

# Hair-raising and knee taking: Colin Kaepernick's Monstrous Persona

SCARLETT L. HESTER

In May 2018, the National Football League implemented a policy that penalizes teams with a fine if any of the personnel (including players) attempt to sit or kneel during the playing of the national anthem (Seifert and Graziano ESPN.com). The revelation of this policy comes after a football season full of protests, name calling, and demands for the firing of players who “disrespect our flag” (Tatum CNN.com). The new NFL policy has been happily endorsed by President Trump. During a segment with “Fox and Friends” Trump stated, “You have to stand proudly for the national anthem, or you shouldn’t be playing, you shouldn’t be there. Maybe you shouldn’t be in the country” (Edelman NBCNews.com). Trump’s enthusiastic support of the policy is not a surprise given his open dislike for NFL quarterback Colin Kaepernick and his fellow protesters. Trump expressed his opinion regarding NFL players who knelt during the playing of the national anthem during a campaign rally in Huntsville, Alabama. He stated, “Wouldn’t you love to see one of these NFL owners, when somebody disrespects our flag to say, ‘Get that son of a bitch off the field right now, he’s fired! He’s fired!’” (Tatum CNN.com).

The implementation of the new policy paired with Trump’s comments represent a wide spread attitude toward those who violate the ritual associated with the national anthem. At their core, Trump’s comments reveal the deep-seated xenophobic racism held by the current administration. He conflates civil protest with issues of belonging and patriotism. Through this and the power associated with his office, he adopts the position of a savior. Trump embodies hegemonic white masculinity and he is here to save the United States from any monster who seeks to disrupt, including NFL players who kneel during the national anthem. For all extensive purposes, those who kneel adopt the persona of a cultural monster, unafraid to wreak havoc on the U.S.’s presumed cultural norms.

The leader of this monstrous revolution is none other than Colin Kaepernick. Trump and his supporters are metaphorically and literally leading the hunt against

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Kaepernick with torches in hand, ready to discipline and extract any individual who does not embody their image of what constitutes an obedient U.S. American citizen. In this article, I argue sports and popular media co-opted Colin Kaepernick's original message regarding his silent protest during the national anthem. Media outlets framed Kaepernick as a threat against patriotism, which cast him as monstrous body and persona. The anxiety Kaepernick sparked highlights the U.S.'s discomfort with outspoken black men who challenge the white hegemonic status quo. Even though Kaepernick enacts nonviolent protest, he is coded as monstrous and becomes trapped in the paradox of violence associated with black masculinity and monsters. Because of this, Kaepernick complicates the perception of his monstrous persona and creates a more nuanced understanding of blackness and monstrosity. Rather than succumb to the disciplinary nature of the NFL and professional sports culture, Kaepernick embraces his monstrosity and decisively creates other monsters to carry on his monstrous legacy.

## Methods

To illustrate my argument, I utilize a combination of rhetorical methods and media criticism. I adopt a critical rhetorical lens to understand the discourse surrounding Kaepernick and his nonviolent protest. I posit both sports and popular media position Kaepernick as a monstrous body who poses a threat to the hegemonic norms of U.S. society. One of my aims is to answer Michael Lacy and Kent Ono's call and engage in a "broad knowledge about how race and racism emerge and function" specifically within sports media (Lacy and Ono 3). Additionally, a critical examination of this discourse seeks to understand "its effectivity, especially the way power operates to constitute subjects" (Lacy and Ono 4). Ultimately, my goal is to reveal how the tension between Kaepernick and media discourse work to disenfranchise *and* empower Kaepernick as a monstrous being. I understand rhetoric and the power associated with it to be fluid, rather than static. Rhetoric is performed and is able to constitute "identity, incite emotion, and motivate action" (Cisneros 6). I adopt a similar approach to rhetorical criticism explained by Darrel Wanzer-Serrano where, "Rhetoric is not reducible to empty verbiage, deceitful speech, or a form of inaction. Instead, I see

rhetoric as both an object of inquiry and a perspective for engaging that object” (15).

