

The Wired Word

Sunday, September 25, 2016
(Student Copy)

Dear Class Member,

It says something about the nature of news cycles that during the week when *The Wired Word* decided to use the story of San Francisco 49er quarterback Colin Kaepernick not standing during the playing of the national anthem at games that *Forbes* ran a piece headlined, "The Colin Kaepernick Story Appears to Be Over."

Of course, *Forbes* wasn't saying that Kaepernick's story is really over, only that the media has now mostly moved on to other news. The NFLer has said his refusal to stand is in protest of what he deems are wrongdoings against African-Americans and minorities in the United States. His action gives us an opportunity to think about the matter of taking a position, even an unpopular one, and when doing so might be a matter of faithfulness to God. So that will be the topic of our next class.

If you wish to start thinking about our topic in advance, below is some introductory material.

The Wired Word invites us to contribute news story suggestions for upcoming lessons. If you have a story you'd like to suggest, post it to *The Wired Word* forum at <http://thewiredword.squarespace.com/>.



Footballer Kaepernick Continues Protest, Kneeling During National Anthem

The Wired Word for the Week of September 25, 2016

In the News

Throughout the National Football League's preseason games, Colin Kaepernick, a backup quarterback for the San Francisco 49ers, has declined to stand during the playing of the national anthem. He explained that he took this action to call attention to what he perceives as wrongdoings against African-Americans and other minorities, particularly when it comes to certain police actions.

More specifically, Kaepernick said he was demonstrating support for the Black Lives Matter cause, sparked by a series of killings by police of young black men. Questioned by reporters after the first time he did not stand for the anthem, Kaepernick said, "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."

While he initially remained seated while the anthem was played, starting with the preseason game on September 1, he opted to kneel during the anthem, explaining the switch as an attempt to show more respect to former and current U.S. military members while still registering his protest. He said he made the decision after having a conversation with former NFL player and U.S. military veteran Nate Boyer.

As Kaepernick's protest continued, some other athletes, including footballers Eric Reid, Jeremy Lane, Jelani Jenkins, Arian Foster, Michael Thomas and Kenny Stills, as well as U.S. women's national soccer team player Megan Rapinoe, have also knelt during national anthem playings at their events. A number of U.S. military veterans have voiced support using the social media hashtag "veterans for Kaepernick," and Kaepernick's jersey was briefly the top-selling jersey on the NFL's official shop website.

While acknowledging some of the criticism, President Obama commended Kaepernick, declaring that he was "exercising his constitutional right" concerning "some real, legitimate issues that have to be talked about." The NFL commissioner, who had refused to allow the Dallas Cowboys to honor police officers slain at a Black Lives Matter protest, ironically was quoted as saying that he supports "players when they want to see a change in

society," although he coupled it with a statement that "it's important to have respect for our country, for our flag."

Opposition to Kaepernick's refusal to stand for the anthem has been made in four areas:

1. The desire for politics-free sports. Some people want sports -- as well as much other entertainment -- be politics-free zones. They look upon sports venues as places where people can come together and, for a while, forget about what divides them from each other on a more significant basis than the team they support.
2. An expectation of community. One way people show that they are a community is by joining their fellow citizens in what might be called "rituals of unity": public demonstrations that, despite differences, show that Americans have a basic unity. Thus some view Kaepernick's refusal to stand for the national anthem as a declaration, "I'm not part of your community."
3. A belief by some that the Black Lives Matter movement is basically in the wrong. In particular, that it is harmful to race relations in general and to both black and non-black citizens overall, and encourages divisiveness and animosity.
4. A perception by some that by refusing to stand for the anthem, Kaepernick is being unpatriotic and disrespectful.

The opposition has manifested itself in various ways. One unidentified NFL executive called Kaepernick "a traitor," and some NFL fans have posted videos of themselves burning Kaepernick jerseys. One store uses a Kaepernick jersey as a doormat, providing an opportunity for customers to wipe their feet in protest.

