

## PORTNOY'S COMPLAINTS

## Nike embraces Kaepernick, and it's completely genius

**Ben Portnoy**

is a senior in journalism.

It's been 976 days since Colin Kaepernick suited up for an NFL team. His appearance in Super Bowl XLVII was more than five years ago — 2,041 days to be precise.

Yet with Tuesday's announcement that Kaepernick will be a face of Nike's 30th anniversary campaign for the company's "Just Do It" motto, the polarizing quarterback has been thrust back into public consciousness.

The trials and tribulations of Kaepernick's football career and its downfall are well documented. After sitting for the National Anthem on Aug. 26, 2016, he continued his silent protest against the oppression of people of color and police brutality in the United States.

Since Kaepernick began his protests, entire teams, such as the Seattle Seahawks and Houston Texans, have taken on variations of his outspokenness by interlocking arms or not participating in the anthem ceremony at all.

But frankly, this column isn't to discuss anthem protests. Rather, what I want to highlight is how a major corporation took a highly political figure and propelled him to the forefront of a major advertising campaign.

A piece in the New York Times on Tuesday by Kevin Draper, Julie Creswell and Sapna Maheshwari observed that this isn't a new phenomenon for Nike.

The apparel giant hasn't been shy in promoting controversial figures. The story pointed to past ads in which Tiger Woods recounted how he'd been turned away from certain country clubs because of his skin color.

Kaepernick is just the next athlete in this line.

History aside, the move is brilliant from a marketing perspective. As showman P.T. Barnum famously remarked: "There's no such thing as bad publicity." And Kaepernick certainly generates publicity.

He drives commentary about whatever product he's associated with regardless of how people feel about his politics.

Take DailyMail.com's report that in the 24 hours since the reveal Nike has received \$43 million of free media coverage. Mr. Barnum, you may have a point.

Further, Nike's target audience more logically aligns with Kaepernick's advocates than his dissenters. Generally speaking, the most vocal detractors of the quarterback's stance are the same purported patriots that support President Donald Trump's tones of denigration and division. Kaepernick's supporters, by contrast, tend to reject Trump's criticisms and fall in line with who this campaign targets.

This is not to say it's mutu-

ally exclusive to be a Trump supporter and a Kaepernick sympathizer. I simply mean that by using the contentious quarterback, Nike targets its message to a group that by-and-large skews anti-Trump.

Speaking of our commander-in-chief, he offered a few thoughts on the situation.

"Just like the NFL, whose ratings have gone WAY DOWN, Nike is getting absolutely killed with anger and boycotts," he tweeted Sept. 5. "I wonder if they had any idea that it would be this way? As far as the NFL is concerned, I just find it hard to watch, and always will, until they stand for the FLAG!"

I'll give Trump this: at least he's consistent in berating the NFL and ragging it for the anthem protests that have persisted despite Kaepernick's apparent black-balling from the league.

And though his tweet was naturally argumentative and attacking, Trump was surprisingly tolerant of Nike's decision in an interview with The Daily Caller.

"In another way, it is what this country is all about, that you have certain freedoms to do things that other people think you shouldn't do, but I personally am on a different side of it," Trump said.

What Trump says here is what I think has been lost in the brouhaha regarding Kaepernick.

First, from the protest standpoint, the right to do so is enumerated in the Constitution, and thus even if you don't agree with one's viewpoint, a level of respect is necessary.

Second, on the business side, Nike is entitled to use whomever it wants to market products. Kaepernick has long been on Nike's payroll — since 2011 to be exact — and the decision to use his face to sell products is just a larger step in publicizing someone Nike already pays to promote its apparel.

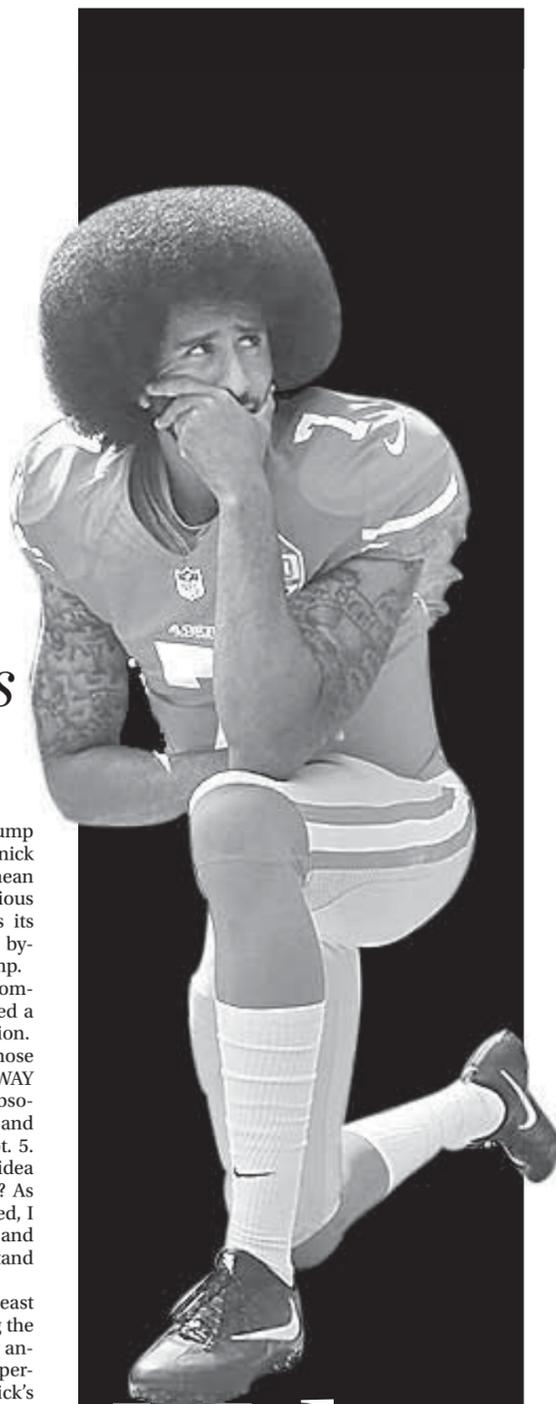
The crux of the Kaepernick saga, at least this portion of it, is directly in line with what Trump said in the Daily Caller interview. Nike can do whatever it feels is appropriate in promoting its products. If Nike wants to use a contentious figure, so be it.

