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Perception, Conflict and the National Anthem

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Abstract

Conflict is an aspect of everyday life. Understanding the factors that influence conflict will lead to better outcomes between two parties in conflict. A greater understanding of conflict can be achieved by examining the conflict involving and surrounding Colin Kaepernick and his protest during the National Anthem. Understanding the role of perception in this conflict will provide insight into what could have been an effective means to achieve Kaepernick's goals that led to the protest.

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Defining Communication

Communication is the basis for all human interaction. It can affect human lives in both a positive and negative manner. Using both verbal and non-verbal delivery systems, two people must find a way to understand each other. Communication can be as simple as the sender telling receiver to “go buy milk” and the receiver buys milk. This would be an example of clear communication. However if the receiver fails to buy milk, either willfully or mistakenly buys the wrong type of milk, then a breakdown in the communication process has occurred. A misunderstanding in the communication process can lead to conflict between the sender and the receiver.

Communication put simply is the sending, receiving and exchange of ideas and information, either verbally, nonverbally. Communication breakdowns can occur when the sender and the receiver speak different languages, come from different cultures, backgrounds, and emotional differences. Theodore Clevenger Jr. (1991) explains:

The continuing problem in defining communication for scholarly or scientific purposes stems from the fact that the verb ‘to communicate’ is well established in the common lexicon and therefore is not easily captured for scientific use. Indeed, it is one of the most overworked terms in the English language.

Mapheus Smith (1946) attempted to elaborate on the process of communication stated:

Communication behavior in its simplest reciprocal form is the use of some action by one person, whether or not accompanied by a material object, as a stimulus to another person in such a way that the second person can perceive the experience of the stimulating person. The overt action of the first person plays the role of the symbol whose reference

or meaning is the same for the two participants with the result that the common experience is perceived by both participants.

Defining Conflict

Defining conflict as it pertains to the everyday life and interpersonal communication will take more than just a dictionary definition. When trying to clarify conflict as a concept, Clinton F. Fink (1968) felt it necessary to clarify conflict by creating an outlining how the definitions of conflict varied from source to source. First, he described that there were two common elements in most definitions of conflict, action and motivation, followed by other characteristics including: unconscious vs. conscious, impersonal vs. personal, peaceful vs. violent, object-centered vs. opponent-centered, and economic goals vs. non-economic goals. Fink (1968) would go on to offer this as his definition for conflict: Any social situation or process in which two or more social entities are linked by at least one form of antagonistic psychological relations or at least one form of antagonistic interaction.

Attempting to explain the relationship between communication and conflict, two approaches may be considered. The first used by Leonard C. Hawes and David H. Smith, is that understanding the relationship between conflict and communication should be approached prospectively. Hawes and Smith maintain that conflict is destructive and episodic. Using this approach, conflict can be seen as having either a negative outcome and should be resolved, or that it is temporary and should be eliminated. On the other hand, Brent D. Ruben (1978) uses a retrospective approach that conflict and communication is constructive and continuous. From this

perspective, conflict is constructive, constant, and is seen as a positive which can be managed. It is a vital condition for normal human interaction.

When looking at these two approaches, it becomes apparent that conflict and communication are interdependent. An approach to understanding one, would lead to assumptions about the other.

Peter A. Andersen (1991) says this about the study of conflict and its relationship to communication:

While there is not a right or wrong perspective, choices regarding [definitions] are not trivial. These perspectives launch scholars down different theoretical trajectories, predispose them to ask distinct questions, and set them up to conduct different kinds of communication studies.

There can be many occurrences of conflict between waking up and going back to sleep, and these occurrences have as much to do with the actual problem as they do with the people involved. There is a very good chance that even on a simple drive to work, you will encounter another person who makes a decision that can affect you for a moment in time, or for the rest of your life. Your reaction to their action can make that event even worse. Do you move over for an aggressive driver who is in a hurry for unknown reasons, or do you stay in your lane because you were there first? It is this type of example that can be considered an interpersonal conflict.

Interpersonal conflict

Interpersonal conflict describes a “process that begins when one party perceives that the other has negatively affected, or is about to negatively affect, something that he or she cares

about” (Thomas, 1992.) It occurs because of the differences between two people when their values, and perceptions lead to incompatible choices and opinions. This type of conflict could be looked upon as an opportunity for growth, understanding, and compromise.

The outcome of interpersonal conflicts can have wide reaching effects in a person’s life. The ability to handle conflict is a learned behavior. Conflict that has a positive outcome can lead to improved relationships, improved mental health, and the ability to learn a lesson and apply it to other situations and conflicts. There is also the added benefit that others might learn from the positive example and apply it to their situations.

Intrapersonal conflict

There are many types of conflict, while discussing interpersonal conflict, it is important to talk about unexpressed conflict. When conflict is triggered by an event, and it is not expressed, it becomes an internal strain, or intrapersonal.

Intrapersonal conflict is an internal crisis in the mind of the individual caused by frustration. If left unchecked and unvoiced, can lead to depression, insecurities, abandonment of goals, and an inability to socialize correctly.

Interpersonal conflict can be a result of a person lacking emotional intelligence and a proper self-awareness. Without self-awareness, there can be a lack of self-esteem, and without clarity about one’s self-worth, even something as simple as making a decision about involving the mundane, there might be enormous paralyzing self-doubt. In other words, knowing oneself, is healthy and can lead to more confidence and better decisions. (Goethe 2017)

Personal traits and conflict

There are numerous factors that affect conflict, such as sex, age, and religion. The state of a person's emotions can also lead to different severity of conflict and the ability to resolve conflict. In fact, mental disorders have been predicted to affect such a large portion of the worldwide population that it is predicted to be the second largest killer disease. (Marcus, Yasamy, Van Ommeren, Chisholm & Saxena, 2012)

Psychosocial theories state that social adversities and stressors lead to depression. The psychoanalytical school of thought proposes that depression is related to repressed anger in childhood, and negative interpersonal behaviors can also lead to depression. The behavioral school of thought believes that poor personal skills to cope the lack of reinforcement in the environment leads to depression. And the cognitive school of thought proposes that negative schemas and thinking causes depression. (Comer, 2010) These factors indicate a dysfunctionality in a depressed person.

Studies suggest that coping styles have a major impact on a person's susceptibility to depression. Two coping styles in particular are referenced, high levels of maladaptive coping combined with lower levels of adaptive coping were strongly associated with higher levels of depression. Maladaptive coping indicates an inability to cope with stress and environment. Meanwhile, adaptive coping plays a role in buffering the effects of social stressors. Simply put adaptive coping can help prevent one's susceptibility to depression. (Nazir & Mohsin, 2013) Researchers also suggest that aggression plays a role in susceptibility to depression. It's debatable whether depression stems from aggression or if aggression is a byproduct of depression, what is determined is that they are intertwined, especially in youth. Depressed people tend to have conflicts that are interpersonal in nature and their interpersonal conflicts increase.

