



Kaepernick sits for social injustices

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This past weekend, San Francisco 49ers backup quarterback Colin Kaepernick stirred up quite the controversy. After all, effective dialogue is not developed by immediate reactions to headlines on Huffington Post or Breitbart.

According to NFL.com, “Kaepernick has willingly immersed himself into controversy by refusing to stand for the playing of the national anthem in protest of what he deems are wrongdoings against African-Americans and minorities in the United States.”

“I am not going to stand up to show pride in a flag for a country that oppresses black people and people of color,” Kaepernick told NFL Media in an interview following his team’s loss that night to the Green Bay Packers.

“To me, this is bigger than football and it would be selfish on my part to look the other way. There are bodies in the street and people getting paid leave and getting away with murder.”

This is the quote that is on the front page everywhere, and the one which has been singled out as the primary soundbite to be played constantly by the national media.

Unsurprisingly, Kaepernick’s statement unleashed a storm of controversy, with pundits from ESPN to the Trump campaign all butting in to give their two cents on the matter – or at least on the action and on that one exact quote.

If one isolated that quotation, plucked it out of context and delivered with an extra side of scalding hot take, as many talking heads have done over the last few days, then it may very well come across as superficial, perhaps not patriotic, maybe not very well thought out and, something that types like Tomi Loren, Shaun King and other media blowhards can milk endlessly.

If, however, one actually looks at the entire transcript of Kaepernick press conference, things are a little bit different and certainly a little more nuanced. Some of it I disagree with – and to be sure I disagree with his sitting during the anthem – but I respect that this was not a spur of the moment decision and that by all appearances was a legitimate attempt to engage in wider dialogue.

With that in mind, let's try and move beyond the one quotation being featured in the media and focus more on the transcript of the entire press conference Kaepernick participated in after the game – an action which should help us get a clearer picture of Kaepernick's stance and thought process.

From the right and even the left, one of the main criticisms is that he is not respecting soldiers and the sacrifices made by the American military. He was actually asked if he was concerned that this act would be seen as disrespectful to the military, and his response was solid, if a little unclear.

“I have great respect for the men and women that have fought for this country,” Kaepernick said. “I have family – I have friends that have gone and fought for this country. And they fight for freedom, they fight for the people, they fight for liberty and justice, for everyone. That's not happening. People are dying in vain because this country isn't holding their end of the bargain up, as far as giving freedom and justice, liberty to everybody. That's something that's not happening. I've seen videos, I've seen circumstances where men and women that have been in the military have come back and been treated unjustly by the country they have fought for and have been murdered by the country they fought for, on our land. That's not right.”

So yes, Kaepernick does respect the military and was aware some people might take his protest as disrespectful to our brave troops. I agree with him maintaining that it is not disrespectful to the military, and I agree with other commentators who have rightly pointed out it is in large part because of the military Kaepernick has the freedom to speak his mind in our open society. And historically Kaepernick is correct: there were several instances of black soldiers being lynched upon returning home from the world wars. That is not only terrible—it is a national shame. This is all straightforward enough and should not be controversial.

What confuses me about this statement is his reference to the government “not holding their end of the bargain up.”

He lists what the government is supposed to provide citizens – broadly: security, liberty, justice. Crucially, he makes no reference to what the people are supposed to provide. I would be quite interested to hear him expand on this point, because obviously a bargain involves two parties entering into an agreement. He is begging the question here of what he considers the duties of an American citizen.

The next common criticism of Kaepernick, very much in line with the anti-military part, is that he is anti-police. Again, he was directly asked whether he thought his stance was anti-police and again answered in a way which was direct and articulate.

“There is police brutality,” he said. “People of color have been targeted by police. So that's a large part of it and they're government officials. They are put in place by the government. So that's something that this country has to change. There's things we can do to hold them more accountable. Make those standards higher.

“You have people that practice law and are lawyers and go to school for eight years, but you can become a cop in six months and don't have to have the same amount of training as a cosmetologist. That's insane. Someone that's holding a curling iron has more education and more training than people that have a gun and are going out on the street to protect us.”

At this moment the focus is often on racial aspects and on the more heinous acts of police brutality – it is not uncommon for police officers to get away with crime in general.

The Cato Institute released a study a couple of years ago reporting that at least 6,000 officers a year engage in some sort of criminal misconduct. It is not unpatriotic, un-American or even anti-police to state that fact, and it is honestly pretty obvious when one considers the fallen nature of mankind: If you give a group of humans vast power, some of them will abuse that power. Not all will act in that way, but enough of a minority will abuse their power to make it an issue. If this was not true, then why do most major police departments in America have Internal Affairs units?

Most of us have seen the videos of police officers in Minnesota or New York escalating situations and ending them in violence. Most of us have also seen the videos of the shootings of police officers in Dallas, an incident which gives a sobering reminder to those who criticize officers that theirs is an occupation both noble and dangerous.

In light of these facts, is it ridiculous to wonder whether or not we could do more to certify and train our police officers and do our best as a nation to protect both police and our fellow non-sworn citizens?

Another criticism that many people have had of the NFL player is along the lines of, “How are you oppressed Colin? You’re a multi- million dollar football player. Give us a break.”

I believe this is both an unfair and unjust criticism of any wealthy individual who speaks their mind. Now, public figures who speak up – or sit down—in protest may be incredibly incorrect in what they are standing for or disingenuous. Generally, I do find it admirable for anyone to try and start a healthy dialogue on an issue which they truly believe is important, regardless of their wealth or lack thereof. After all, some sort of healthy dialogue is generally a prerequisite for any sort of peaceful social change to occur.

In the end, Kaepernick has identified something that is an issue in society and has used his platform as a celebrity to advocate for his beliefs in a manner in keeping with the freedom provided by America – a nation which has its issues but remains the beacon of liberty for the rest of the world. That is something to be respected, even in disagreement.

Finally, this entire incident was apolitical, something which shows Kaepernick in a more genuine light than if he had followed up his stance by advocating for a particular candidate or party. Instead, he did not spare either presidential contender.

“I think the two presidential candidates that we currently have also represent the issues that we have in this country right now,” Kaepernick said. “You have Hillary, who has called black teens or black kids super predators. You have Donald Trump, who’s openly racist. So, what is this country really standing for?”

Being ashamed that America has two obviously terrible, possibly criminal, certainly hypocritical and completely subpar presidential candidates running for office this year? Now that’s something that Colin and I can both agree on.