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## Editor's Notes

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## The Editor's Notes

Fall brings football and as we all know, football has its intrigues. This year brings Nike's support for Colin Kaepernick as they reinvigorate their "Just Do It" campaign. For the moment, let's leave aside Nike's motivations; in fact, let's leave Nike aside altogether. Kaepernick is the center of this storm. He has been reviled as unpatriotic for attacking the dignity of the Flag and our military. He has been ostracized by the NFL, whose owners refuse to employ him, while they also attempt to implement a policy that would force players either to stand for the national anthem or stay in the locker room until it is over. This policy was put on hold through a grievance filed by the NFL Players Association. Some college teams have implemented this policy. In turn, the media has decided not to begin NFL game coverage until after the anthem is played.

But when we reflect, we know, though we may not want to admit it, that Kaepernick is not to be reviled. Does he make us uncomfortable? I hope so. Was he unpatriotic and disrespectful to the Flag and our armed forces? Hardly. When Kaepernick knelt during the anthem he did more than make a statement about the social conditions he sees and experiences every day. He also paid homage to the underlying principles this country was founded upon, and this goes beyond first amendment rights. He also presented to all of us the risks, the rewards, and virtues of active civic engagement.

Certainly Kaepernick echoes those who had come before – John Carlos and Tommie Smith at the '68 Olympics; Muhammed Ali and the poetic justice the emanated from Rehnquist Court decision; the Black 14 at the University of Wyoming; the Syracuse 8, among others. All of these "athletes" risked everything to make their statements heard. But there is more here than just athletes using their celebrity to exercise their right to speak about the need to address equality and equity. Kaepernick echoes others.

In late August 1963 King told us:

In a sense we've come to our nation's capital to cash a check. When the the architects of our Republic wrote the magnificent works of the Constitution a and the Declaration of Independence they were signing a promissory note to which every American was to fall heir. That note was a promise that all men – yes, black me as well as white men – would be guaranteed the unalienable rights of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. It is obvious today that America has defaulted on this promissory noted insofar as her citizens are concerned. Instead of honoring this sacred obligation, America has given the Negro people as bad check, a check which has come back marked "insufficient funds."

(I Have a Dream Speech)

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In his quiet act of kneeling, Kaepernick challenges us to reflect on this. But there are others who would risk everything who echo through Kaepernick's silent gesture. Let us remember that the Declaration of Independence itself was an act of high treason. The signers were well aware of this. We remember this from Franklin, who penned in a letter prior to signing the Declaration "We must indeed all hang together, or most assuredly we shall all hang separately". If we believe the Declaration of Independence to be a living document, Kaepernick tells us it must be lived and not just read on NPR every Fourth of July.

Kaepernick's act also echoes John Locke. The framers of the Constitution and Declaration of Independence were influenced by Locke's writings on the social contract and government. His thinking, indeed his language, can be seen throughout the Declaration and taught the framers to think about and implement the "checks and balances" that protect "the minority from the tyranny of the majority." For Locke, "the justification of the authority of the executive component of government is the protection of the people's property and well-being, so when such protection is no longer present, or when the king becomes a tyrant and acts against the interests of the people, they have the right, if not the outright obligation, to resist his authority" (*Social Contract Theory, Encyclopedia of Philosophy*). This is an act of civic engagement.

I do not want to suggest that we should either agree or disagree with Kaepernick. But we should not dismiss him. In taking a knee, he challenges us to become "political", but not in a traditional sense of protesting, bringing out the vote, or organizing community events. He challenges us to be political in way Thucydides wanted us to reflect on being "political" – to actively engage with other people on every level, from our families and neighborhoods to our country as a community, and to look consciously and purposefully at our unending negotiations with each other. In his simple act, he challenges us to look at whom we are and whom we could be. Kaepernick challenges us to civically engage not in a class room activity or a servant-learning project but with each other, day-to-day, every day.

Isn't this what we strive for when claim on our campuses that we want our students to strengthen their dispositions for civic engagement? Perhaps.....

--Ned Scott Laff, Ph.D.--

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