**[OpEd] Colin Kaepernick is a Hero**

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One pitfall of a month-long editorial process is that something that’s “in the news” when you start writing about it may no longer be “in the news” once it goes to press. I would guess that, by the time you are reading this, Colin Kaepernick will no longer be in the headlines. Yet, I feel his actions have been momentous enough to merit an article.

Colin Kaepernick, as you are probably well aware, refused to (and, possibly, continues to refuse to) stand for the national anthem. “I am not going to stand up to show pride in a flag for a country that oppresses black people and people of color," he told NFL Media on August 27th. "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."

The Santa Clara Police Officer’s Association, some of whose represented officers contract as security for the 49ers, called Kaepernick’s statement “obviously insulting, inaccurate, and completely unsupported by facts.” The officers have a right to not contract for the 49ers, but are they correct in saying Kaepernick’s statement is “completely unsupported by facts”?

**Who’s Right?**

Unfortunately, it’s hard to obtain reliable statistics when it comes to policing, as departments are generally stingy when it comes to releasing data. For instance, the most recent Beaueu of Justice Statistics (BJS) report relied on a survey of drivers. It found that black individuals (12.8 percent) were more slightly likely to be pulled over than Hispanic individuals (10.4 percent) and white individuals (10.2 percent), while blacks (6.3 percent) and Hispanics (6.6 percent) were significantly more likely than whites to be searched once pulled over (2.3 percent).

The surveys that do exist are based on samples of departments that provide detailed information willingly, but even then may be biased by underreporting. In two separate surveys, from July 2016, both found that while use of lethal force does not significantly vary between blacks and whites, the use of *nonlethal* force—where individuals are grabbed, pushed, handcuffed, and even tazed—*is* more commonly used on blacks than it is whites.

At the very least, then, we exist in a fog of uncertainty. Anecdotal accounts will paint the picture that blacks have worse police experience than whites, but the data simply doesn’t exist to prove this one way or the other. Which is where better oversight, reporting, body and dashcams, and training all come into play.

**Unfortunately, Activism Can Backfire**

This brings us to Black Lives Matter, a movement which has been instrumental in ushering in many of these reforms. Yet, I fear, they may also be breeding resentment among the whites whose votes and support may be essential to realizing the full spectrum of the changes Black Lives Matter seeks—changes, to be clear, that will benefit everybody. This, I know, ventures into the “white savior” territory—the white-appealing idea that black people can’t possibly save themselves without a white savior, à la *To Kill a Mockingbird*—yet, in a democracy, there is truth to it so long as whites maintain a majority. A change may be *just*, it may help literally *every* person in a country, but if a majority of people believe otherwise, it is unlikely to come about.

I support Black Lives Matter, and I believe every person who has participated in the movement is doing so in order to effect good. But, I worry that some of the activities it has partaken in, such as blocking traffic and disrupting malls and airports, will hurt the movement and its goals. I know many otherwise liberal white people whose opinion of the movement is negative, not because of the goals they support, but because of the methods they employ.

Yet, effective protest still needs to be heard. Yelling into the wind is not “protesting,” which is why these disruptions seem so effective—they *will* be heard, even if they don’t convince people of one’s cause.

To give numbers to this problem, a recent pew survey found that 12 percent of blacks, 11 percent of Hispanics, and 28 percent of whites oppose the movement, while 36 percent of people don’t understand what the movement’s goals are.

**Kaepernick is a Hero for Showing Us a Different Way**

And this, finally, brings me back to Kaepernick. He has proven that Black Lives Matter can be heard without breeding possible resentment. Sure, some people will be put off by him for being “unpatriotic,” but I suspect that most of these people were never going to be easily convinced to begin with. For this, then, Kaepernick is a hero. He is effectively advancing the goals of police reform without losing mindshare in the process.

And I encourage you, my reader, to consider similar approaches. Social media protest is somewhat maligned these days for so-called “slacktivism,” but this is because people are trying to effect change while being lazy, often supporting causes that they wouldn’t, if they knew better, actually support (Kony 2012, for instance). Yet, it is clear many people would put blood, sweat, and tears into Black Lives Matter, and social media is a great place to convince people of the need for change.

Finally, the best approach, I truly believe, is volunteering in the name of the movement, where you can help the community and spread the word at the same time. If you organize enough people to do so, you might even be able to attract press coverage.

Ultimately, everyone who has participated in Black Lives Matter has my heartfelt thanks. You are working to make the world a better place, and I salute you for it. But please be mindful of how your actions might inadvertently hurt the cause, and be creative in seeking ways of convincing people without inviting blowback. Kaepernick, I believe, has shown us a great example of this.