Thus, a depressed person is often locked in a cycle of interpersonal conflict. (Haddad et al., 2008)

Power

Another aspect of interpersonal conflict, is Power. Those of have it, flaunt it, and those who don't have it crave it. Power struggles can occur within a political, military, educational and corporate settings. These organizations tend to foster control and monopolize decision-making, and often is the perception that methods used by those in power aren't fair or equal.

Peter T. Coleman (2014) studied a variety of social sciences before developing his own definition of power:

Power can be usefully conceptualized as a mutual interaction between the characteristics of a person and the characteristics of a situation, where the person has access to valued resources and uses them to achieve personal, relational, or environmental goals, often through using various strategies of influence.

Understanding the role of power in conflict, is the first step to solving a conflict. Within Coleman's studies he found four perspectives on power. The first "power over" the ability to compel someone to do something, which implies power as coercive and competitive. The second "power with" suggests cooperative or joint action is effective. A third perspective focuses on powerlessness and dependence. And the final "power to" implies power without constraint or disability.

With the perspectives of power laid out, it becomes useful to understand which aspects of a personality and situations are pertinent to power. Personal aspects can include cognitive,

motivations, and morality. Each person tends to develop their own perspectives on power and often adopt a variation of one the four Coleman mentioned. As far as motivations are concerned, a person may be motivated to gain personal power, or group power (such as a political party). And finally morality plays a role in a person's perception about good vs. evil, judgment, and sentiment.

Understanding power allows one to understand conflict. Viewing conflict through the lens of "power over" one tends to view conflict as a competition with an outcome of win or lose. This view tends to influence the resolution of a conflict towards a negative outcome. Therefore in order to arrive at a positive resolution to conflict, those in conflict should try to perceive power as it pertains to cooperation, dependent and independent power. The perception of power after all shapes the strategies one would use in a conflict. (Coleman, Deutsch & Marcus, 2014)

Perception

Another definition for conflict provided by Wilmot and Hocker (2011): . . . an expressed struggle between at least two interdependent parties who perceive incompatible goals, scarce rewards, and interference from the other party in achieving those goals (p. 11).

Wilmot and Hocker's definition begins to illustrate the important role of perception in conflict. When the implications are studied, perception can mean that conflict arises when both parties share a perception that the goals, rewards, scarcity, or interference have to be objectively present. Either one or both parties only has to perceive that they are. This can mean that getting to a solution would involve understanding the perception of the parties involved. Understanding the

perceptions surrounding the conflict provides information about the beliefs, positions which are unchangeable, belief systems.

A person's view of conflict or of those involved in a conflict, and all the factors surrounding a conflict can often be skewed by their perception of those elements. This doesn't mean that a person's perception is right or wrong, it just means that their perception has been shaped by life events, upbringing, environment, observations and interpersonal relationships.

Every participant involved in a conflict has a different worldview. Their unique worldview will stem from their own preferences, attitudes, religion, experiences. These preferences can lead to assumptions, stereotyping, and misunderstandings with communication.

Every decision made that involves interpersonal conflict involves using our own perceptions. A popular example of perception involves showing a group of children an image that could be the head of either a rabbit or duck depending on how their mind interpreted the optical illusion. According to researchers, children were more likely to see a rabbit on Easter Sunday, while on other days they would see the duck. This common example shows how perception can shape our view of the surrounding world.

Adults and children both have a worldview shaped by perception. For instance a group of adults might be shown a video where police are engage in a violent struggle with a civilian. If those adults identified more strongly with the civilian, they might call for a strong punishment of the police officer, and conversely those who identified with the police officer might be willing to believe the officer did nothing wrong.

When considering the effects of perception on conflict, many parties rarely consider how subtle the perception really is. Perception influences and defines the conflict for the parties involved. Perception is an individual's truth. A further look into perception as it pertains to truth

would involve looking at how the brain develops perception. It's a practically an instantaneous and simultaneous process of selection, organization, and interpretation.

The selection process involves sifting through the infinite information such as what is seen, heard, experienced, and numerous other factors. Overall this process involves selecting information from the environment and choosing what is given attention. Hocker (2011) describes a process where the selection of what to process is based on contrast. One might choose a large thing against a small background, or a small thing against a large background, bright color against a black background, etc.

Selecting that information that is important, needed, wanted, and possibly discarding the rest, or at least placing value in a descending order from most important to least. Because information without context can be ambiguous, it's necessary to organize an abundance of information in more than one way.

The human mind has to develop a "frame of reference" or "mental model" of how things should be. Because of this humans will organize information according to how things should be. There are three dynamics involved in the organization process.

The first part of the process is known as punctuation, which quite literally refers to how data is organized. This process could be compared to how we use grammar, with capital letters, periods, and question marks. Punctuating events is a defining feature of the perception process. As with grammar, how an event is punctuated can drastically change our perception of the event, or meaning of the event.

An example would be:

"Rachel Ray enjoys cooking, her family and her dog."

Given that example one would surmise a rather innocent statement about what Rachel Ray enjoys in life, and a positive image would be conveyed. This would be a positive frame of reference. However, removing the one comma would lead to a drastically different connotation.

“Rachel Ray enjoys cooking her family and her dog.”

In the second example, it is easy to see how you can completely change the context of the words by removing one little item. Our minds work in the same way when organizing information to fit our perception. If at first we perceive something as evil, or good, we will often take that information and fit it into our preconceived organizations.

This process is also known as assimilation, or changing data to fit our beliefs, values, attitudes. (Hocker, 2011) However, if the information we gather actually changes our mind, or our point of reference, then accommodation happens.

In the final perception process, interpretation, we assess or evaluation the information we've gathered, or develop and understanding of the data. These interpretations and or organizing scheme come from our frames of reference otherwise known as a mental model. Past experience plays a large role in how we interpret data, human nature, and expectations people, places, things, and events.