The first of Kaepernick's Nike commercials was leaked on his personal Twitter account Wednesday morning. Midway through the advertisement, the football-player-turned-social-justice-advocate poignantly asserts, "Don't believe you have to be like anybody to be somebody."

In the vein of its newest spokesperson, Nike did exactly this. It did what no one else would do and gave Kaepernick a platform.

Differently put — Nike just did it.

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# Nike just did it.

TRIBUNE NEWS SERVICE  
Former San Francisco quarterback Colin Kaepernick kneels during the national anthem before an NFL game against the Dallas Cowboys on Oct. 2, 2016, in Santa Clara, California. Kaepernick was just named the face of Nike's "Just Do It" campaign.

## CALLOUTS WITH CARSON

## Do not ignore the exploitative history of Nike's brand

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Nike's latest ad campaign has sparked controversy. It features former NFL player Colin Kaepernick, who can no longer play in the league presumably because of his protest.

Kaepernick knelt during the anthem at NFL games to protest police brutality and the treatment of minorities in the United States.

Some have deemed Kaepernick's kneeling disrespectful to the flag, U.S. and U.S. troops. Many of these individuals take issue with Nike's affiliation with Kaepernick and his message.

The ad is a black and white close-up of Kaepernick's face with the words, "Believe in something. Even if it means sacrificing everything. Just do it."

Nike's implied support for Kaepernick's protest has caused many people to take to the internet to share their disappointment in the company. Videos were posted to social media of people who had cut the swoosh off their tube socks and burned their shoes. The hashtag #BoycottNike has been trending on Twitter.

For today, I will put aside the fact the Keurig-smashers are at it again, ripping their homes apart one brand name item at a time to own "the libs." I will put aside the irony of destroying a product that has already been purchased, particularly when this destruction is in the name of veterans, many of whom could benefit from the donation of said products. I will put aside the fact that many veterans have openly stated support of Kaepernick and his cause. I will put aside the fact that an active method to ensure the well-being of the troops is to vote against candidates eager to use military force, not setting your Nike Elites ablaze.

I will not put aside Nike and its wrongdoings.

This is not because I take issue with Kaepernick. In fact, it's quite the opposite. I am entirely in support of him and his cause.

It's Nike's exploitative tendencies that are goading me and, I fear, going unnoticed.

Yes, the company has provided Kaepernick with a platform for his message, which will help him since he will not be playing in the NFL this fall. It has done so in exchange for the use of Kaepernick's face to sell products.

Additionally, it has donated to Kaepernick's Know Your Rights campaign, an effort to educate young people on how to navigate situations with law enforcement.

While any money toward this cause can be put to good use, the contribution is undoubtedly a public relations decision on Nike's part, not

an act of altruism.

Nike's donation is not its only calculated move. Its decision to team up with Kaepernick was a marketing strategy with positive side effects. Kaepernick's ability to spread his message off the field is of little to no importance to Nike in comparison with sales. And Kaepernick will sell.

In fact, its online sales jumped 31 percent from Sept. 2 to Sept. 4 following the release of the Kaepernick ad. The losses from any consumers now boycotting Nike were accounted for before the public ever saw the ad. There is much more to be financially gained for Nike from markets that will appreciate the Kaepernick ad and its message.

I take issue with Nike's manipulation of a protest into an advertising campaign. Civil rights movements should not be exploited for capital gain, but Nike is doing exactly that. While Kaepernick has given up a great deal in his protest, Nike has risked nothing. It took a soft stand on an issue once the hypothetical calculations showed money could be made under the guise of morals.

In fact, the company has shown a disregard for morals over the years. Notorious for its horrible sweatshops, Nike did not sacrifice its stock value, production rates or profit to provide better working conditions.

Though conditions have supposedly improved over the years for those involved in product production, they are by no means satisfactory. In 2016, the Worker Rights Consortium reported physical abuse, bathroom restrictions, forced overtime and workers collapsing at their stations at the Nike plant in Hanoi, Vietnam. The irony is apparent in an advertisement that encourages sacrifice in the name of conviction.

I realize that Kaepernick will benefit from a platform for his message. That is something Nike can and will provide him. Keeping this dialogue alive is of the utmost importance.

Nike is the disappointment here. Not because it is supporting Kaepernick and his cause, but because it isn't. If Nike were truly in support of Kaepernick, it would not be holding contracts with the same NFL that boxed him out for his protest. Instead, Nike is profiting off of a movement for racial justice, and consequently the deaths of black men at the hands of police officers, while continuing to make jerseys for NFL teams. Clearly, money is Nike's only real concern, and it'll exploit anyone to make more of it.

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