

The Awakening of Colin Kaepernick

In college, Kaepernick began a journey that led him to his position as one of the most prominent, if divisive, social activists in sports.

By John Branch

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The standout college quarterback went to the meeting alone that winter night, looking to join. The fraternity brothers at Kappa Alpha Psi, a predominantly black fraternity with a small chapter at the University of Nevada, knew who he was. He was a tall, lean, biracial junior, less than a year from graduating with a business degree.

“When he came and said he had interest in joining the fraternity, I kind of looked at him like, ‘Yeah, O.K.,’” said Olumide Ogundimu, one of the members. “I didn’t take it seriously. I thought: ‘You’re the star quarterback. What are you still missing that you’re looking for membership into our fraternity?’”

His name was Colin Kaepernick, and what he was looking for, Ogundimu and others discovered, was a deeper connection to his own roots and a broader understanding of the lives of others.

Seven years later, now 29, Kaepernick is the most polarizing figure in American sports. Outside of politics, there may be nobody in popular culture at this complex moment so divisive and so galvanizing, so scorned and so appreciated.

Attempts to explain who Kaepernick is — and how and why he became either a traitor (“Maybe he should find a country that works better for him,” Donald J. Trump said as a presidential candidate last year) or a hero (“He is the Muhammad Ali of this generation,” the longtime civil rights activist Harry Edwards said in an interview last week) — tend to devolve into partisan politics and emotional debates ranging from patriotic rituals to racial inequities.

Kaepernick is now (and may forever be) known for a simple, silent gesture. He is the quarterback who knelt for the national anthem before National Football League games last year as a protest against social injustice, especially the deaths of African-Americans at the hands of police.

Almost immediately, many of the complex real-world issues of the times — police violence, presidential politics and the foment of racial clashes that continue to boil over in places like Charlottesville, Va. — all flushed through the filter of Kaepernick’s gesture. Time magazine put him on the cover, kneeling next to the words “The Perilous Fight.”

With the N.F.L. season beginning in earnest this weekend, Kaepernick finds himself out of the league, either exiled or washed up, depending on the perspective.



From left, Eric Reid, Colin Kaepernick and Eli Harold knelt during the national anthem before an N.F.L. game against the Seahawks last September. Joe Nicholson/USA Today Sports, via Reuters

The N.F.L. and its 32 franchise owners, none of them African-American, may be the most conservative fraternity of leaders in major American sports. They bathe their games in overtly patriotic ceremonies and discourage players, mostly hidden behind masks and uniforms of armor, from individual acts of showmanship. At least seven donated \$1 million or more to Trump's inaugural committee, far more than any other sport's owners.

In Kaepernick's absence, other players will kneel. Demonstrators will protest. Some will boycott. His jersey will be seen, more as a political statement than a sporting allegiance, as the game goes on without him.

Living mostly in New York, Kaepernick has stayed out of the spotlight, friends said, because he wants the conversation to be not about him, but about the issues he has raised. (He declined several requests to speak to The New York Times for this article.) That is why he will, reportedly, stand for the anthem this season, if he joins a team.

Among those who will play this weekend is Brandon Marshall, a linebacker for the Denver Broncos. He was a teammate of Kaepernick's at Nevada, and it was his idea to join the fraternity. He was not sure Kaepernick would do it with him.

"He actually showed up to the meeting before me," Marshall said in an interview this week. "He's like: 'Where you at? I'm here.' He was real prompt. I was like, O.K., Colin's serious about it."

Kaepernick's curiosity and worldview were expanding, growing inside him rather quietly. No one knew then that he would become one of the league's most thrilling players or that he would lead a team to the Super Bowl just a couple of years later. And they certainly did not expect that he would make even more noise with a now-famous silent gesture.

"Being part of that fraternity opens you to a new world," Ogundimu said. "I would not doubt that it is where he started becoming either more curious about his own background, or where he just started seeing more things — just realized that things weren't always so easy for the rest of us."

'How Dare You?'

Turlock is a pleasant and unremarkable place in California's flat, interior heartland. It is stifling hot in the summer and can be cool and rainy in the winter. Like many sprawling cities of central California, it features suburban-style neighborhoods and strip malls slowly eating the huge expanses of agriculture that surround it. And, like neighboring cities, the population of about 73,000 is overwhelmingly white and increasingly Latino. In Turlock, fewer than 2 percent of residents identify as African-American, according to the census.

