

An open letter to Colin Kaepernick

Dear Colin –

Please allow me to start with this: America’s deplorable history of slavery and segregation will always be a dark stain on the legacy of an otherwise great nation that eventually made good on its promise that all men are created equal.

I readily acknowledge that black Americans are more than justified in having a totally different perspective on America’s history—and policing—than white people like me. I’ve never been stopped for driving while black, and have never been handcuffed or pepper-sprayed or Tased or thrown to the ground for no apparent good reason. I’ve never been followed around in a store, denied public accommodations, called the n-word or forced to sit in the back of a bus. I was never called ‘boy’ when I became a man, and I never feared being lynched for looking at a white woman. Horrible things were done to black people during slavery and segregation, but none of those injustices were suffered by me or any of my lily white ancestors.

I get it why black people are distrustful of the police. But the political narrative that America is a sorry place that doesn’t give a damn when white cops kill innocent black men is simply not true. Democrats say that black men are nearly three times as likely to be killed by police as white men, and they are 100% right. What they don’t say is there’s a reason for that disparity that extends beyond the issue of prejudicial policing. When their percentage of the overall population is taken into account, black men commit a disproportionate share of crimes. That means they’re much more likely to get into altercations with police than non-black men.

I realize profiling is a sensitive issue with African-Americans. I could be wrong, but I believe the fact that black people are stopped in greater numbers by police has less to do with racial prejudice than with crime demographics. Even if that’s so, I’m sure there are plenty of egregious exceptions. Either way, the fact remains that white cops are not the enemy of black people, especially those in the inner cities. Every day and every night, white cops put their lives on the line by going into crime-ridden urban communities to protect law-abiding black citizens against rape, robbery, murder, assault, drug dealing, domestic violence, child trafficking, carjacking and drive-by shootings. When innocent black citizens are set upon by violent criminals, their most fervent hope is that a car with flashing blue lights is on the way.

A lot of political hay is made of unjustifiable police killings of African-American men. Even one such killing is one too many. But is the problem an out of control epidemic, as is persistently claimed? [This website](#), which chronicles the number of unarmed black people killed by police, reports that 104 such killings occurred in 2015, and that in 13 of those cases, the police officer was charged with a crime. The Bureau of Justice Statistics reports that [62.9 million](#) American citizens had at least one encounter with the police in 2011, the latest year for which data is available. (Some citizens, habitual criminals, have significantly more than one encounter a year, but let’s ignore that here.) Using the 62.9 million figure, African Americans, who comprise 13.3% of the U.S. population, would thus have around 8.4 million encounters with police in a typical year, each of which has the potential to turn violent. Assuming (from above) that 13 unjustifiable police killings of black people occur in a typical year, that’s one unjustifiable killing in every 645,000 encounters. Thus, unjustifiable killings occur in only 0.00015 percent of police encounters with black people. Even if we *double* that number for the sake of argument, that still works out to just 0.0003%—that’s *three ten-thousandths of one percent*.

Considering that policing is one of the most difficult jobs in America, that cops often have to make life and death decisions in the blink of an eye, and that cops—like the rest of us—are human beings who occasionally make good faith mistakes that end up being unlawful, that tiny percentage of wrongful police killings of black people is a remarkable tribute to the restraint and professionalism of America’s roughly 650,000 men and women who wear blue. It also shows that unwarranted police killings of black people is light years away from being even remotely close to an epidemic.

According to a [report](#) released on Oct. 12, 2017 by the FBI, 66 law enforcement officers were criminally killed in 2016. Seventeen of those officers were victims of ambush assassinations, presumably by African American men who’d been led to believe that unwarranted police killings of black people is an epidemic. That police officers are randomly executed because of racial anger over an epidemic that doesn’t exist is every bit as tragic as unwarranted police killings of black people.

By heightening racial animus to white hot levels, the ‘epidemic’ narrative does tremendous harm to our overall society. But the biggest harm it does is to serve as a huge distraction from the real problems inner city communities face, nearly all of which can be directly traced not to racism, but to the failed social welfare policies of the last half-century. Regardless of skin color, welfare kills the human spirit, something I’ve seen in my own extended family. Black players who grew up in the projects may have noticed the same thing.

I assume you took a knee during the national anthem because you’d accepted the notion that the America of today is an unjust place. Despite the remarkable racial progress since the 1960s—no one can deny that—something apparently led you to believe that America is still a racist hellhole. If you stop and think about it, Colin, that’s simply not true. Slavery was eradicated in 1865, and Jim Crow was rightfully sent to its grave decades ago. Any fair-minded person would have to acknowledge that no country has ever done more to right the wrongs once committed against an oppressed minority within its borders than this country has. Yes, it took far longer than it should have, and no, things aren’t perfect. But they are infinitely better than in the days when black people were made to sit in the back of the bus.

No one denies that things still need improving, but I ask you this: Where else on Earth can you get a better deal than right here in America? Because you were born in this country, you’ve been able to pursue your dreams in the greatest land of opportunity the world has ever known. As a result, you became wealthy beyond your wildest expectations. Things weren’t always fair for people of your skin color, even in sports—I remember when the SEC had no black players. But that was a long time ago. Despite the injustices of the past, it’s beyond dispute that a black child born in America today has the EXACT same legal right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness as a white child. That’s never mentioned by those who would have black people believe that America is still an oppressive place where the deck is stacked against them.

Finally, I have an idea of how you can get back in the NFL. The way things stand now, I wouldn’t hire you if I owned a team. Most people who shell out their hard-earned money to go to football games are patriotic. If I gave you a job, I’d worry it would result in a lot of empty seats. Let’s face it, Colin, your name is mud with millions of football fans. But it doesn’t have to be that way. The human ego makes it hard for any of us to admit we may have been off base about something we made a big deal of. If you could somehow convince yourself to see America as it is, rather than the way it’s politically portrayed, I believe the NFL would find a spot for you in a New York minute, even if your skills have slipped a bit. By showing gratitude for all that America has enabled you to accomplish, you’d be seen as a national hero overnight, and fans who’ve stopped watching NFL games would quickly revert to form. Just a thought.

God bless all those—our military abroad and first responders here at home—who voluntarily risk their lives defending the rest of us. And God bless the imperfect place seen by people in every corner of the globe as that shining light on a hill, the greatest land of freedom and opportunity the world has ever known.

Respectfully and best wishes,

John Eidson
Atlanta, GA
10/27/2017

P.S.—The players who’ve followed your example by kneeling during the anthem say they don’t mean to disrespect their country or its military. But that’s the way it’s taken by millions of football fans, including me. To understand why so many of us feel that way, I hope you will watch the Kevin Bacon movie, ***Taking Chance***. To get a general sense of what that movie’s about, you can watch [this short video](#). And to better understand what cops face every time they go on patrol, I hope you’ll also watch [this](#).