Our perceptions and conflict should not necessarily be viewed as a negative. Developmental psychologist Jean Piaget (1932) viewed conflict, particularly between children of the same age or developmental stage, as instrumental in reducing a child's egocentrism and for teaching cooperation and empathy. Conflict perception is a social-cognitive variable that develops from a child's experiences and interpersonal conflicts and how those conflicts were addressed and resolved. (Brinkman 1995)

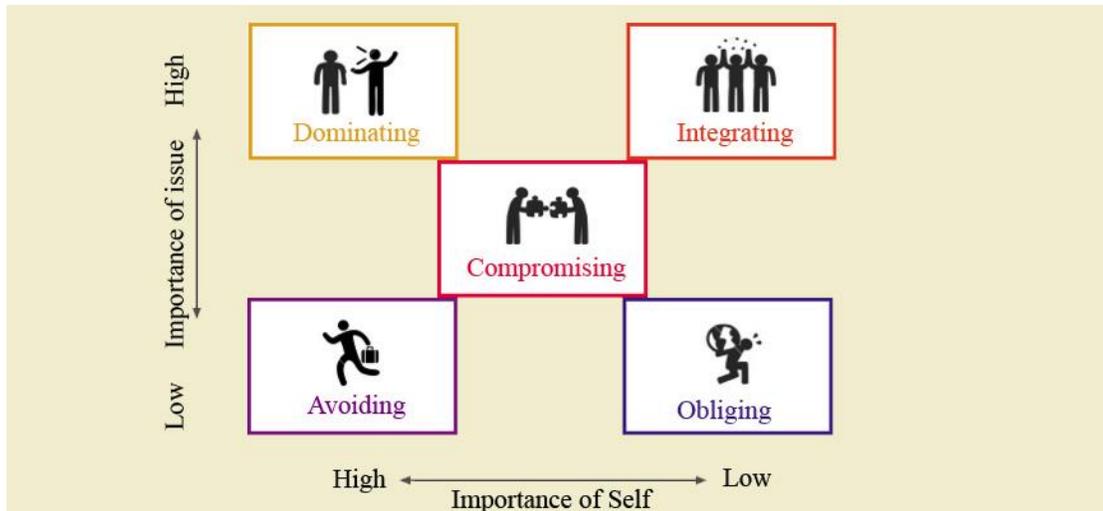
A negative conflict perception is the belief that conflict is destructive, unproductive, unneeded, and futile. Negative conflict perception threatens and endangers personal relationships. Words associated with this perception are: War, anger, destruction, violence anxiety, and pain. (Hocker 1985). Individuals with a negative conflict perception often avoid conflict, and often value communication and restraint as a means of limiting or preventing conflict.

On the other hand, a positive conflict perception tend to see conflict as a challenge, and an opportunity to reach a solution that both sides can benefit. Conflict will clarify the issues, prevent errors, and bridge the differences. Words one might associate with positive conflict perception are: clarification, creativity, opportunity, growth and intimacy. (Hocker 1985).

Traditional thinking once viewed conflict as negative and destructive, now considers conflict as an agent of change and growth. It is often views as a natural and necessary form of socialization that can serve both individuals and society by promoting development, change, and adaptation to one's surroundings. (Johnson 1996).

Conflict Styles

There are five styles or strategies for dealing with conflict in a given situation. The effectiveness of one style over another is debatable. The five styles are: integrating, obliging, compromising, dominating, and avoiding. (Rahim, 1986) Researchers suggest that integrating or problem-solving is the most appropriate style. (Likert, 1976).



Integrating

Integrating style places emphasis on having a high concern for self and others, and represents a desire to fully satisfy concerns of both parties. Using this style is useful if one is assertive and can cooperate effectively and acknowledge the importance of others. This style is useful for bringing together a variety of viewpoints and ideas for the best solution. Integrating is also useful when parties involved have been in previous conflict, or the situation is too important for trade-offs. This style is not as useful when immediate decisions need to be made, such as in emergency situations.

Integrating is known as the problem solving style. This style also requires an openness, exchange of ideas, and examination are used to reach an acceptable solution for both parties. This style had two distinctive elements, confrontation and problem solving. Confrontation would involve an open dialog, would be useful to clear up misunderstandings, and would lead to understanding the causes of conflict. Understanding the conflict would be a pre-requisite for problem solving, eventually leading to maximum satisfaction at the conclusion of the conflict. (Prein, 2007)

Follet (1926) said: The first rule . . . for obtaining integration is to put your cards on the table, face the real issue, uncover the conflict, bring the whole thing into the open.

Gray's (1989) view on problem solving: a process through which parties who see different aspects of a problem can constructively explore their differences and search for solutions that go beyond their own limited vision of what is possible.

Obliging

Obliging is a style with high concern for others and low concern for self. It is a conflict style where one side knows when to give in or compromise, but often does so when it isn't warranted. People who tend to use this style are not assertive but are highly cooperative. Obliging also has an element of self-sacrifice. It may take the form of selflessness, charity, or obedience. A person who uses this style is likely to neglect their own interests to satisfy the concerns of the other party. The Obliging style is useful when the conflict and solution matters more to the other party, and a resolution needs to be found quickly. This is a valuable style to peacekeeping, or when one wants to curry a future favor, but is unlikely to achieve the best outcome.

Boulding (1962) said this about the obliging style: Conflict absorber... person whose reaction to a perceived hostile act on the part of another has low hostility or even positive friendliness" (p.171).

Compromising

The compromising style is a style that has an intermediate concern for self and others. This style is used to partially satisfy the concerns of all involved. Everyone involved in the conflict is expected to give up something in order to achieve a settlement. It can mean splitting the difference, concession seeking or achieves a middle-ground position.

Compromising is a useful conflict style when deadlines need to be met, and both sides refuse to budge. This style can create an environment where no one ever wins and can lead to dissatisfaction. A compromising style user will often give up more in concession than a dominating style user, but less than an obliging style user. Users of this style will often address issues directly, but not as thoroughly as an integrating user.

Dominating

The dominating style is a style with a high concern for self and a low concern for others. Those who enter a conflict with this style tend to know what they want, and operate from a position of power. Power is usually derived from position, rank, expertise or persuasive ability. This is a useful style when an immediate decision needs to be made, such as emergencies, or when an unpopular decision needs to be made. Using this style can often lead the other party to feel resentful.

Users of this style are likely to show a strong desire to “win at any cost.” Another consistent trait is that users are likely to use their positional power to impose their will on others in an attempt to command obedience. Those without actual power may try to bolster their power over others through deception.

Avoiding

Avoiding style is a style with a low concern for self and others. Avoiding style tends to be used by those who want to completely avoid conflict. It is often the keystone style for those who prefer to delegate difficult decisions, until they can no longer be avoided.

This is an appropriate style in a no-win scenario, or when the conflict is trivial. This is the most ineffective style to assume in a conflict situation. An avoiding style user often shows little concern about the conflict issues and fails to satisfy their own concerns as well as the other party.