Kaepernick moved there when he was 4. He was born in Milwaukee to a single white mother and a black father and quickly placed for adoption. He was soon adopted by Rick and Teresa Kaepernick of Fond du Lac, Wis., who were raising two biological children, Kyle and Devon. They had also lost two infant sons to congenital heart defects.

The family moved to California because Rick Kaepernick took a job as operations manager at the Hilmar Cheese Company, where he later became a vice president.

The boy became used to strangers assuming he was not with the other Kaepernicks. When anyone asked if he was adopted, he would scrunch up his face in mock sadness. “How dare you ask me something like that?” he would reply, and then laugh.

“We used to go on these summer driving vacations and stay at motels,” Kaepernick told US magazine in 2015. “And every year, in the lobby of every motel, the same thing always happened, and it only got worse as I got older and taller. It didn’t matter how close I stood to my family, somebody would walk up to me, a real nervous manager, and say: ‘Excuse me. Is there something I can help you with?’”

Kyle nicknamed his younger brother Bo, after Bo Jackson, because Colin was good at football and baseball. Colleges were interested in him as a baseball pitcher and a football quarterback, but he made it clear that football was his priority. Kyle burned DVDs of Colin’s high school highlights and sent them to college teams across the country. Only Nevada offered a scholarship.

It was in Reno that Kaepernick’s potential as a quarterback was realized, and where his curiosity in African-American history and culture began to foment, mostly as he met teammates with vastly different experiences from his growing up.

“I saw him transform, develop, whatever you want to call it,” said John Bender, an offensive lineman during Kaepernick’s tenure and a frequent classmate. “Finding an identity was big for him, because in some aspects in life, he would get the racist treatment from white people because he was a black quarterback. And some people gave him the racist treatment because he was raised by a white family. So where does he fit in in all this?”

Kaepernick was a starter for most of four seasons. He became the first N.C.A.A. player to throw for more than 10,000 yards and rush for more than 4,000 yards. He scored 60 touchdowns and threw 82 more. In 2010, Kaepernick’s final collegiate season, Nevada went 13-1, beat No. 3 Boise State in overtime and finished No. 11 in The Associated Press poll at season’s end.

Kaepernick, a starter for most of four college seasons, became the first N.C.A.A. player to throw for more than 10,000 yards and rush for more than 4,000 yards. Michael Conroy/Associated Press

He never loved the attention that came with the success, but he was deft and polished with the news media, willing to do interviews and quick to share credit for successes. He was the rare player who never needed training in dealing with the media. Kaepernick said his father instilled in him the importance of manners and the proper way to conduct himself in front of others.

He once joined other players in calling season-ticket holders who were yet to renew for the upcoming seasons. An older woman told him that she enjoyed going to the games with her husband, but he had recently died. She said couldn't afford the tickets and she couldn't imagine going alone.

Kaepernick's family already had 24 season tickets, and the four-hour drive from Turlock did not prevent a small army of supporters at every game. What's one more? Kaepernick thought. He bought the woman a season ticket.

"We're probably the only N.C.A.A. compliance office in the country that had to check to see if it was O.K. for a player to give a fan something," said Chad Hartley, an associate athletic director for Nevada.

Kaepernick excelled as a student. He graduated with a degree in business management. Some wondered when he slept.

When he showed up at Kappa Alpha Psi, members figured that Kaepernick would quit once he saw the commitment required: the time, the rituals, the community service, the all-night study sessions of the fraternity's history and liturgy. Marshall said that his own schoolwork suffered during the semester, but Kaepernick maintained perfect grades.

"The process is not easy," said Ogundimu, now a case manager for a rehabilitation hospital in Las Vegas. "It's definitely something that will shine a light on your weaknesses and shine a light on your strengths. He was all strength."

Kappa Alpha Psi, which says it has 120,000 members, has thrown its support behind Kaepernick, writing a letter to N.F.L. Commissioner Roger Goodell and joining a pro-Kaepernick demonstration at league headquarters recently.

The 'Anti-Manning' Persona

Just four years ago, Kaepernick was a different type of sports phenomenon, "the anti-Manning," as the Sports Illustrated writer Peter King called him. He kissed his tattooed biceps when he scored, which turned his name into a verb: Kaepernicking. His jersey was spotted across the Bay Area. All lean muscles and corrugated abs, he posed nude for ESPN Magazine's Body Issue. He discussed his growing assortment of tattoos, the first of which were Bible verses inked in college. Active on Twitter, he mostly thanked fans, promoted appearances and kept opinions to himself.

