

## Protest doesn't send right message

**Personal Column**  
**Tanner Carlson**  
Assistant editor



Colin Kaepernick first sat on the bench during the national anthem before two preseason games on Aug. 14 and Aug. 20, 2016. The quarterback began kneeling once the media started to recognize his protest.

Kaepernick further explained his reasoning behind the protest, his reason being in a report from Mark Sandritter for SBNation, "I'm going to continue to stand with the people that are being oppressed... When there's significant change and I feel that flag represents what it's supposed to represent, and this country is representing the way that it's supposed to, I'll stand."

The original protest had begun while former President Barack Obama was in office.

The point I am trying to make is that the players protesting the flag during the 2017 season, especially in week three of the season, are protesting what current President Donald Trump said at a republican rally in Alabama.

"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.'"

I am going to touch on those extremely disrespectful, unwarranted, and un-presidential comments later, but for now I'll stick to the players.

The protest as of lately seemed to be a rebellious act against President Trump. Which is not at all the original message Kaepernick was sending. I found myself loss of the meaning during the protest these last couple of weeks. Are they protesting oppression in America, or the President?

I question the mass of protest, because of how the teams went back to their usual stance during the anthem a week later, for the most part. Some players continue to kneel, or sit during the anthem, but it does not consist of entire teams kneeling, or just not taking the field for the anthem like they had the previous week.

If teams had continued to show strong stances for oppression, then I would not question what they're kneeling for. However, a week later, when teams league wide went back to their regular program, it made me question what they were protesting.

To me, the league rebelled against the president's comments, in a protest that originally was against oppression to minorities in this country. That being said, as a journalist, I fully support freedom of speech, and expression. I am not saying the players do not have

the right to voice their opinions, I just feel as though this protest is not causing unity in the country, but in fact causing more division. I fully support the cause of standing up for the oppressed, I just feel the way the players are doing it disrespects the flag.

Now it is time to talk about the disgraceful, sickening, and unprofessional comments made by President Trump. Again, as stated before, I support first amendment rights, so the president has every right to say/tweet what he wants, regardless of agreement or not with his comments/tweets.

President Trump calling these players sons of bitches is extremely insensitive, uncalled for, disrespectful, and just plain rude. The NFL is full of bright minded and unbelievably talented individuals. The majority of these players are graduates from some of the top universities in the country, and many of them probably have family, or friends in the military. They respect the military, do not get it confused that the NFL is protesting the military. What the president said seemed so high school drama, like name calling immature pre-teens that throw fits because mommy and daddy told them no. The president of the United States is supposed to take the high road, and not stoop down to such immaturities like name calling, and cursing. Likewise, if I were an NFL player and someone had called myself, or one of my teammates a son of a bitch, then I too would feel resentment, and feel the need to rebel, especially if that person was the leader of our nation.

Still, not saying what the players did send a message was the right thing to do. I would have loved to see the players get it right, by taking the high road over Trump's comments, but instead they fell right into the trap he wanted them to fall in causing nationwide resentment towards the players.

Players that are sticking up for what is right to the oppressed minorities, many of them that may have been an oppressed minority at one point in their life.

Trump has purposely made this protest about himself and taken the attention from the original statement which is to support the oppression. The NFL is only being criticized for being disrespectful to the military. Whereas, Trump was just as disrespectful calling them names and for cursing at the NFL players.

I do not consider this a cop out, but both parties are wrong. The league was wrong by straying from the original message of Kaepernick, and the president was wrong by disrespecting the players and by causing the protest to be about him.

*Tanner Carlson is a senior majoring in communication. You may email him at [tanner.carlson@sckans.edu](mailto:tanner.carlson@sckans.edu)*

## Bill of Rights offers right to protest

**Personal Column**  
**Cale Eirich**  
Staff reporter



Peaceful protests have been engrained in the very fabric of our democracy since the founding fathers penned the bill of rights in the preamble of their new country's constitution.