Kaepernick’s discourse and his persona serve as both a site of inquiry and a lens to understand black masculinity. Critical rhetorical methodology provides the opportunity to reveal the relationship between Kaepernick’s understanding of his “monstrosity” and his utilization of his monstrous persona to transgress the disciplinary nature of sports culture and advocate for change. Kaepernick’s navigation of his ascribed identity in the media serves as one example of the contentious relationship between professional black male athletes, protest, and media discourse. While Kaepernick is not the first black male athlete to protest social injustice, his case further reveals the power of mediated discourse that obfuscates damaging norms associated with race and racism. The media’s reaction to Kaepernick further exposes the racist ideology associated with monstrosity. I seek to call attention to the influence of these symbols and how they contribute to the “collective beliefs, identifications, and actions” associated with Colin Kaepernick (Cisneros 6).

There is a breadth of scholarship that investigates how masculinity, hegemonic and black, is conveyed in the world of professional sport (Trujillo 292; Butterworth 232; Griffin, 167; hooks 21; Oates 86; Leonard 33; Grano 89; Lavelle 427; Khan 46), to cite but a few. While these scholars provide deep insight into how media often frames athletes in inherent sexist and racist ways, often to achieve economic gain, my goal is to expand the conversation and include notions of monstrosity. I aim to build upon this foundation and critically connect existing scholarship concerning black masculinity in sport with monstrosity. To make this connection, I first analyze Kaepernick’s initial press conference in which he explains his decision to kneel during the playing of the national anthem. Next, I look at mediated responses to Kaepernick’s press conference and continued kneeling through other NFL player’s responses via Twitter. Finally, I examine how Trump and NFL commissioner Roger Goodell demonized Kaepernick, which warrants his being framed as a monster. An analysis of Trump and Goodell’s remarks reveal how Kaepernick’s actions were perceived as monstrous and thus necessitated his ultimate unemployment within the NFL.

## Black Masculinity, Monstrosity, & Sports Culture

The characteristics associated with black masculinity are often conflated and dramatized by the media. Generally viewed as hyper aggressive and violent, black men are repeatedly depicted as “animals, brutes, natural born rapists, and murderers” (hooks 49). Oftentimes, black men are reduced to and signified by their body, which then results in associating stereotypical ideological beliefs with tenets of black masculinity. Seemingly, the implied violent nature of black men negates the ability for them to be viewed as American citizens. It is not shocking then that blackness, in particular black men and black masculinity, has historically been associated with notions of monstrosity. The link between black masculinity and “brute strength and natural instincts” (Collins 152) further explains why black men are overwhelmingly stereotyped and minimized to their bodies and physical prowess. In the case of Colin Kaepernick, and many other professional black male athletes, professional sports serve as a site of particular interest in to interrogate the relationship between the black male body, black masculinity, and monstrosity. Black masculinity correlates with tropes of violence and animalistic, or monstrous behaviors. Stuart Hall writes, “It is the position within the different signifying chains which ‘means,’ not the literal fixed correspondence between an isolated term and some denoted position in the color spectrum” (108). Black men and black masculinity “means” different things at any given time, much like any aspect of any individual’s identity. However, when black men are reduced to their bodies, as they so often are through the white patriarchal gaze, their identity is diminished to the ideological tropes associated with black masculinity. Because black men’s identity is encapsulated in the ideological tropes associated with black masculinity, their bodies serve as the main signifier for how they are categorized.

When black male athletes, and by extension black masculinity, cannot be contained and utilized for capitalistic gains, they must be coded in a way that warrants accurate discipline. According to Patricia Hill Collins, “Athletics constitutes a modern version of historical practices that saw Black men’s bodies as needing taming and training for practical use” (153). It is not a stretch to see how black male athletes can potentially to be monstrous, especially if they are no longer able to be tamed and trained for practical use. The question becomes, is there a gradient upon which cultural monsters are created and measured? (Rai 20). In this sense, black masculinity must be viewed as monstrous, and those who

embody black masculinity must become monsters within the realm of professional sports culture. The violence and “brute strength” often associated with black men is necessary in order for sports like professional football to be successful. However, it is when the monster begins to show itself “in something that is not yet shown” that monstrosity becomes something to be feared “precisely because no anticipation had prepared one to identify this figure” (Rai 23).