"I want to have a positive influence as much as I can," Kaepernick told King in 2013. "I've had people write me because of my tattoos. I've had people write me because of adoption. I've had people write me because they're biracial. I've had people write me because their kids have heart defects — my mom had two boys who died of heart defects, which ultimately brought about my adoption. So, to me, the more people you can touch, the more people you can influence in a positive way or inspire, the better."

He had led the 49ers to the Super Bowl after Coach Jim Harbaugh inserted him as the starter midway through the 2012 season. Kaepernick dueled with and beat Tom Brady and the Patriots at New England on a brutally cold night in December, 41-34. ("He may have played the best game at quarterback, certainly one of the best games, that I've ever seen," the NBC analyst Cris Collinsworth said during an interview last week.) In a playoff game against Green Bay, Kaepernick had better passing statistics than Aaron Rodgers, and added 181 rushing yards.

A loss to Baltimore in the Super Bowl, after Kaepernick and the 49ers could not score a touchdown after having first-and-goal at the 7-yard line in the final minutes, did little to suppress the excitement over the quarterback.

"I truly believe Colin Kaepernick could be one of the greatest quarterbacks ever," the ESPN analyst Ron Jaworski said the following preseason. "I love his skill set. I think the sky's the limit."

But Kaepernick felt the barbs of stardom, too, often dipped in racial undertones. He (and later his mother) had to defend his tattoos after a columnist said that a quarterback is, essentially, the team's chief executive, "and you don't want your C.E.O. to look like he just got paroled."

In the midst of Kaepernick's growing fame, his birth mother, Heidi Russo, emerged and said that she wanted a relationship with her birth son, sparking a flurry of articles, including during Super Bowl week. Kaepernick expressed no interest. Columnists criticized him.

Kaepernick's public persona shifted, whether because of his distrust in the media or because he was following the lead of Harbaugh, often disdainful of reporters, seeing little value in sharing information. More and more in front of cameras and reporters, he was all sulking expressions and terse answers. In a running half-joke, reporters began to count the words in his responses. They were often comically short.

People who knew Kaepernick in Reno were surprised, and veterans of the N.F.L. were confused. But as long as the team was winning, few fans cared about his off-field demeanor.

But then the 49ers went 8-8 in 2014, and simmering disputes with the front office led to Harbaugh's departure at season's end. Kaepernick's playing career faded, here and gone like the trace of a comet. The 49ers were 2-6 under Jim Tomsula in 2015 when Kaepernick lost his starting job, then was placed on the season-ending injury list.

In 2016, Tomsula was replaced by Chip Kelly, who named Blaine Gabbert the starting quarterback for the first three preseason games. It was safe to wonder if most people had heard the last of Colin Kaepernick.

A Quest for an Education

Kaepernick's Twitter and Instagram feeds reveal his trajectory. There were a few football-related messages early in 2016, including a congratulatory note to Harbaugh, coaching collegiately at Michigan, for a bowl victory. Kaepernick posted a photo and quote of Malcolm X on the February anniversary of his murder. In June, he posted a video of Tupac Shakur, the rapper killed in 1996.

"I'm not saying I'm going to rule the world, or I'm going to change the world," Shakur said in the clip. "But I guarantee that I will spark the brain that will change the world. That's our job, is to spark somebody else watching us."

Kaepernick's next message was a thank you for supporting Camp Taylor, a charity for children with heart disease. Rick Kaepernick is on the board of directors.

By then, Colin Kaepernick was auditing a summer course on black representation in popular culture taught by Ameer Hasan Loggins at the University of California, Berkeley. He drove an hour each way to each class, took notes, did the readings and engaged in class discussions, Loggins wrote in a recent essay.

Kaepernick had been introduced to Loggins by Kaepernick's girlfriend, Nessa Diab, a syndicated radio host and MTV personality whom Kaepernick has dated since late 2015. (Diab previously dated Aldon Smith, another 49ers player, leading to a reported scrap between the two during training camp in 2015.)

Kaepernick speaking with the 49ers' head coach, Jim Harbaugh, during a game in 2012. Marcio Jose Sanchez/Associated Press

Diab, known professionally as Nessa, has had a measure of influence on Kaepernick's views over the past two years.