The first amendment of that constitution, the freedom of religion, speech, and the press, contains the right of the people peacefully to assemble and to petition the government for a redress of grievances.

More than 240 years later, the ethics of the way you peacefully protest are in question. At the very center of this controversy sits the one of the nation's most popular past-times, the NFL. Over the past week roughly 200 NFL players knelt during the playing of the national anthem, a decision that was met with boos, support, and continuous criticism from the President of the United States.

Donald Trump has criticized both players and owners, urging them to force their players to stand for the anthem. On Sept. 30, Trump tweeted, "Very important that NFL players STAND tomorrow, and always, for the playing of our National Anthem. Respect our Flag and our Country!" While this issue has heated up recently following the president's strong words saying, "Get that son of bitch off the field right now, out, he's fired." This comment came in reference of how he believes NFL owners should respond to their players peacefully protesting during the national anthem. But this protest is one that is not new to the NFL nor political discourse.

With all movements there are pioneers, and those pioneers are not always celebrated immediately. Over a year ago, San Francisco 49ers quarterback, Colin Kaepernick, made his decision to sit through the national anthem. He sat on the bench somewhat inconspicuously during the 49ers first pre-season game of 2016, but his silent protest did not go unnoticed for long.

"To be honest, I didn't notice at the time, and neither did the news media," said teammate Eric Reid in an article he himself published in the New York Times. The two then collaborated and discussed how they could use their platform as athletes to combat systematic oppression against people of color.

Kaepernick's protest eventually evolved from sitting during the national anthem, to kneeling, a move he saw as less disrespectful to the flag, and the men and women who protect what it stands for. "I am not going to stand up to show pride in a flag for a country

that oppresses black people and people of color," said Kaepernick. "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 leaved and getting away with murder." The very leader of this movement has been absent since opting out of his contract with San Francisco after impending cuts following an abysmal pre-season.

Since the initial protest, we have seen a change in leadership of our country, and a change in reality. Despite the original message, the falsehood that the athletes are disrespecting our flag continues, due in large part to the fixation of Donald Trump. It is an issue that most have chosen to ignore.

The way people of color have been treated has been detrimental to our society. To some it is easier to attack the way they perceive the protest and cling to their belief system.

Among ways to disrespect the flag are laying the flag horizontally and wearing the flag, one we do before many NFL games, and the other we see daily. So is the issue in the way athletes are protesting, or what they are protesting for. Donald Trump tweeted in 2011, "Burning a flag is a peaceful and respectful way for citizens of this great country to voice their displeasure. Very powerful."

Kneeling during the national anthem though has been perceived as un-American and anti-military. But, many who have served see this issue differently. Former Green beret Michael Sand said, "it is PRECISELY for men like (Kaepernick), and his right to peacefully protest injustice, that we were willing to serve."

We can now focus on the real issue that athletes are forcing many to address. Instead of ostracizing athletes for their use of freedom of expression, we must celebrate them for using their platform to make a difference. For many, like Kaepernick, their decision has been met with great criticism. Great change causes many to cling to their old ways, standing for the anthem is a tradition we've grown accustomed to. As any powerful movement, the players protest of inequality has evolved.

Whether the rebirth of the movement is reactionary to Donald Trump's attack on the league, or they are still working towards equality for all, does not matter. The debate has been reborn, stronger now than ever.

Political views aside, we cannot ignore the plight of others in our country. Athletes with the ability to create change are refusing to stand for inequality, and forcing us to ask if the flag we stand for stands for all of us. Peaceful protests have brought us to unimaginable heights and changed our society, but we still have a difficult path ahead we can no longer ignore. Someday we will celebrate the athletes that made the important choice to do the unpopular, and kneel for what they believed in.

*Cale Eirich is a junior majoring in communication. You may email him at [eirich@sckans.edu](mailto:eirich@sckans.edu)*