For Colin Kaepernick, his monstrosity began to evolve into something unidentifiable, therefore, he was coded as a threatening monster. Kaepernick challenged and made strange “the categories of beauty, humanity, and identity that we cling to,” which further resulted in his monstrous perception (Halberstam 6). The parallel between black bodies and monstrosity or horror is traceable throughout U.S. America’s history. Elizabeth Young explains, “The figure of the monster is consistently intertwined with fantasies and anxieties about masculinity, relations between men, and the male iconography of the American nation” (5). While Young refers to monstrosity in the U.S. generally, monsters in relation to blackness and racism have a deep-seated history in U.S. American culture. If black masculinity chronically links with violence, there is a seeming natural connection between black masculinity and monstrosity or horror. Robin Means Coleman explains, “In many instances violence in Blackness and horror function together to provide important discursive inroads, such as violence as exhibiting a sort of ‘return of the re/oppressed’” (5). According to Means Coleman, the association of violence and blackness does not have to be one that constrains but rather, offers an alternative narrative for black individuals. Horror and monstrous narratives then, have the potential to expand cultural understandings of black bodies and experiences, as is the case with Colin Kaepernick.

While Means Coleman offers an alternate understanding to black monstrosity, it would be remiss to ignore the deeply racist underpinnings that are traditionally associated with black bodies and black masculinity. Metaphorically speaking, monsters and horror represent cultural fears and anxieties. Scott Poole writes, “The link between the metaphor and the reality of horror, the moments when monstrous fascinations become monstrous acts, appears far too often in American historical experience” (24). American culture is both fearful of and fascinated by horror as representations of historical experience. The enduring appeal of the monstrous figure of Frankenstein reveals this obsession. Mary Shelley’s monster from the book *Frankenstein* can be interpreted to signify many things. Yet, Young argues that the consistent presence of the Frankenstein

monster and metaphor associated with it represents its vitality, and more specifically, it's representation of "contemporary language of political dissent" (4). Frankenstein's monster, especially a black Frankenstein monster, is political and "a key figure in the history of monsters as politically charged forms, as well as in the history of monstrosity as a constitutive feature of the language of politics" (13). Michael Lacey asserts the enduring representation of the monster includes one where "he is rejected because of his unnatural or grotesque condition; and, therefore, he suffers, becomes enraged, and goes on a murderous rampage against his maker" (231). The consistent rejection and subsequent murderous rampage justify the surviving correlation between black masculinity, monstrosity, and the need to discipline both. When blackness is embodied as monstrous and used as a tool in American political discourse, black bodies are interpreted as horrifying and dangerous. If black monstrosity is granted too much power or freedom, there is the threat of the monster rising up against his creator.

The fear of black monstrosity has a strong connection to professional sports culture. Black monstrosity or blackness is acceptable as long as it can be contained and controlled. However, when the black athlete or monster revolts against his creator, he must be disciplined. One particular example of this is the 2004 NBA brawl, or "Malice in the Palace." The physical fight involved players from the Detroit Pistons and Indiana Pacers. While this display of violence was certainly worrisome, it was not until the fight spilled into the stands among spectators that it became particularly problematic. Rachel Griffin and Bernadette Calafell explain that when the players entered the stands, "blackness became uncontrollable, spilling into the safety of white space, and the arena became a savage space where the black bodies of the players climbing into the stands were represented as 'violent beasts' going after 'innocent' white fans" (125). The black bodies, or monsters, did not contain their aggression and became "uncontrollable" and posed a threat to the spectators. In the metaphor of the monster, the spectators are the creator and the players are the monsters. The expectations of (white) spectators constrain black masculinity to the performance of sport and further highlight the power struggle between black men and U. S. American society. Black male athletes' control is limited to the arena of competition. Collins further discusses this tension and explains that, "Black men's bodies generate admiration, whereas in others, these qualities garner fear...the bodies of athletes and models are admired, viewed as entertaining, and used to sell a variety of products" (153). Outside of the game, the aggression and violence associated with black male

athletes is coded as dangerous and therefore untrustworthy. Black athletes can be aggressive when it is for the benefit of white spectators. When black male athletes contest the ideological beliefs associated with black masculinity and instead demonstrate modes of monstrosity, ideological struggle occurs.

Black athletes are more susceptible to the breaking down, fragmentation, and disenfranchisement of their bodies, minds, and voices. The presentation of a politicized black athlete who is unafraid to vocalize concern is something that creates discomfort among “the unenlightened white world” (hooks 23). It is within the confines of professional sport that its symbolic power becomes evident. Sut Jhally further explains,

Sport derives its ability to mediate this dialectic from its power as *symbol*, a symbolism that lies at the root of its role as ritual. This allows us to not merely ask the surface questions of *what* values are internalized through sports, but also questions regarding *how* that movement is structured. (52)

For hooks and Jhally, sports culture functions symbolically. When the structures that operate within sports culture are scrutinized and interrogated, the value associated with racial identity and racial politics is revealed. Kaepernick represents notions of black Frankenstein because he is a monster who “revolts against his creator” (Lacy 231) to advocate for racial equality. The discourse that surrounds his nonviolent protests further expose how the NFL values him for his athletic ability, not his politicized voice.