Aside from her work on MTV, she is the host of a nationally syndicated show on Hot 97, an influential hip-hop station in New York, and supported the Black Lives Matter movement from that platform. She has been more active and overtly opinionated than Kaepernick on social media.

Loggins and Diab were classmates in Berkeley years ago, and she asked Loggins to recommend books for Kaepernick. It was not the first time Kaepernick sought reading material. As a rookie with the 49ers, he asked Edwards, the sociologist and civil rights activist who served as a consultant for the 49ers, for a reading list, Edwards said.

He recommended "The Autobiography of Malcolm X," James Baldwin's "The Fire Next Time," Ralph Ellison's "Invisible Man," and Maya Angelou's "I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings," Edwards said.

"He was willing to work and study to kind of understand what was happening with his teammates, with other people, and how this whole thing rolled out over 400 years," Edwards said.

The list from Loggins included "The Wretched of the Earth," by Frantz Fanon; "Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment," by Patricia Hill Collins; "Black Looks: Race and Representation," by bell hooks; and "The Miseducation of the Negro," by Carter G. Woodson.

Before long, Kaepernick and Loggins were engaged in lengthy conversations, until the quarterback asked if he could sit in on the professor's upcoming summer class.

“People that trace our connection to U.C. Berkeley assume he became politicized in my class,” Loggins wrote. “But Colin came in aware, focused, well-read and eager to learn. His decision was made on his own — from the heart. He came to me intellectually curious. The questions he asked me regarding my research, the lectures he attended, he was a sponge.”

Kaepernick’s social media posts flared with urgent intensity, though, when black men were killed by the police on back-to-back days in early July 2016.

“This is what lynchings look like in 2016!” Kaepernick wrote on Instagram and Twitter when video of Alton Sterling’s death became public. “Another murder in the streets because the color of a man’s skin, at the hands of the people who they say will protect us. When will they be held accountable? Or did he fear for his life as he executed this man?”

A day later, Kaepernick posted video of Philando Castile dying in the driver’s seat of his car after being shot by an officer, taken by a woman recording the aftermath from the passenger seat.

“We are under attack!” Kaepernick wrote. “It’s clear as day! Less than 24 hrs later another body in the street!”

Kaepernick’s rising anger online created little reaction, at least in football circles. He went to training camp to compete with Gabbert for the starting job. A sore throwing shoulder prevented him from playing in the first two preseason games. He was out of uniform, which is probably why no one in the media noticed that he sat on the bench during the national anthem.

It was not until the third game, at home on Aug. 26, that Kaepernick’s gesture got attention. A reporter took a photograph of the San Francisco bench, unrelated to Kaepernick, and later spotted him sitting alone near the coolers.

Word of the protest did not spread. Steve Wyche of nfl.com was the only reporter to speak to Kaepernick about it after the game.

“I am not going to stand up to show pride in a flag for a country that oppresses black people and people of color,” Kaepernick said. “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.”

He added that he had not sought permission from the team or sponsors.

“This is not something that I am going to run by anybody,” he said. “I am not looking for approval. I have to stand up for people that are oppressed. If they take football away, my endorsements from me, I know that I stood up for what is right.”

Many didn’t like Kaepernick doing it during an anthem. Some said it was anti-military, a slap to those who served and died. (Kaepernick said on the first day that he had “great respect for the men and women that have fought for this country,” including friends and family, but even veterans were not being treated right by this country.) Some thought it was disingenuous for a millionaire, especially one raised comfortably by a white family, to take a stance on black oppression. Some football fans saw Kaepernick as a second-string has-been looking for attention.

“The actual point of protest is to disrupt how we move about our daily lives,” Wade Davis, a former professional football player and a black activist who often works with athletes, said in an interview last week. “What Kaepernick did was disrupt one of our most treasured sports. Whether you agree with his tactics or not is one type of conversation. The larger conversation is what he is protesting about. The fact that so many don’t want to have that specific conversation speaks to the fact that they know what is happening in America is beyond tragic.”

For the fourth preseason game, which Kaepernick started, he changed from sitting on the bench to taking a knee on the sideline. Safety Eric Reid joined him. The same night, Jeremy Lane of the Seattle Seahawks sat for the anthem, too. Then soccer player Megan Rapinoe did it before a professional game days later. On Sept. 9, Marshall, Kaepernick’s teammate and fraternity brother from Nevada, was the first to do it in an N.F.L. regular-season game, with the Broncos.

