

2011

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Timothy Zick

William & Mary Law School, tzick@wm.edu

Repository Citation

Zick, Timothy, "The Summer of Discontent: Creative Repertoires of Public Protest" (2011). *Popular Media*. 151.
https://scholarship.law.wm.edu/popular_media/151

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The Summer of Discontent: Creative Repertoires of Public Protest

Posted By [Timothy Zick](#) On September 2, 2011 @ 10:25 am In [Civil Rights, First Amendment](#) | [2 Comments](#)

[¹]Thanks to Danielle and the full-timers here at Concurring Opinions for inviting me for another visit. As Danielle's introduction indicated, my recent publications have focused primarily on freedom of speech. I want to use part of my guest stint to discuss some of the subjects of my second book, tentatively entitled *The Cosmopolitan First Amendment*. But I thought I would start with a post related to the subject of my first book, *Speech Out of Doors*.

Across the globe, it has been an active and tumultuous summer of protests. Public protests in Tunisia, Syria, and Belarus have been most publicized. In Belarus, citizens demonstrated their creativity in the face of official crackdowns, first by engaging in clapping protests and then, when those were met with repressive measures (including imprisonment), synchronized cellphone ringing or buzzing. The *New York Times* [reported on](#) [²] the diversity of worldwide public demonstrations during the crackdown in Belarus:

Russia has the "blue buckets," activists who affix plastic sand toys to their cars (or their heads) in a protest against the traffic privileges accorded to government officials, whose cars are equipped with flashing blue lights. In Azerbaijan, where protesters are hustled away so quickly that even gathering is nearly impossible, small flash mobs have appeared out of nowhere to perform sword fights or folk dances.

The more permissive political atmosphere of Ukraine has spawned Femen, a group of young women who address such nonsexy issues as pension reform by baring their breasts in public. A woman was arrested in April for walking up to a World War II memorial in Kiev, Ukraine's capital, and frying eggs and sausages over the eternal flame.

These and other reports prompted me to think about the most creative forms of public contention. The man pictured above is Ahn Sang-gyu, a/k/a The Bee Man. Ahn, a bee farmer, covered himself with 187,000 bees to protest Japan's territorial claim to the Korean-occupied Liancourt Rocks. The 187,000 bees apparently represent the 187,000 square meter dimensions of these islets. As it turns out (and this was news to me), South Koreans are among the most creative when it comes to demonstrating public discontent with official policies. No mere marchers or chanters are they. For example, as [this photo array](#) [³] shows (warning: some graphic images), South Koreans have been known to drop trou in the street, eat the flags of rival nations, dismember pigs, chop off their own fingers, and behead dummies. But the South Koreans have global competition in this regard.

American citizens can hold their own, of course, when it comes to public displays of contention and dissent. We do tend to burn flags (usually our own) rather than eat them. And indecent exposure and animal cruelty laws likely deter some of the repertoires used in South Korea. Still, Americans press the limits of public order and decency too. For example, a traveler from my home state (on his way to a funeral, no less) recently [disrobed down to his shorts](#) [⁴] at a Virginia airport TSA checkpoint to express disagreement with the agency's search policies. The disrobing presumably served a dual purpose – to show disapproval of the intrusiveness of the searches, and to display the text of the Fourth Amendment, a portion of which was written in black marker on the traveler's chest. TSA responded by



arresting the scantily clad traveler, whereupon he sued various federal officials for violating his civil liberties. (The First Amendment claims recently survived a government motion to dismiss.)

So, what is the strangest symbolic act or demonstration you've ever seen or heard about? Which country's citizens do you think are the most creative in terms of displays of public conention and dissent?

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URLs in this post:

- [1] Image: http://www.concurringopinions.com/archives/2011/09/the-summer-of-discontent-creative-repertoires-of-public-protest.html/bee_guy-2
- [2] reported on: <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/07/15/world/europe/15belarus.html?pagewanted=all>
- [3] this photo array: <http://www.who-sucks.com/people/the-exciting-world-of-south-korean-protests>
- [4] disrobed down to his shorts: <http://www.firstamendmentcenter.org/va-airport-protester-can-pursue-speech-claim>
- [5] : <http://www.smallactsofresistance.com/>

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