### A Monster is Born

Colin Kaepernick explained his decision to sit during the playing of the national anthem during a locker room press conference following an August 2016 preseason game. When asked if he will continue to sit Kaepernick says yes and explains,

I’m going to continue to stand with the people that are being oppressed. To me this is something that has to change. When there’s significant change and I feel like that flag represents what it’s supposed to represent, this country is representing people the way that it’s supposed to, I’ll stand. (Biderman, “Transcript”)

Kaepernick specifically states what needs to change in order for him to resume standing. He says, “There’s a lot of things that need to change. One specifically is police brutality. There’s people being murdered unjustly and not being held accountable” (Biderman, “Transcript”). Kaepernick’s action of kneeling followed by his answer during the press conference reveal the paradox of his nonviolent actions. He peacefully protests in response to the cultural and literal violence experienced by black communities. Kaepernick physically and vocally calls attention to an issue that persists in U.S. American culture. From his perspective, his acts of nonviolent protest are necessary in order to point out the true cultural monsters, police officers who murder black U.S. Americans.

Certainly, the views Kaepernick expresses are not shocking. However, it is the venue and ways he took action that place him in a precarious position. Professional athletes, especially black male athletes, are meant to be seen and not heard. Kaepernick violates this notion. By openly stating his opinion about police brutality, Kaepernick disturbs the expectations associated with his locale as a professional athlete. Kaepernick sets forth the frame that views him as monstrous. His actions are shocking. According to Phillips, “This level of shock is caused not merely by the introduction of some new monster but through an almost systematic violation of the rules of the game” (7). Kaepernick does both. He introduces himself as a monster who violates the rules and expectations ascribed to black male athletes. Additionally, he evokes the persona of black Frankenstein. Young writes, “With its plot of boomerang violence, Frankenstein is the embodiment of blowback, or as another commentator summarizes the theory, ‘Now the monster as turned on its creator’” (2). Kaepernick is not content standing and honoring a flag that does not honor all of the citizens it presumes to protect. Instead, he turns on his creator, revolts by kneeling, and resists.

Kaepernick’s form of resistance exemplifies what Gorsevski and Butterworth explain as “the paradox is that nonviolence invokes a perception of imminent violence in the short-term so as to gain long-term, nonviolent social change” (51). Kaepernick is seemingly aware of this. However, the imminent, short-term violence is against himself and his career. He explains,

There’s a lot of people that don’t want to have this conversation. They’re scared that they might lose their job, or they might not get the endorsements, they might not be treated the same way. And those are things I’m prepared to handle and those are things that you know, other



people might not be ready for... I've been blessed to be able to get this far and have the privilege of being in the NFL and making the kind of money I make and enjoy the kind of luxuries like that. But, I can't look in the mirror and see other people dying on the street that should have the same opportunities that I've had and say, you know what, I can live with myself, because I can't if I just watch. (Biderman, "Transcript")

Kaepernick states he is willing to invoke short-term violence against his personal career and financial well-being in order to achieve long-term social change. However, Kaepernick would not be financially stable without the NFL, which is something he acknowledges. Through this, he further illuminates his position as black Frankenstein. According to Young, the traditional depiction of Frankenstein is one that is sympathetic. Yet, when interpreted as an allegory for slavery, the monster is positioned "within the slave owning and colonial enterprises, moving him 'toward and away from the master' rather than in a direction entirely his own" (29). Kaepernick is moving in his own direction. Yet, this would not have been possible had he not participated in the colonial enterprise of the NFL. He allowed his body and skill to be commodified and consumed in order to achieve economic freedom. It is specifically because of this that he embodies notions of black Frankenstein. The Frankenstein monster is meant "to signal both monster and monster-maker" (Young 3). The NFL created Kaepernick, and like Frankenstein, he no longer wants to be oppressed, thus he must revolt against his creator. Unlike Frankenstein, Kaepernick's mode of revolt and revolution invites violence upon himself instead of evoking violence upon others. Kaepernick becomes a cultural monster and sacrifices his economic well-being to achieve his goal.