The controversy slowly lowered to an uneasy simmer through the fall. Presidential politics took control of the national debate. Kaepernick kept kneeling before games but said little. The 49ers were awful, and Kaepernick retook the starting job. He went 1-10 as the starter for a team that finished 2-14. He threw 16 touchdowns and 4 interceptions, completed 59.2 percent of his passes and rushed for 468 yards. His passer rating of 90.7 was 17th in the N.F.L.

Kaepernick’s teammates voted him the winner of the Len Eshmont award, the team’s highest honor, “for inspirational and courageous play.”

The coach and general manager were fired and replaced.

Kaepernick’s contract with the 49ers was due to pay him \$16.5 million for this season, according to ESPN, but was not guaranteed unless he made the team. Knowing that was unlikely, he opted out as a free agent on March 1, and he has been out of a job since.

His unemployment is a fuse on another debate, this one over whether Kaepernick is being willfully kept out of the league because of his politics, or if he is no longer good enough to play in it. The N.F.L.’s 32 teams each carry at least two quarterbacks, some three.



Other athletes joined Kaepernick's protests last year. Clockwise from top left, Brandon Marshall of the Denver Broncos; Kaepernick, in Seattle; Megan Rapinoe of the United States women's national soccer team, before an exhibition against the Netherlands in Atlanta; and Seahawks cornerback Jeremy Lane, before a preseason game. Justin Edmonds/Getty Images; Ted S. Warren/Associated Press; John Bazemore/Associated Press; Tony Avelar/Associated Press

"It's really tough to make an argument that he's not one of the best 64," said Collinsworth, the NBC analyst. "Everybody has some reason that they haven't signed Colin Kaepernick. Maybe they have two or three quarterbacks they think are better. Maybe they don't want the distraction. Maybe they don't want to pay the money. But it's hard to say 'they,' like all 32 owners think exactly the same. That's ridiculous. That's what has made this really complex."

Activism Outside the Spotlight

While Kaepernick waits to play, he has hardly been idle. Fulfilling a "million-dollar" pledge he made during the heat of the anthem flap last September, he has donated \$100,000 every month since October to up to four charities, with little notice beyond Kaepernick's website.

The beneficiaries are usually small, relatively unknown and surprised.

"We had no idea how Colin Kaepernick heard about our organization," said Carolyn A. Watson, founder and executive director of Helping Oppressed Mothers Endure, or H.O.M.E., a foundation supporting single mothers in Georgia. Someone representing Kaepernick contacted the group, Watson said, "and before we knew it, we were giving them the appropriate information and received

a \$25,000 check in the mail.”

Muhibb Dyer, a co-founder of the I Will Not Die Young Campaign in Milwaukee, thought the \$25,000 donation was a prank.

“What is unique is that he identified grass-roots organizations like my own that are hanging on by a thread trying to do the work,” Dyer said. “But a lot of the time we are face-to-face, in the trenches, with some of the most at-risk youth in this country. Having him reach out to us is like a lifeline to continue the work that we do that is oftentimes not highlighted, but very much essential to the life and death of youth every day.”

The range of charities Kaepernick supports is broad. In January, for example, he gave \$25,000 each to a Brooklyn group called Black Veterans for Social Justice, a clean-energy advocacy group called 350.org, the Coalition for Humane Immigrant Rights of Los Angeles, and the Center for Reproductive Rights in New York.

Michelle Horovitz, a co-founder of Appetite for Change, which promotes healthy food through urban gardens and cooking seminars in Minneapolis, said the donation they received was “huge on an emotional level.”

She added: “We are huge fans of him and I personally have decided to boycott the N.F.L.”

Kaepernick has also held three “Know Your Rights” free camps for children. About 200 came to the one in Chicago in May, at the DuSable Museum of African American History, and others have been held in Oakland and New York. The goal, according to the website, is “to raise awareness on higher education, self empowerment, and instruction to properly interact with law enforcement in various scenarios.”



Kaepernick prayed with members of the Ravens after a preseason game in Baltimore in 2014. Rob Carr/Getty Images

Children received free breakfasts and T-shirts listing 10 rights: The right to be free, healthy, brilliant, safe, loved, courageous, alive, trusted and educated, plus “the right to know your rights.”