Determining factors about the more appropriate conflict styles might be attributed to organizational settings and number of variables. The use of conflict styles might be most effective if considered as a fluid process. Variables might include the sources of the conflict (Renwick, 1975), size of the issue (Thomas, 1976), and the relative power of the parties involved. (Kabanoff, 1986).

With the five conflict resolution styles as reference, and understanding that perception is a major part of conflict, the following will attempt to show how conflict, perception and resolution styles tie into a major event that not only affected the sports world, but news media and political conversation for the better part of three years.

Perception, conflict and the National Anthem



The following pages will illustrate that former San Francisco 49ers Quarterback Colin Kaepernick placed a high importance on the issue, and low importance on the feelings of others, and for the duration of his protest he used a dominating conflict style. Later Kaepernick would exhibit other conflict resolution styles when his position in the conflict and his ability to affect change though protest was no longer effective.

As the timeline will show, eventually President Donald Trump would admonish Kaepernick for his protest. President Trump exhibits a tendency to place a high importance on himself, and a high importance on the issues as he perceives them. With two people both using a dominating style in regards to conflict, it was unlikely that the conflict would have any compromise.

On November 27th, 2016 the National Football League (NFL) and the United States had a huge cultural and perception issue that transcended sports, for the first time in a long time, a

sports figure was making a statement. Kaepernick was the central figure in a growing controversy that threatened to divide a country that somehow seemed even more divided than ever.

There were many events that led Kaepernick to make his stand, or in this case, kneel, not the least of which was the inequality of the treatment of black people by police and society. During the 2016 preseason, he began his silent and peaceful protest. Early on, very few fans noticed because he really didn't draw a lot of attention to himself, but eventually the news caught wind of it.

Kaepernick (2016) would clarify his reasons for kneeling as he made a brief statement early in the 2016 preseason:

I am not going to stand up to show pride in a flag for a country that oppresses black people and people of color... 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 not something that I am going to run by anybody. I am not looking for approval. I have to stand up for people that are oppressed. If they take football away, my endorsements from me, I know that I stood up for what is right.

While Kaepernick was very articulate and clear about his message and actions, many felt that the timing was suspect. They felt that his earlier demotion from starter to backup quarterback had led him to make a decision to force his way out of San Francisco and onto another team that needed a starting caliber quarterback.

Kaepernick confirmed (Fann, 2016) his desire to be traded. This occurred after a season where his play and injuries resulted in a career low quarterback rating (an average measurement of many factors including effectiveness, touchdowns, and interceptions). He was then benched for ineffective play, and eventually placed on injured reserve. His confirmation of the trade request also conflicted with an earlier interview with then San Francisco 49er's Head Coach Chip Kelly. Before the start of the 2016 season, Kelly denied there was a trade request by Kaepernick's agent.

Kaepernick (2016) said this about the trade request:

Organizations, at the end of the season, go through and evaluate personnel and opportunities. That's something that I sat down with my team and did the same thing. That's how we handled the business. We were looking at different opportunities. I don't want to get into specifics of what happened and why things happened. At this point, everything is football. I'm a 49er ... and I'm excited about what's to come.

Concerning the 2015 season, Kaepernick would also attempt to do some damage control:

To be perfectly blunt with you, I didn't play my best football last year. Injury or no injury, I wasn't playing my best football. That's something I'm excited about for this season, is being able to redeem myself, go out there, play well and prove to everyone what I'm capable of. (Wagaman, 2016)

Chip Kelly (2016) would later say this about Kaepernick and the 2016 season:

Kap was awesome. At the beginning of the year, he made a stance in terms of what he believes is right. We recognized and supported his ability to do that. But he never brought that into the locker room. We had a meeting the day after the Green Bay game that he did it in the preseason, and he explained to all the players his thought process and

the mindset of what he was doing. There were some players that agreed with him and there were some players that didn't agree with him. But after that point, we heard from the outside about what a distraction it is, except those people weren't in our locker room and it never was a distraction. And Kap never brought that and turned it into a circus or whatever people think. (Ruiz et al., 2019)

Until now, the discussion has mostly focused on Kaepernick's motivations for protesting during the 2016 season, the fact he protested for a cause he believed in is only part of the problem with perception. Another factor is his form of protest, and the venue. Before delving into what he eventual protest morphed into, it should be noted that Kaepernick and the form of his protest changed from the first preseason game.

The protest

On 14 August 2016, Kaepernick began his protest. It went mostly unnoticed because it was preseason and he was out of uniform, (he was still recovering from injuries and surgery). By the third week of preseason, 26 August 2016, a picture surfaced on Twitter that quickly caught the media's attention. The word was out, Kaepernick was sitting on the bench while his teammates stood for the National Anthem. (Biderman et al., 2019)

It didn't take long for the fans and media to take sides. One side bought into Kaepernick's reasons for the protest, while the other side took it as a slap to the face of every service member who had served, fought, and died for the flag. Kaepernick chose the most visible means of protest possible, and achieved a level of notoriety that few athletes in modern times have achieved.

Kaepernick (2016) on his protest:

I have great respect for the men and women that have fought for this country. 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.

At the same interview he was asked if his protest could be construed as “blanket indictment of law enforcement in general...”

Kaepernick (2016) responded:

There is police brutality. 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.

In an open letter to the military times, Staff Sergeant Nate Boyer, a former player himself, wrote to Kaepernick and explained his views and support (Boyer, 2019):

Even though my initial reaction to your protest was one of anger, I'm trying to listen to what you're saying and why you're doing it. When I told my mom about this article, she cautioned me that "the last thing our country needed right now was more hate." As usual, she's right.

There are already plenty people fighting fire with fire, and it's just not helping anyone or anything. So I'm just going to keep listening, with an open mind.

I look forward to the day you're inspired to once again stand during our national anthem. I'll be standing right there next to you. Keep on trying ... De Oppresso Liber.

Kaepernick read the heart-felt open letter and requested a meeting with Boyer. During that meeting Kaepernick and Boyer discussed the issue at length, and Boyer revealed that many of his friends and family had texted him, and claimed he was betraying his fellow Green Berets for even meeting with Kaepernick.

Boyer would later recall the meeting and how the protest evolved from sitting on the bench, to kneeling on the sideline (Brinson, 2019):

So when I talked to them, it was mutual. Me, him, and Eric Reid [I said] I think maybe taking a knee would be a little more respectful. It's still a demonstration. You're still saying something but, people take a knee to pray. So for me it was a common ground, at least, to start from.

