

How Kaepernick Encourages Discourse on Campus

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Reflecting on the events of the summer of 2017 is no easy task. Knowing that things will only get worse, reflecting on the events takes courage and requires a firm commitment by all to engage in meaningful civil discourse. One cannot make light of the events, but rather must contextualize them. I know that, personally, I had trouble grasping the regressions of the country.

In June, President Trump announced his plan to disregard climate change and pull out of the Paris Climate Accord. Later in the summer, Heather Heyer was killed by a far-right sympathizer amid the Charlottesville protests. President Trump condemned both sides of the riot for the violence, as opposed to just the neo-nazis and racists. Even in recent days, controversy is plentiful. NFL protests have taken the limelight, furthering the divide originally caused by Donald Trump's presidency.

During the 2016 NFL season, San Francisco 49ers quarterback Colin Kaepernick started protesting police brutality by sitting, then kneeling, through the national anthem before his games. A few teammates and a handful of other players joined Kaepernick during the 2016 protests, but kneeling as protest has spread like a wildfire since the beginning of the current 2017 NFL season. As a result of his initial protest, though, Kaepernick has been blacklisted from the NFL entirely and remains unsigned as of today.

In this current NFL season, Michael Bennett, a Seattle Seahawk, sat with teammate Justin Britt to acknowledge the oppression and racism that still continues to plague the United States. After this, the #TakeAKnee campaign continued to pervade the NFL. By the time Week Two of the season rolled around, many members of various teams dropped down to a knee during the national anthem. President Trump, though, responded to the protests at a rally in Alabama. "Wouldn't you love to see one of these NFL owners," Trump said, "when somebody disrespects our flag, to say, 'Get that son of a bitch off the field right now. Out! He's fired. He's fired!'" This single comment disrespected the right of every American to voice their opinion. Going against the First Amendment, President Trump furthered the divide amongst the activists and citizens.

Kaepernick's stance against injustice has morphed into a modern-era Civil Rights Movement fight against racism in the United States. During Week Three, teams coordinated their approach at showing solidarity to the movement in retaliation to President Trump's comments. While the Seahawks, Titans and Steelers stayed in the locker room to show the country that they will not have their First Amendment rights infringed upon, every team organized some kind of demonstration to show their disapproval at Trump's comment. With many calling those teams "unpatriotic" by

kneeling during the national anthem, the teams have drawn media to the cause of the protest.

During Week 3's protests, many members around my dorm and around campus seemed unable to look beyond the "unpatriotic" act of kneeling during the National Anthem. But, having lived abroad before, I think that people place too much emphasis on nationalism and embracing abstract concepts. The hardest part of my summer was grasping why President Trump and fellow Americans felt the need to knock down others for their own gain.

While I know not everyone can have the same impact as an NFL player, as a boarding school community member I aim to stay up to date on current events in an attempt to break out of the bubble of boarding schools. This should be the a standard across boarding school campuses. Everyone has an opinion, and it is our job, as the future of society, to understand different perspectives and engage in meaningful conversation without letting political affiliations or preconceived notions get in the way. Beyond the political chaos, everyone should branch out and try new things to gain a wider perspective.

The NFL issue, a heated subject of debate on campus, leads people to to discuss the practicality of the movement. With these arguments quickly escalating to shouting matches, all I ask is that even if you personally disagree with Kaepernick's action, take time to recognize the courage it took for him to stand up against the system. During these conversations, rather than discuss the "unpatriotic" actions, talk about what you can do to make your campus a better place.