Seemingly, Kaepernick did not initially intend to be cast as monstrous. Yet, he is cognizant of the ways his modes of resistance are perceived. Kaepernick challenges hegemonic notions associated with black male bodies, especially athletic black male bodies. Historically, blackness and black masculinity signify violence. However, Kaepernick offers a version of blackness that Means Coleman describes as, "mature, God-fearing and otherwise resistant to evil, whole and full, wise and aged, in full combat against evil, and at or near the center of constructions of goodness" (10). Kaepernick purposefully enacts nonviolent resistance and performs an alternate form of monstrosity. His actions are perceived as violent because they disrupt ideology associated with the ritual of

standing for the national anthem. His explanation indicates his understanding of the consequences associated with his actions. He counters the presumption that as a black man, he is “naturally” violent. Instead, he thoroughly explains his thought process in a “wise and aged” way. Kaepernick’s embodiment of black masculinity and monstrosity is not violent and is not ruled by brute strength. Instead, he is nonviolently “in full combat against evil.” This is particularly noteworthy since he is a black athlete who was employed by one of the most physically violent professional sports organizations. Yet, Kaepernick refuses to be traditionally tamed and controlled. He uses his embodiment of black masculinity and monstrosity to present a construction of goodness. He demonstrates this through avenues of non-violence by kneeling and further problematizes the understanding of his black masculinity.

Finally, Kaepernick establishes his refusal to conform to the whiteness of the NFL. However, this lack of conformity gives sports media and political pundits the opportunity to frame him as monstrous. According to Cohen, monsters are “disturbing hybrids whose externally incoherent bodies resist attempts to include them in any systematic structuration. And so, the monster is dangerous, a form suspended between forms that threatens to smash distinctions” (6). Through his actions and responses during the press conference it is evident that Kaepernick smashes distinctions. Kaepernick frames himself as a professional football player and a concerned citizen who believes that it is necessary to take a stand. For example, when asked if this will distract him from the Super Bowl he states, “You know, we talk about football. We handle our business there. But, you know, there’s also a social responsibility that we have to be educated on these things and talk about these things” (Biderman, “Transcript”). Kaepernick is able to focus on football *and* the social responsibility he has, which violates the expectations of the NFL. He is a politicized body and mind. As such, Kaepernick embodies black masculinity and monstrosity in order to “horrify the white man,” or in this instance, the NFL (Young 40). He is a monstrous hybrid of professional athlete and activist. Kaepernick’s decision to position himself as a hybrid further creates the opportunity to view his actions and persona as monstrous, especially because he roots his need to protest in political and ideological difference. As Cohen iterates, it is these differences that serve as “a catalyst to monstrous representation on a micro level as cultural alterity in the macrocosm” (8).

## The Monster Lives On

Kaepernick's decision to sit or kneel during the national anthem was to protest the literal and cultural violence demonstrated against bodies of color. He was labeled monstrous and unpatriotic because of his actions and investment in cultural politics. Yet, Kaepernick himself explains his decision to protest the national anthem has nothing to do with patriotism and everything to do with the state of the nation. In a sense, Kaepernick is a monster in the horror film of the U.S.'s current cultural climate. He depicts horror in a way that "captures our cultural anxieties and concerns that our collective fears seem projected onto the screen before us" (Phillips 3). Jeffery Cohen explains specific cultural moments create monsters. Further, he indicates "the monster signifies something other than itself: it is always a displacement, always inhabits the gap between the time of upheaval that created it and the moment into which it is received and born again" (Cohen 4). Kaepernick's actions and explanation force the country into a moment of upheaval, which makes viewers of the NFL contend with the monster Kaepernick has become. In order to cope with this horror, fellow NFL players further perpetuated the narrative of Kaepernick as monstrous. Kaepernick's rationale for protesting became re-appropriated by other NFL players. As such, the Twitter responses reveal that *what* is valued in the NFL is patriotism that supports the white status quo. Kaepernick's explicit revolt against this ideological stance warrants his monstrous coding.