Taking a knee

On September 1, 2016, Kaepernick began kneeling during the National Anthem before the 49ers final preseason game. Kaepernick was joined by teammate Eric Reid and America took notice, it was a dividing moment. A statement that was meant to bring about change and unity

soon divided Americans. Kaepernick could not have chosen a more visible game to begin kneeling since the game was the San Diego Chargers 28th Annual Salute to the Military. (Mather, 2019)

During a postgame news conference, Kaepernick would address the bias against his stance and the media's portrayal of him:

The media painted this as I'm anti-American. (That) I'm anti-men and women of the military. That's not the case at all. I realize men and women of the military go out and sacrifice their lives, put their selves in harm's way for my freedom of speech and my freedoms in this country, my freedom to take a seat or take a knee. I have the most utmost respect for them. And I think what I did was taken out of context and spun a different way. I'm not anti-America. I love America. I love people. That's why I'm doing this. I want to help make America better.

Kaepernick wasn't done. During the same post-game conference, he also made a pledge to donate a sum of one million dollars of his earnings from the 2016 season to worthy charities. It was a promise he would later fulfill. The donations would cover a wide range of organizations, including at-risk families, education, community-police relations, prison reform, inmates' rights, reproductive rights, hunger and more.

His final donation went towards his own #10for10 project. A project where Kaepernick called upon participants to donate \$10,000 to a cause of their choice and then he would match that \$10,000. The final \$10,000 of the one million dollar pledge would go to match a pledge made by Usher on Jan 31, 2018. (Willingham, 2019)

Around the league on that very same opening weekend, other players because protests of their own. On September 8th, Denver Broncos wide receiver Brandon Marshall, a college teammate of Kaepernick, took a knee during the National Anthem of the opening game of the 2016 season. (Chenoy, 2016) The rest of the opening week finished with players from the Kansas City Chiefs, New England Patriots, Seattle Seahawks, and Miami Dolphins all had players perform some type of protest.

Prior to the New England Patriots opening game in 2016, Free Safety Devin McCourty (2016) explained why he chose to join the protest:

I wore socks with the American flag. I believe in this country. I love this country...My father was in the Army. My older brother was in the Army. Those men and women go out there and put their life on the line. I respect that. That's the reason why I didn't do anything during the national anthem because I respect it. You talk to people about how much respect they have for the flag. That's why they believe. That's why they go fight. Nothing but respect for that. (Reiss, 2016)

On November 13, 2016, Tampa Bay Buccaneers wide-receiver Mike Evans sat during the National Anthem not in support of Kaepernick, but in protest of election of Donald Trump as president. Evans was criticized for the timing of his protest, as it happened the day after Veteran's Day.

Evans (2016) made a statement regarding his protest:

If this happens, then America's not right right now. I said this a long time ago. When he ran, I thought it was a joke, and the joke continues. I'm not a political person that much, but I got common sense. And I know when something's not right.

After the criticism Mike Evans apologized for his method and timing of his protest:

If I had to do it over again, I would have done it differently, but I would still use my platform to help," Evans said, saying that the timing of his protest was poor. On the field, I'm going to continue to do what I do -- play hard. I'm playing hard because I've got this right -- freedom, because of the vets. I'm going to reach out to organizations, organizations that I feel are doing the best job to help the minority ... women, LGBT, African Americans, Latinos, people that are in fear of Donald Trump and his presidency. (Laine, 2016)

What these various protests and later apologizes and lack of solidarity showed, was that while many of the players wanted to effect change, and spread a message, none of them were on the same page, nor organized in their stance. Furthermore, because there was a lack of solidarity when any one player protested, they opened themselves up to various interpretations. For the rest of the 2016 season, various players would protest in a variety of ways, and at the same time, many fans viewed these protests in one of two ways.

Two perceptions

On one side of the fandom, these protests were viewed as being similar to the silent protest during the 1968 Olympic Games by Tommie Smith and John Carlos. Upon winning their Gold and Bronze medals, stood in solidarity in the victory ceremony with their gloved fists in the air. Their protest is widely considered one of the most powerful, and memorable of all time. Their protest also led to a division among critics. Millions viewed their protest as an insult to the Olympic spirit and an outrage, while millions viewed it as a symbol of an expression of disillusionment at a Nation that failed to live up to its promise of equality. Their protest would cause them to get them suspended from the U.S. team and would elicit death threats.

In a later documentary Smith (2014) would explain:

We were just human beings who saw a need to bring attention to the inequality in our country. I don't like the idea of people looking at it as negative. There was nothing but a raised fist in the air and a bowed head, acknowledging the American flag—not symbolizing a hatred for it. (Cosgrove, 2014).

President Trump unites the NFL

At the beginning of the 2017 NFL season, much of the nation waited to see who would continue the protest, as Kaepernick was no longer on the 49ers, or any NFL team. This also marked a change in who was protesting. During the 2017 preseason, Seahawks defensive end Michael Bennett called for white players to join the protest.

In Bennett's (2017) words: It would take a white player to really get things changed, because when somebody from the other side understands and they step up and they speak up about it... it would change the whole conversation.

Cleveland Browns tight end Seth DeValve became the first white player to kneel during the National Anthem protest. DeValve was one of nearly a dozen Cleveland players to kneel during their preseason game against the New York Giants. Of those who didn't kneel, several showed their support by standing with their hands on their kneeling teammates' shoulders. This would be the largest protest up to that point.

The Browns would later release a statement for DeValve:

(The U.S.)...the greatest country in the world, despite issues of inequality. The issue is that it doesn't provide equal opportunity to everybody, and I wanted to support my African-American teammates today who wanted to take a knee. We wanted to draw attention to the fact that there's things in this country that still need to change.

(Baccellieri, 2017)

While players were still protesting during the 2017 season, it took something unprecedented to really galvanize the resolve of players league-wide. That galvanizing force would take the shape of President Donald Trump. President Trump who by all accounts never seems to shy away from a controversy or creating one, would rally those who had the perception that NFL players who kneeled did so were disrespecting the United States Flag.

President Trump launched his attack on the NFL protestors on Friday September 22, 2017. During his speech during a rally to support Republican Senator Luther Strange, President

Trump would call upon NFL Owners to release players who protested or engaged in the movement started by Kaepernick.

President Trump (2017) said:

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! Out! He's fired. He's fired!'

You know, some owner is going to do that. He's going to say, 'That guy that disrespects our flag, he's fired.' And that owner, they don't know it [but] they'll be the most popular person in this country.

But do you know what's hurting the game more than that? When people like yourselves turn on television and you see those people taking the knee when they're playing our great national anthem. The only thing you could do better is if you see it, even if it's one player, leave the stadium.