There were seminars and sessions on black history, including segregation and Jim Crow laws. There were lessons on healthy eating and household finances. There was advice on speaking and dressing for respect, and for how to calmly handle interactions with the police.

Among the speakers were Eric Reid, Kaepernick’s former teammate in San Francisco, and Common, the hip-hop star. Near the end, Kaepernick shared his personal story to campers in Chicago.

"I love my family to death," he said, according to Dave Zirin of The Nation. "They're the most amazing people I know. But when I looked in the mirror, I knew I was different. Learning what it meant to be an African man in America, not a black man but an African man, was critical for me. Through this knowledge, I was able to identify myself and my community differently."

He explained that he was giving the campers a kit to test their own DNA, to better understand their background, The Nation reported.

"I thought I was from Milwaukee," Kaepernick said. "I thought my ancestry started at slavery and I was taught in school that we were all supposed to be grateful just because we aren't slaves. But what I was able to do was trace my ancestry and DNA lineage back to Ghana, Nigeria, the Ivory Coast, and saw my existence was more than just being a slave. It was as an African man. We had our own civilizations, and I want you to know how high the ceiling is for our people. I want you to know that our existence now is not normal. It's oppressive. For me, identifying with Africa gave me a higher sense of who I was, knowing that we have a proud history and are all in this together."

Kaepernick traveled to Ghana this summer. On July 4 on Instagram, accompanying a video montage of the trip, he said that he made the pilgrimage to get in touch with his "African ancestral roots."

He sat in prison cells at "slave castles," the fortresses that detained people just before they were shipped across the ocean as slaves. He also visited the Kwame Nkrumah Memorial Park, schools and hospitals. Along with Nessa Diab, he also went to Egypt and Morocco.

"A part of the motivation was, if you have an awakening, then you start to want to have answers," Loggins, who was part of the travel group, said on a podcast with Zirin. "You start to become inquisitive at a level that can sometime be seen to others as obsessive."

On a day off last December, Kaepernick took the GRE, the standardized graduate-school entrance exam. "Just exploring all opportunities," he said.

It was about then that Kaepernick was introduced to Christopher Petrella, who teaches American Cultural Studies at Bates College in Maine. Petrella has since helped devise the curriculum and taught at the Know Your Rights camps and become part of Kaepernick's inner circle.

Their first conversation, Petrella said in an email interview, "unexpectedly morphed into a back-and-forth on Bacon's Rebellion, a late 17th-century political uprising in colonial Virginia that began to codify race and class hierarchies in the U.S. I was immediately struck by Colin's raw curiosity, historical fluency, and the sophistication with which he spoke of persistent forms of racial injustice and racialized forms of police brutality today."

He, too, has heard Kaepernick's name mentioned alongside other athletes who became civil rights icons. Petrella said the comparisons were apt, but Kaepernick's approach reminded him more of Ella Baker, a civil rights pioneer known for her work with the N.A.A.C.P., the Southern Christian Leadership Conference and the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee.

"Just as Colin tends to eschew the spotlight, Baker operated under the principle that 'Strong people don't need strong leaders,'" Petrella wrote. "Baker once said that 'People must fight for their own freedom and not rely on leaders to do it for them.' This approach seems consistent with Colin's principle of believing in the capacity of ordinary people to grow into leaders, to self-advocate and to lift as we climb."

What may be settled in the coming days and weeks is whether Kaepernick will once again experience the spotlight of the N.F.L. — whether a team will sign him, or whether it matters to the movement he has sparked.

"I'm so proud of him," said Marshall, his Nevada teammate and fraternity brother. "If people look at the real issue, and look at what he's doing in the community — the money he's donating, the time he's donating, the camps he's putting on — they'd be like: 'You know what? This dude's really a stand-up guy.'"

Correction: Sept. 8, 2017

An earlier version of this article described incorrectly an Instagram post from Colin Kaepernick on July 4. It was a video montage, not a photograph of a black screen. An earlier version also referred incorrectly to the shooting of Philando Castile by a police officer. Castile was in the driver's seat and the woman recording the aftermath was in the passenger seat, not the other way around. And an earlier version misidentified the recipient of several \$1 million donation from N.F.L. owners. It was President Trump's inaugural committee, not his election campaign.

Malika Andrews contributed reporting.

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