Eric Reid: Why Colin Kaepernick and I Decided to Take a Knee

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1 In early 2016, I began paying attention to reports about the incredible number of unarmed black people being killed by the police. The posts on social media deeply disturbed me, but one in particular brought me to tears: the killing of Alton Sterling in my hometown Baton Rouge, La. This could have happened to any of my family members who still live in the area. I felt furious, hurt and hopeless. I wanted to do something, but didn’t know what or how to do it. All I knew for sure is that I wanted it to be as respectful as possible.

2 A few weeks later, during preseason, my teammate Colin Kaepernick chose to sit on the bench during the national anthem to protest police brutality. To be honest, I didn’t notice at the time, and neither did the news media. It wasn’t until after our third preseason game on Aug. 26, 2016, that his protest gained national attention, and the backlash against him began.

3 That’s when my faith moved me to take action. I looked to James 2:17, which states, “Faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.” I knew I needed to stand up for what is right.

4 I approached Colin the Saturday before our next game to discuss how I could get involved with the cause but also how we could make a more powerful and positive impact on the social justice movement. We spoke at length about many of the issues that face our community, including systemic oppression against people of color, police brutality and the criminal justice system. We also discussed how we could use our platform, provided to us by being professional athletes in the N.F.L., to speak for those who are voiceless.

After hours of careful consideration, and even a visit from Nate Boyer, a retired Green Beret and former N.F.L. player, we came to the conclusion that [we should kneel](https://www.colorofchange.org/campaigns/kneel-with-colin-kaepernick/), rather than sit, the next day during the anthem as a peaceful protest. We chose to kneel because it’s a respectful gesture. I remember thinking our posture was like a flag flown at half-mast to mark a tragedy.

It baffles me that our protest is still being misconstrued as disrespectful to the country, flag and military personnel. We chose it because it’s exactly the opposite. It has always been my understanding that the brave men and women who fought and died for our country did so to ensure that we could live in a fair and free society, which includes the right to speak out in protest.

5 It should go without saying that I love my country and I’m proud to be an American. But, to quote James Baldwin, “exactly for this reason, I insist on the right to criticize her perpetually.”

6 I can’t find words that appropriately express how heartbroken I am to see the constant smears against Colin, a person who helped start the movement with only the very best of intentions. We are talking about a man who helped to orchestrate a commercial planeful of food and supplies for famine-stricken Somalia. A man who has invested his time and money into needy communities here at home. A man I am proud to call my brother, who should be celebrated for his courage to seek change on important issues. Instead, to this day, he is unemployed and portrayed as a radical un-American who wants to divide our country.

7 Anybody who has a basic knowledge of football knows that his unemployment has nothing to do with his performance on the field. It’s a shame that the league has turned its back on a man who has done only good. I am aware that my involvement in this movement means that my career may face the same outcome as Colin’s. But to quote the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., “A time comes when silence is betrayal.” And I choose not to betray those who are being oppressed.

8 I have too often seen our efforts belittled with statements like “He should have listened to the officer,” after watching an unarmed black person get shot, or “There is no such thing as white privilege” and “Racism ended years ago.” We know that racism and white privilege are both very much alive today.

9 And it’s disheartening and infuriating that President Trump has referred to us with slurs but the neo-Nazis in Charlottesville, Va., as “very fine people.” His remarks are a clear attempt to deepen the rift that we’ve tried so hard to mend.

10 I am nevertheless encouraged to see my colleagues and other public figures respond to the president’s remarks with solidarity with us. It is paramount that we take control of the story behind our movement, which is that we seek equality for all Americans, no matter their race or gender.

11 What we need now is numbers. Some people acknowledge the issues we face yet remain silent bystanders. Not only do we need more of our fellow black and brown Americans to stand with us, but also people of other races.

12 I refuse to be one of those people who watches injustices yet does nothing. I want to be a man my children and children’s children can be proud of, someone who faced adversity and tried to make a positive impact on the world, a person who, 50 years from now, is remembered for standing for what was right, even though it was not the popular or easy choice.