I guarantee things will stop. Things will stop. Just pick up and leave. Pick up and leave. Not the same game anymore, anyway. (Graham, 2019)

In response to President Trump, NFL Commissioner Roger Goodell would issue this statement on behalf of the NFL:

The NFL and our players are at our best when we help create a sense of unity in our country and our culture. There is no better example than the amazing response from our

clubs and players to the terrible natural disasters we've experienced over the last month.

Divisive comments like these demonstrate an unfortunate lack of respect for the NFL, our great game and all of our players, and a failure to understand the overwhelming force for good our clubs and players represent in our communities.

NFL Player Association Executive Director Maurice Smith would issue his own statement:

The peaceful demonstrations by some of our players have generated a wide array of responses. Those opinions are protected speech and freedom that has been paid for by the sacrifice of men and women throughout history. This expression of speech has generated thoughtful discussion in our locker rooms and in board rooms.

However, the line that marks the balance between the rights of every citizen in our great country gets crossed when someone is told to just 'shut up and play.'

NFL Players do incredible things to contribute to their communities. NFL Players are part of a legacy of athletes in all sports who, throughout history, chose to be informed about the issues that impact them and their communities. They chose -- and still choose today -- to do something about those issues rather than comfortably living in the bubble of sports. Their decision is no different from the one made by countless others who refused to let 'what they do' define or restrict 'who they are' as Americans. (Wyche, 2017)

Two days after President Trump's derisive words, the players and the league would respond on the field. In what was the largest demonstration, over two hundred players, coaches, and even owners would protest during the National Anthem of the third week of the NFL Season. Every single team had at least one player perform some form of protest. Many teams



issued statements in support of the players and their protest. Without a doubt, the perception of one side elicited a strong reaction from the other and vice versa. (Staff ESPN.com, 2017)

While the protests had primarily been an on field demonstration, many NFL team owners made written statements condemning Trump and showing their support for the players and their movement. Two in particular stand out from the third week of the NFL season.

Jim Irsay owner of the Indianapolis Colts issued this statement September 24, 2017:

I am troubled by the President's recent comments about our league and our players.

Sports in America have the unique ability to bring people from all walks of life and from different points of view together to work toward or root for a common goal, and the Indianapolis Colts are proud to be a part of that tradition in our home city and state.

The vast majority of players in the NFL — especially those who have worn and continue to wear the Horseshoe — have donated millions of dollars to charities, raised money for those affected by recent hurricanes, created charitable foundations, visited schools,

mentored students, worked in homeless shelters, cleaned up parks, and put in hours of their personal time toward improving their communities and the lives of those around them.

That's the spirit in which this nation was founded, and we all need to work tirelessly to bring people together to take on the challenges that face us and give back to the people of our communities. More so than any result on the field, that is a common goal worth rooting for.

Jimmy and Dee Haslem, Owners of the Cleveland Browns (the Colts opponent that week) would go on to issue their own statement:

We view our organization, our league and our players as great unifiers of people. Our players, just like so many others across our league, have been honest and thoughtful with their attempt to bring awareness to the issues of inequality and social injustice. We were incredibly moved by the meaningful and powerful dialogue they initiated within our organization when they spoke of their intent to unify and not be disrespectful while using familiar and important terms like one nation, indivisible with liberty and justice for all. Their intent is to create positive and unifying change and that was demonstrated well by the unity they led prior to our home opener. They have continued to prove this dedication to unite diverse members of our community throughout this past month by establishing direct conversation with the Cleveland Police Department and creating a plan to work together in our neighborhoods. We are also proud of their many other significant efforts in our city throughout the year that are done quietly to improve the lives of others.

We must not let misguided, uninformed and divisive comments from the President or anyone else deter us from our efforts to unify. Our stance in support of the liberties of peaceful, personal expression afforded to our players and all Americans will remain strong, and we will continue to encourage our players to respectfully use their earned platform to inspire positive change in our nation and throughout society. (Fischer, 2017)

While the majority of the league admonished Trump, some fans booed the players on the field. It became clear that as players around the league rallied around each other and in support of “Take a Knee,” protest that Kaepernick started, the portion of fans that felt Kaepernick’s form of protest had more to do with disrespecting the flag than support of equity and awareness, began to become more vocal about their displeasure. Fans booed the kneeling players on the field. Fans boycotted games, and some even cancelled their premiere DIRECTV NFL Sunday Ticket subscriptions.

DIRECTV went against its own policy concerning canceling subscription services. Normally once the NFL season begins, it no longer offers a full refund. However in September 2017, amid the mounting protests by NFL players and owners, DIRECTV seemingly caved. (Flint, 2017) Among the reasons that it might have reversed this policy was that viewership was down through three weeks of the 2017 season by 11% from the previous season. (Ozanian, 2017)

Not only was DIRECTV offering refunds, but when ratings began to dip near the end of the 2016 season, and continued to dip in the 2017 season, fan perception of the NFL players protest began to hurt the broadcasting services of NFL games. In the early part of the 2017

season, the stock of the companies (Comcast, Walt Disney, Fox, and CBS) that broadcast the games was down 1% to 8%. (Ozanian, 2017)

Further fallout from the protests would appear in the 2018 season. While the NFL players and owners showed some solidarity on the field during the 2017 season, off the field Kaepernick was paying the price for starting the protests. On March 3, 2017, Kaepernick severed his ties with the 49ers and opted out of his contract. (Biderman, 2017) The day before, Kaepernick spread the word that he would no longer kneel during the National Anthem.

Adam Schefter reported:

Kaepernick no longer wants his method of protest to detract from the positive change he believes has been created, sources told ESPN. He also said the amount of national discussion on social inequality -- as well as support from other athletes nationwide, including NFL and NBA players -- affirmed the message he was trying to deliver.

Soon after news broke that Kaepernick would no longer kneel in protest during the National Anthem, players, fans, and news pundits would voice their displeasure. Many felt that Kaepernick had sold out in an effort to save his career.

Famous media personality Colin Cowherd had this to say:

Yeah, courage. Courage is you're on the street, need to get paid and taking a stand. So, whether I agree or not, what does this tell you? It feels like a sellout to me. Feels like selling out to me, and I defended Kaepernick. I defended him on the kneel. I said that's the world we live in. People protest. (Cowherd, 2017)

Former NFL player Michael Vick had praise for Kaepernick and the stand he took, however Vick claimed that Kaepernick's unemployment had less to do with the protest, and more to do with his lackluster play of the previous two seasons.