Initially, Kaepernick's presentation of his monstrous persona was not well received within the NFL community. A poll taken in September 2016, less than a month after Kaepernick's press conference, revealed that he was "disliked a lot" by 29 percent of those who were polled, more than any of the more than 350 players asked about in the survey (Rovell "Poll"). While Kaepernick did not poll favorably with most NFL fans, his popularity among African-Americans showed an increase. According to the same data, "The poll shows 42 percent of African-Americans now say they like the 49ers quarterback 'a lot,' while only 2 percent dislike him 'a lot'" (Rovell "Poll"). Kaepernick's popularity among the African-American community should not be a shock. His embodiment of monstrosity attempted to call attention to the horror black communities face on a daily basis. Certainly, African-American fans would empathize with this, yet, this was clearly not a narrative most of the NFL fan base wants to be exposed to. Griffin and Calafell further explain that American sport is not intended for viewers of color.

Instead, the gaze of the spectator is meant “to commodify blackness so that it appeals to consumers willing to spend the most money consuming the sport, which tend to be white middle and upper-class people” (Griffin and Calafell 124). It is not surprising then that Kaepernick was not popular among the larger NFL fan base. His monstrous actions directly interfered with the commodification of his blackness.

The NFL organization also poorly received Kaepernick’s monstrous performance. Many players took to Twitter to express their feelings. Justin Pugh, an offensive lineman for the New York Giants tweeted, “I will be **STANDING** during the National Anthem tonight. Thank you to **ALL** (Gender, Race, Religion) that put your lives on the line for that flag” (Pugh). Additionally, fellow quarterback and free agent T.J. Yates commented with, “It blows my mind how many people hate the country they live in” (Yates) and retired player Tyler Polunby tweeted, “Activists changed USA for better but have to associate Nat Anthem w/ military that die for ur right to protest. Stand up. Find another way” (Polunby). It is evident the justification for taking a knee was lost among most of Kaepernick’s white peers. The intention behind his protest was quickly correlated with disrespect for the U.S. American flag and military. By shifting the purpose of the protest, Kaepernick’s peers reified the narrative of castigating his acts and persona as monstrous. Kaepernick was not only revolting against his creator through the NFL, but also the creator of the freedoms and liberties those who serve in the military fight to protect.

Perhaps more surprising is that several black players did not whole heartedly support his actions. Russell Okung of the Los Angeles Chargers wrote, “Kaepernick is well within his rights to do what he did. I’m not saying I agree but I do understand why he felt morally obligated in his acts” (Okung). Similarly, Arian Foster stated that he believed Kaepernick was well within his rights to kneel. He wrote, “He has the right to choose not to stand. just as you have the right to disagree with his stance. round and round we go” (Foster). Unlike the white players, Okung and Foster state that they do not agree with his actions but understand that Kaepernick has the “right” to protest. However, in this instance, what is withheld or not said by these two players reveals the tension and power dynamic black athletes must navigate, especially within the NFL. Seemingly, neither Okung nor Foster want to risk being linked with Kaepernick’s monstrosity. Their responses reveal Kaepernick as a monster who is both “the thing that horrifies, or as the victim or that which is horrified” (Means Coleman

8). If Okung or Foster agree with Kaepernick, they risk being labeled monstrous by association. His monstrosity created dissent among his fellow NFL players. What is important to note is the tweets associate Kaepernick's monstrosity with being unpatriotic. By positioning Kaepernick as unpatriotic, it is easier to view him as a monster against the state and cultural politics. His monstrosity becomes a pawn in the horror narrative to further perpetuate a polarized relationship between Kaepernick and those who stand for the national anthem. Means Coleman writes, "Horror continues to propagate an 'us,' 'them,' and 'us versus them' understanding of race relationships in which cross-cultural communication is displayed as difficult to negotiate head on" (213). The horror narrative created by the discourse on Twitter positions Kaepernick as someone who is difficult to communicate and negotiate with. He does not respect the U.S. American flag or the military, therefore he is beyond reason and negotiation.

### (Un)taming Kaepernick's Monster

It is not surprising that a similar sentiment was echoed by the NFL commissioner, Roger Goodell. Goodell released a statement to AP and said, "We believe very strongly in patriotism in the NFL. I personally believe very strongly in that" (Wilner "Goodell doesn't agree"). He goes on to explain, "We have to choose respectful ways of doing that so that we can achieve the outcomes we ultimately want and do it with the values and ideals that make our country great" (Wilner "Goodell doesn't agree"). Goodell concludes his remarks by stating, "I think it's important to have respect for our country, for our flag, for the people who make our country better; for law enforcement; and for our military who are out fighting for our freedoms and our ideals" (Wilner "Goodell Doesn't Agree"). Rhetorically, Goodell further positions Kaepernick as a monster who is unreasonable and who does not understand "our freedoms and our ideals." Goodell furthers the horror narrative of "us" versus "them." According to Goodell, Kaepernick's monstrous persona is one that does not respect the country. Kaepernick then is not only a black Frankenstein, but a bogeyman who "embodies the chaos that exists on the other side of these cultural boundaries" (Phillips 133). By placing Kaepernick in a dichotomous space, Goodell rhetorically positions Kaepernick as a monster who falls outside of the cultural boundary of understanding true patriotism and U.S. American ideals. Instead, Kaepernick is a monster lurking on the other side of

