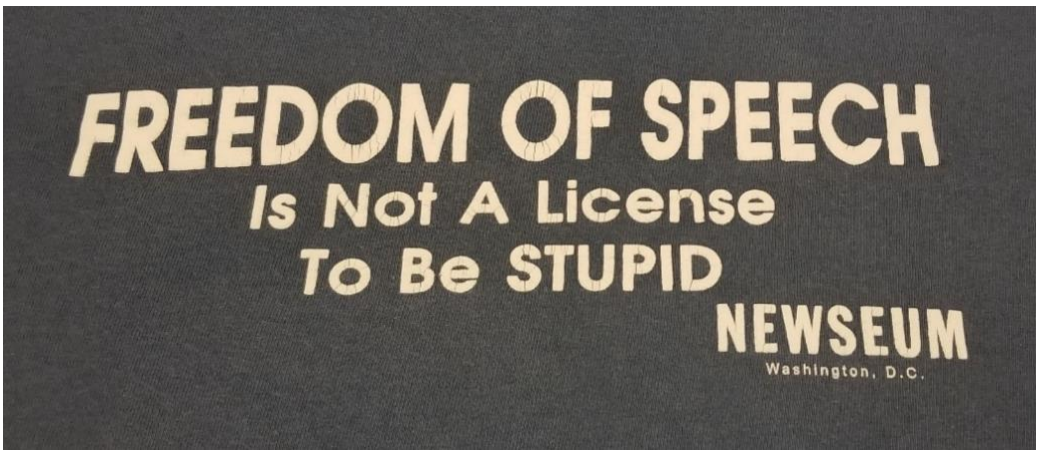

Figure 12: One example of a Christian (likely evangelical) t-shirt

Figure 13: An atheist shirt that twists a phrase printed on US currency

Figure 14: A vegan t-shirt that also draws attention to the politics of religion

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[1] McElvain conducted her research in Minnesota with students, faculty, and staff linked to the University of Minnesota. They may have been particularly keen to be viewed as 'Minnesota nice' or 'politically-objective' (academic), especially in a face-to-face interview with a peer.