In Vick's (2017) own words:

It has nothing to do with him being blackballed. The gesture that he made last year when he took the stand to do what he did, listen, we all appreciated it, we respected it, and it was a good thing. I really think the stand that he took has nothing to do with him not having a job playing in the NFL right now. And being frank, Colin didn't have the best two years his last two seasons. It wasn't as productive as what we've seen him do.

Examining Vick's statement Dylan Gwinn (2017) observed:

Kaepernick has clearly regressed statistically in the last couple years. Though, it's unlikely that his protest has nothing to do with him failing to land a roster spot.

Kaepernick ranked seventeenth in quarterback rating last year out of 30 eligible players. He did that with one of the worst receiving corps in the NFL. That performance put him ahead of Eli Manning, Philip Rivers, and other quarterbacks of some achievement. Which would suggest he's good enough to play in the NFL, even if only as a back-up.

However, unless a player is going to produce at the level of a legitimate starter, or Pro Bowl caliber player, then why would anyone bring in a public relations nightmare like Kaepernick?

In 2017, Kaepernick was in a situation where no matter what decision he made, standing, kneeling, protesting, not protesting, there was going to be a perception about his actions, both

positive and negative that would follow him wherever he went. In the months after his departure from the 49ers, the prognostication of Gwinn seemed prophetic, Kaepernick remained unemployed as team after team hired quarterbacks that many considered less talented than Kaepernick.

On October 7, 2017, Stephen Ross owner of the Miami Dolphins and longtime supporter of civil rights commented on the changing public perception of the National Anthem protests. Stephen Ross had long been a supporter of the protests, and had allowed his players to protest without condemnation, nor punitive measures. In fact as of the end of the 2018, the Dolphins had at least one player (Kenny Stills) protest every week of the season. However Ross began to worry about public perception in the wake of President Trump's comments, and how the public no longer viewed the protest as a protest to create equality, but that the players were unpatriotic.

Ross (2017) said:

It's a different dialogue today. Whenever you're dealing with the flag, you're dealing with something different. (Trump) has changed that whole paradigm of what protest is. I think it's incumbent upon the players today, because of how the public is looking at it, is to stand and salute the flag. It all started a conversation, which we started a couple years ago, and I've been supportive of them...

I believe in these social causes, and it's really what football stands for today and the paradigm of how people are looking to sports to create change. Sports is really the great equalizer amongst everybody. It's a common denominator. So I think what was done was great—what they did started last year—but it's taken a different tone this year.

The opinion of one owner about public perception isn't enough to gauge what the majority of the owners felt. When the evidence is examined and combined with Ross's statement, combined with the early 2017 financial losses and a policy change to the NFL's National Anthem guidelines, made it clear that the NFL was indeed worried. When examined as a whole, the evidence supports the idea that the National Anthem protests were affecting profits.

While the owners were beginning to acknowledge that the protests were taking on a different public perception than intended, Kaepernick had been unemployed for months. Kaepernick felt the NFL leadership conspired to keep him off the field. On October 15, 2017, he filed a grievance against the NFL, and all NFL franchise owners.

As stated in the grievance:

...have colluded to deprive Mr. Kaepernick of employment rights in retaliation for Mr. Kaepernick's leadership and advocacy for equality and social justice and his bringing awareness to peculiar institutions still undermining racial equality in the United States.

If the NFL (as well as all professional sports teams) is to remain a meritocracy, then principled and peaceful protest -- which the owners themselves made great theater imitating weeks ago -- should not be punished and athletes should not be denied employment based on partisan political provocation by the Executive Branch of our government,

Such a precedent threatens all patriotic Americans and harkens back to our darkest days as a nation. Protecting all athletes from such collusive conduct is what compelled Mr. Kaepernick to file his grievance.

Kaepernick's goal has always been, and remains, to simply be treated fairly by the league he performed at the highest level for and to return to the football playing field...

(Geragos, 2017)

Former teammate and fellow protestor Eric Reid weighed in on the grievance:

I'll have to follow up with him. It sure does seem like he's being blackballed. I think all the stats prove that he's an NFL-worthy quarterback. So that's his choice, and I support his decision. We'll just have to see what comes of it. (Reid, 2017)

The Kaepernick grievance wouldn't be settled in 2017 or 2018, but what did happen was that the NFL, in order to alleviate itself of the drama surrounding the player protests of the national Anthem decided to create new policies regarding player participation and guidelines. This policy change would have been a welcome relief to those against the protest, or at least how the protest was conducted. Those in favor of the protest were very outspoken about the policy change.

April 25, 2018, NFL Commissioner Roger Goodell, NFL Owners, and the NFL Players Association (NFLPA) met to discuss the protests. To illustrate how important this meeting was to the NFL, rarely do owners and players meet in such a manner. In what was intended to be a confidential meeting, an audio recording obtained by the New York Times of the nearly three hour meeting. This recording revealed that the players were aggrieved that Kaepernick still was not on an NFL roster. The Owners were intent to avoid further political scrutiny from President Trump. The Owners were concerned about the anger of a large number of fans and sponsors over the protests. (Belson & Leibovich, 2018)

May 23, 2018, nearly a month after the meeting, the NFL took the next step to protect its image and its sagging ratings, (NFL ratings were down 10% for the 2017 season. Schefter, 2018) Roger Goodell and the NFL Owners unanimously implemented a National Anthem policy. This new policy required players to either stand on the sideline or stay in the locker room during the National Anthem. The policy also stated that players who were on the field who did not show proper etiquette would be fined by the NFL. Once again the NFL was worried about public perception as Roger Goodell's statement confirmed: "It was unfortunate that on-field protests created a false perception among many that thousands of NFL players were unpatriotic. This is not and was never the case." (Goodell, 2018)

Soon after the policy announcement, the players and fans who supported the protest voiced their displeasure about the changes. Because the NFL did not consult the NFLPA prior to announcing the new policy, the NFLPA filed a grievance challenging the NFL's National Anthem Policy. Later In a statement made by the NFLPA, it was announced that the NFLPA and the NFL would conduct confidential meetings to discuss the policy and attempt to come to a compromise in advance of litigation.