these boundaries waiting to attack. Rhetorically, Goodell asserts himself as the innocent creator. Goodell and the NFL respect the country, flag, etc. He is the voice of the white patriarchal spectators who consume Kaepernick's black body. Because Goodell conflates the purpose behind Kaepernick's protest with notions of patriotism, he is able to further deepen the white ideological stance that saturates the NFL and ostensibly validate the disciplinary action taken against Kaepernick.

This is a stance taken up by Donald Trump. As previously discussed, he whole heartedly supports the new NFL policy that punishes any player or personnel who kneels during the anthem. Additionally, he has openly called players who took a knee "sons of bitches" and indicated that they deserve to be fired (Remnick "The Racial Demagoguery"). While Trump does not explicitly name Kaepernick, he implies Kaepernick's influence and he states, "We put our hands on our hearts for the pledge of allegiance and we stand for the national anthem" (Lincoln, "Donald Trump Implies"). Thus, Trump contributes to and continues the demonization of Kaepernick and his actions. By conflating Kaepernick's actions as anti-American or unpatriotic it becomes easier to frame him as a cultural monster who necessitates and more importantly, deserves disciplinary action. More recently, Trump made the rhetorical shift to not only call for NFL players who disrespect the flag and anthem to be fired, but to also be removed from the country. Calling for this level of action against players, mainly black players, Trump not only frames Kaepernick as monstrous, but also anyone who chooses to follow in his path.

What becomes particularly unsettling about Trump's narrative is that while Kaepernick and his colleagues may be viewed as cultural monsters, a similar shift in Trump's divisiveness is concurrently happening in regard to individuals immigrating from Mexico. In a response to a comment about ICE and MS-13 gang members Trump stated, "You wouldn't believe how bad these people are. These aren't people. These are animals. And we're taking them out of the country at a level and at a rate that's never happened before" (Valverde "In Context"). While Trump does not call immigrants or MS-13 gang members monsters, he refers to them as animals. They are not people and should be treated as such. What is similar between Trump's rhetoric in regard to Kaepernick, black NFL players, and Mexican immigrants is that in both statements, he classifies all as unhuman. They are animals or sons of bitches. They need to be handled or fired. Feasibly what is more revealing is Trump's comments regarding the NFL players

serve as a foreshadow to his quick spiral of framing bodies of color as in-human. Monster or animal, all must be handled in a way that aligns with the measure of disrespect demonstrated against the United States. Trump's comments further reveal the embedded notions of racism sewn into America's cultural fabric. However, like Collins iterates, these racial politics, especially blackness, are rendered invisible (169). By calling bodies of color animals or coding them as monstrous, Trump is able to, albeit poorly, obscure the larger issue of racism from popular discourse.

## Conclusion

Goodell and Trump's responses to Kaepernick are deeply problematic but grant Kaepernick the opportunity to capitalize upon his monstrous persona. Undoubtedly, the violent rhetoric and vitriol espoused by Trump necessitates an emboldened and angered response. Yet, Kaepernick furthers his position as a nonviolent monster by remaining silent. In spite of being in a violent situation, Kaepernick remains nonviolent. He creates a rhetorical slippage between who should be deemed a monster in these specific situations. If Kaepernick is a version of black Frankenstein, he reveals a story that "requires not only the presence of a monstrous slave, but also a way to dramatize ongoing enslavement" (Young 44). The consistent demonization by Trump allows Kaepernick to continuously call attention to the modern enslavement experienced by black U.S. Americans. By accepting his monstrosity in silence, he allows the true monster to rear his head. For example, when questioned further about the NFL policy Trump replied with, "You have to stand proudly for the national anthem and the NFL owners did the right thing if that's what they've done" (Around the NFL Staff, "Donald Trump"). Trump, the NFL, and Goodell, further highlight the modes of ongoing enslavement that necessitates the birth of Kaepernick's brand of monstrosity. He cannot and will not be tamed.

