

## **Rhetorical Analysis of Colin Kaepernick**

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**Figure 1**



Rhetorical analysis is the process of looking at a certain image, speech, text, etc, to understand the message, the purpose, and who the target audience is. When taking a look at the following image above, the first you might notice is people in jerseys. The gear resembles what people wear when they play football. Another thing you might notice from this is that you see two players kneeling while the rest of the people shown are standing. You might be curious about what is happening in this scenario. What this image shows is the NFL football team, the San Francisco 49ers. More importantly, what is shown is the quarterback of the 49ers, Colin Kaepernick. Based on this image, you can assume that the photo was taken for NFL fans, more specifically, people who like the 49ers, or people who are fans of Colin Kaepernick. Although at first glance, this seems like an innocent photo, there is a lot more context that takes place about this image that it does not show. This essay will use rhetorical analysis to understand this image of Colin Kaepernick and the purpose and the message behind it.

To understand the context of this image, there is some history that must be learned before taking a closer look at the photo in full depth. On July 2016, there was a killing of African Americans who were unarmed (Levi's® Stadium). Due to these events, some athletes like WNBA players protested with "Black Lives Matter" shirts for the killing, leading them to get fined. During the summer of 2016, Colin Kaepernick was in recovery from a surgery he had received and spent time on social media during his recovery, sending out comments (HISTORY). What this image shows is Kaepernick kneeling. Many different photos during the 2016-2017 NFL season were taken of Kaepernick kneeling. However this image is unique because back during the 2016 NFL preseason, Kaepernick did not stand for the U.S National Anthem. When a reporter asked him why he did not stand for the anthem, Kaepernick responded with "I am not going to stand up to show pride in a flag for a country that oppresses Black people and people of color" (HISTORY 2016). On September 1st, 2016, the San Francisco 49ers played against the San Diego Chargers. On this particular day, Colin Kaepernick kneels during the anthem. This was the start of the few kneels Kaepernick would take during the 2016-2017 season of the NFL.

This image shown is not just only targeted for sports, or NFL fans who like the 49ers of Kaepernick, but it is also targeted to African Americans who are harassed, people who care for racial injustice, and people on social media. This image even caught the attention of Barack Obama and Donald Trump. The people who took most of these photos of Kaepernick did not give their stand on him performing his kneeling. The rest of the players of the 49ers are not shown. But it manages to capture some of the people at the game standing showing a difference in what is going on. It makes Kaepernick and his teammates appear isolated. With the context of the photo in mind, you can see the purpose of someone taking a photo of Kaepernick was to make him controversial and make him be seen as problematic. Kaepernick was the a star player

for the 49ers, so him not standing for the national anthem caused a lot of discussion about him, and with the use of social media, photos of him kneeling got out and invited many viewers who are not football to see Kaepernick making him more viral. This photo also shows that even though many athletes got to where they want in life, some of them still look out for their community. Just like how some of the WNBA players wore “Black Lives Matter” shirts to protest the shooting in the summer of 2016, Kaepernick kneeled showing that he cares for the lives of African Americans since he was willing to put his beliefs first before his job as a player for the NFL. This image shows the racial injustice of the African American community when this photo was taken, and it shows that even athletes still care for their community.

Based on this image, ethos can be established in this rhetorical analysis. The ethos of this rhetorical analysis is Colin Kaepernick, who became the face of the protest that he started during the 2016 preseason game. As a professional athlete, he used social media and his protest to make people aware of what was happening with the African American community. He even got some of his teammates to join him in his protest. Wearing his NFL jersey also shows the people that people should not take what he is doing lightly and be taken very seriously. This rhetorical analysis also shows the pathos of this image. The pathos creates an emotional appeal with Kaepernick kneeling during the national anthem. It may make people who are football fans feel different about him, and maybe not care for him anymore, while some people who are not fans of football like what he is doing with his protest. This is how Kaepernick became controversial with his protest.

Overall, the image of Colin Kaepernick kneeling creates a well-visual rhetorical analysis. The use of the image focusing on him, while leaving out the rest of the team gives a sense of him being isolated. With the context in mind, the purpose of this image was to reach out to a different

audience of people which caused him to be controversial, causing him to lose fans while gaining new ones. Whether people agreed with what he did or not, this image succeeds in the rhetorical analysis, forcing people to think critically about Colin Kaepernick.

### References

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