On July 20, 2018, the NFL and the NFLPA released a joint statement that the National Anthem Policy had been put on hold for the duration of the 2018 NFL season. While the statement claimed that the League was working on a resolution, there would be no punitive measures taken against players who chose to continue their protest. It also promised to continue to discuss the issue in good faith, outside of litigation. (NFLPA, 2018)

The National Anthem protests would continue unabated for the duration of the 2018 season. One player, Kenny Stills of the Miami Dolphins would continue to kneel on a weekly

basis. Stills, became the most visible face of the protest after Kaepernick. Stills, unlike Kaepernick, began with a clear and concise message for his protest, and explained:

Once your eyes are open to some of the things that are happening, you continue to work and try and grow and create change for the rest of your life, so this is something I'm committed to forever. It's not about being the face or who gets the notoriety for it. It's just what I care about outside of work and what I spend my time doing when I'm not here working for the Dolphins. (Stills, 2018)

Even though other players had taken Kaepernick's torch and continued to run with it, he still managed to find himself in the news. On September 3, 2018, Nike had decided that Kaepernick should be the face of its 30th anniversary. Nike's first ad featuring Kaepernick showcased a close-up of his face with the tagline, "Believe in something. Even if it means sacrificing everything."

This of course was an extremely risky move, signing such a derisive figurehead could've easily backfired on Nike. And it did have some very predictable results, as a large contingent of consumers decided they would boycott Nike. Many of the boycotters claimed that because Nike supported Kaepernick, that they would burn or destroy their Nike merchandise. In many cases the destroyed merchandise was already bought and paid for. (Abad-Santos, 2018) On the flip side, Nike was marketing to the 15-17 year old demographic (Rovell, 2018) and betting heavily that while they would lose profit in one area, their target demographic would more than make up for it. In the days after starting the new ad campaign featuring Kaepernick, it saw a sales increase by 31% over the same time period the previous year. (Pengelly, 2018)

Kaepernick's protest began on the sideline, cost him a spot in the NFL and potentially millions of dollars. And while it's quite possible he recouped some of that money with his Nike endorsement, his legacy came into question when he settled his collusion case against the NFL on February 15, 2019. (Schad, 2019) Many considered Kaepernick to be the face of the National Anthem protest, even though he hadn't been on the field to protest in two full seasons.

There were Kaepernick supporters who immediately took to social media to call him a sellout. Even NFL players were joining the outrage. Former NFL Pro Bowl running back Larry Johnson made his thoughts on Kaepernick known to TMZ Sports:

If your backdrop is going to be the African American civil rights presence that it brought from the '60s and you're going to use that for your own causes, you don't sell out. You don't turn your message into a Nike hoodie. (Johnson, 2019)

Others weren't so quick to label him a sellout, but they did call into question what his legacy would be. Would he be the hero athlete that fell on a sword to further social justice and equality? Or would he be that player who didn't like his contract and protested his way right out of the NFL?

The creator of The Olympic Project for Human Rights, and inspiration of the iconic Black Power Salute, Harry Edwards discussed his views about the settlement. Edwards had been in Kaepernick's corner. Edwards was not only a supporter of Kaepernick, but also a mentor. He was one of the people that Kaepernick had spoken to prior to his protest to seek advice and had discussed the issue of race many times. After news broke about the settlement, he didn't

admonish Kaepernick. Instead he suggested that Kaepernick needed to make a bold move to cement his legacy.

Edwards stated:

What Kaepernick is going to do is become the Muhammad Ali of his era. He's got to come up with a great move, because what has happened now is that he has been defined, not by what he actually did, but by people's perceptions of the relevance of what he did. He has to craft a post-take-a-knee movement presence and impact, and that's tough.

To fully appreciate this societal event, one could consider that it really is about perception. At the core there are two opposing perceptions, where one side wanted to focus on the issue of equality, and stopping injustice, and the other was trying to protect a flag and national pride. These perceptions are not constrained by age, sex, ethnicity, or religion. One just has to look through social media to find any combination of traits, both for or against the National Anthem protest. Over three seasons of National Anthem protests, and the only awareness the protest really brought about was that two sides couldn't look past the method the message was delivered to pay attention to the message itself.

In 2018, Kareem Abdul-Jabbar wrote an open letter to NFL owners concerning the National Anthem protests and Kaepernick. In this letter he made several points about patriotism and protest. Among the points he made and perhaps the most thought provoking in regards to the effectiveness of the protest:

It's been two years since Kaepernick first took a knee to protest systemic racial injustice, especially police brutality, against people of color. The worst thing about that isn't that

two years later we're still debating whether players have the right to protest, it's that not much has changed regarding what Kaepernick was protesting. (Abdul-Jabbar, 2018)

Possible Solution

It's questionable what legacy the protest has had, or will have. What is possible is to look at it from the outside and examine what could've been done to further the conversation without dividing those who needed to listen.

First, the timing could've been better. After an offseason of personal turmoil, trade talks, and losing his starter's position, it was unlikely that his protest would be perceived as altruistic by the target audience. If he had taken this stance while he was the unquestioned starter (a few years earlier he was a SuperBowl starting quarterback,) he would've had a much more powerful and first stage to stand on.

It is possible to protest before and after the National Anthem, not just during. This middle ground (if taken during the height of his power as a football player) would've gone a long way to avoid upsetting the very patriotic and would've done more to get people to question the purpose of his protest rather than the means of his protest. If Kaepernick had taken a less abrasive protest approach to begin with, then gauge the effectiveness of the protest, he could've adjusted his visibility and garnered more support along the way. It was the lack of support in the early going that really clouded his message and purpose. By taking things to the extreme he left himself with no viable means to progress the protest, nor any means to take it back down a notch. He was stuck at the point, any sign of weakness, and he would be deemed a sellout.

Kaepernick did consult those who had led protests themselves, but he didn't do enough homework or value the feelings of others enough to really consider the long term effect his protest would have. Had he cared enough for the feelings of others, he would've known those that needed to listen, most likely would not, because they would be too busy paying attention to what they considered was a group of rich athletes disrespecting both the flag, the military, and those who had fought and died for our nation.

The most important thing to do before the protest was to get as much support as possible from everyone in the league, from the owners, to the players, cheerleaders, even the ball boy. Get everyone on the same page, demonstrate the unity and diversity of the NFL working towards a common goal. Ask other players to reach out in their home cities, to donate time, and money. Spread the message to the local communities through actions and words.

Laying this groundwork would've given Kaepernick's message clarity, conviction, and solidarity with the NFL and host cities. Then Kaepernick's first press conference to announce he was spearheading a protest, with the support of the NFL, players, and cities. He would've controlled the narrative, rather than let someone else explain it for him. Following that, announce the charity work, donations, and the desire to start a grassroots campaign to reach out to both sides and bring the community together to improve race relations and really understand just how far apart the two sides are from being equal.

After three years, it's clear that perception has really minimized the impact of what the protestors were attempting. Not only was the initial message unclear, control and power was never aligned to get the message through to those who needed to hear it the most. A perfect example how perception can shape the outcome of a conflict.

Timeline of Kaepernick's Protest



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