Kaepernick's monstrous persona, predicated upon his embodied black masculinity, is certainly not a new framing strategy from the media. As Calafell argues, blackness and monstrosity seemingly work hand in hand. However, unlike Kanye West, Kaepernick does not purposefully evoke a monstrous vision (Calafell 115). Additionally, Kaepernick does not perceive himself as part of a monstrous race who should remain a remote social outsider (Wright 26). While

Kaepernick may not explicitly perceive himself as a monster, he intentionally and purposefully inserts himself into a narrative that advocates for social justice while encouraging the inner social justice monster in his fans to emerge. Kaepernick urges his supporters to harness their desire for an inner monster as a means to “embrace our own darkness” (Poole 16).

In many ways, his monstrous persona gives birth to baby monsters who will continue to work against the violent and cultural oppression perpetuated against bodies of color. As a version of black Frankenstein, Kaepernick is able to incite “racial rebellion,” but also create vampire-like monsters who will continue his legacy. Kaepernick’s deployment of monstrosity challenges Young’s understanding of vampires, who have traditionally worked “better to depict continuing racial enslavement” (13). However, Kaepernick’s monstrous legacy and creation of vampires does not hint at one that includes racial enslavement. On the contrary, the presence of vampires who carry on Kaepernick’s legacy indicate the hopeful promise of Kaepernick’s monstrous persona. Cohen theorizes that vampires are able to remain a monstrous race that perseveres because they are a monster that takes new shape, and “returns in slightly different clothing, each time to be read against contemporary social movements or a specific, determining event” (5).

Kaepernick has succeeded in returning in slightly different clothing. During the press conference he indicated his plans of resistance were greater than the NFL. He replies, “There are things I have in the works right now at I’m working on to, you know, put together in the future and have come to fruition soon” (Biderman, “Transcript”). According to Kaepernick’s website, “The mission of the Colin Kaepernick Foundation is to fight oppression of all kinds globally, through education and social activism” (“About”). This includes Kaepernick’s pledge, “I will donate one million dollars plus all the proceeds of my jersey sales from the 2016 season to organizations working in oppressed communities, 100k a month for 10 months” (“Million Dollar Pledge”). Additionally, he founded the “Know Your Rights Camp,” which “is a free campaign for youth fully funded by Colin Kaepernick to raise awareness on higher education, self-empowerment, and instruction to properly interact with law enforcement in various scenarios” (“Know Your Rights Camp”). Kaepernick does not have to remain the monster because he is able to *create* monsters who return in slightly different clothing and are able to adapt to varying contemporary social movements.



While Kaepernick may not remain a monster in society, his monstrous legacy will certainly live on. Kaepernick did not create the horrific narrative of racial violence in America. However, he became a monster by vocalizing his concerns. He also promised this narrative will not go away. This is evidenced in recent comments from Trump. When questioned about the NFL protests Trump responded with, “They're all saying, 'Oh, it has nothing to do with the flag, it's the way we've been treated. In the meantime, they're making \$15 million a year. Look, I'm all for the athletes. I think it's great. I love athletics. I love sports. But they shouldn't get the politics involved” (Schad “Donald Trump Says He Doesn't Believe”). By accepting his monstrous persona, Kaepernick allows the monstrous movement to grow beyond him, which was his original purpose. For Kaepernick and his supporters, sports are political, but politics should not remain just in the realm of sport. Instead, Kaepernick and his monstrous politics can infiltrate communities and villages outside of sport. He demonstrates this through his charitable actions. According to Rachel Leah, “the unsigned quarterback was awarded the Week 1 NFLPA Community MVP for his philanthropy and grassroots activism in support of marginalized communities” (“Colin Kaepernick, unsigned, wins NFL Players Association MVP”). He may not be employed by the NFL, but he is not going away. Poole writes, “One of the conventions of modern horror is to portray the death of the monster and the restoration of the social order only to bring the thing horrifyingly back to life in the final frame” (228). Kaepernick is not a defeated monster. It is quite the contrary. He is a monster who encourages other like-minded monsters to embrace their darkness and continue his legacy. Arguably, the demonization of his monstrous persona is the very thing that makes his narrative so appealing. Kaepernick's career in the NFL may be dead, but he is not gone, and he has created a sentiment in the U.S. that is horrifying and still lurking in the final frame.

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