Some people who disagree with Kaepernick have also come in for criticism. At a high school football game in Alabama, Pastor Allen Joyner who was a volunteer announcer, resigned after he was reported to have said, after calling people to stand for the anthem, "If you don't want to stand for the national anthem, you can line up over there by the fence and let our military personnel take a few shots at you since they're taking shots for you." Joyner says that he was misquoted, explaining, "I never said anybody should be shot. My words were, 'If you don't want to stand for the national anthem, please go sit at the baseball field and let some of our folks take a shot at reminding you of the price our military paid for your freedom to sit.'" Whatever he actually said, school officials quickly denounced his remarks.

Kaepernick was baptized Methodist, confirmed Lutheran, and attended a Baptist church during his college years. At a speaking engagement at a local church last year, he said, "My faith is the basis from where my game comes from. I've been very blessed to have the talent to play the game that I do and be successful at it. I think God guides me through every day and helps me take the right steps and has helped me to get to where I'm at. When I step on the field, I always say a prayer, say I am thankful to be able to wake up that morning and go out there and try to glorify the Lord with what I do on the field. I think if you go out and try to do that, no matter what you do on the field, you can be happy about what you did."

Kaepernick has several tattoos, with Bible verses among his inkings.

In the United States, one's refusal to participate in patriotic ceremonies and rituals -- such as standing for the playing of the national anthem or refusing to say the pledge of allegiance -- is protected by the 1946 U.S. Supreme Court decision *West Virginia State Board of Education v. Barnette* regarding freedom of expression. Writing for the majority position, Justice Robert Jackson said:

To believe that patriotism will not flourish if patriotic ceremonies are voluntary and spontaneous, instead of a compulsory routine, is to make an unflattering estimate of the appeal of our institutions to free minds. We can have intellectual individualism and the rich cultural diversities that we owe to exceptional minds only at the price of occasional eccentricity and abnormal attitudes. When they are so harmless to others or to the State as those we deal with here, the price is not too great. But freedom to differ is not

limited to things that do not matter much. That would be a mere shadow of freedom. The test of its substance is the right to differ as to things that touch the heart of the existing order.

More on this story can be found at these links:

[The Colin Kaepernick Story Appears To Be Over. *Forbes*](#)

[Colin Kaepernick Explains Why He Sat During National Anthem. *NFL.com*](#)

[Colin Kaepernick Kneels During National Anthem While Former Green Beret Nate Boyer Stands Beside Him. *Los Angeles Times*](#)

[Jelani Jenkins: Why I Knelt During the National Anthem -- And Why It's Time to Stand Up. *TIME*](#)

[Colin Kaepernick: Why His National Anthem Protests Have Touched a Nerve. *Christian Today*](#)

[Colin Kaepernick and a Landmark Supreme Court Case. *The New Yorker*](#)

The Big Questions

Here are some of the questions we will discuss in class:

1. Should U.S. citizens be expected or encouraged to participate in public patriotic rituals where they are in attendance? Why or why not? What do such rituals demonstrate? What does refusal to participate demonstrate? Would you answer the same way if the question were about church members' participation in Christian rituals, such as recitation of the Apostles' Creed or the communal praying of the Lord's Prayer? If so, why? If not, why not?
2. When, if ever, have you decided that something that was legal needed to be changed and thus, taken an unpopular stand against it? Like Kaepernick, did you find yourself basically supported by the establishment, or, like Pastor Joyner, were you basically opposed by those in power? What did you learn from that process? In what way, if any, were you blessed by your participation? Was there a time you did not take a stand against a popular sentiment that you felt was wrong and later regretted that you did nothing?
3. Over time, some people who at the time regarded as wrong certain protests, such as those in the 1960s over civil rights, have come to view them as a necessary right. Other protests, such as blocking black children from entering previously all-white schools, have come to be viewed as absolutely wrong. Do you think Kaepernick's protest will stand the test of time? Why or why not?
4. What is the story behind the word "Protestant"? In what way, if any, does it apply to this lesson?
5. Are there any ways that Kaepernick could have chosen to raise his concerns that might have been more effective than not standing for the anthem? If so, what are they?

Confronting the News With Scripture and Hope

We will look at selected verses from these Scripture texts. You may wish to read these in advance for background:

[Daniel 3:1-30](#)

[Daniel 6:1-28](#)

[Luke 10:1-12](#)

In class, we will talk about these passages and look for some insight into the big questions, as well as talk about other questions you may have about this topic. Please join us.