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2019 LAURE Essay

### Behind the Man, the Kneel, and the Protest

If someone were to have told me three years ago that I would be writing an essay describing how I utilized the library to research a topic for a paper, I would have thought they were kidding. But alas, here I am, writing this paper with a new-found respect for librarians and researchers around the globe.

It all started in my MAC 447: Media Criticism class. Our final writing assignment consisted of students picking a media artifact to analyze with one of the critical lenses we reviewed throughout the semester. From here, one would create a probable argument and construct a rhetorical research paper. The last critical lens we have analyzed in class, the activist lens, stood out to me because of the example article included in the module readings, David Johnson's (2007) examination of the images taken during Martin Luther King Jr.'s march through Birmingham in 1963. Johnson's riveting article showed how King's use of visual arguments moved moderate whites to mobilize favor of civil rights. I decided to use Johnson's article and the activist lens as a guide, and I picked the kneeling image of Colin Kaepernick as my media artifact. Kaepernick's stance and message had sparked discussion and controversy during the 2016 NFL season and was still doing so in November of 2018 with talk of who would perform at the 2019 Superbowl halftime show. Many artists like Cardi B and Rihanna declined the offer to perform, reasoning that they instead stand in solidarity with Kaepernick. My intention for the paper was to bring awareness to the message behind Kaepernick's kneel, especially because media coverage of Kaepernick's activism often (and inaccurately) framed Kaepernick's position as anti-military.

Truthfully, I did not know where to start for research on this paper. I went to see my professor, Leland Spencer, for guidance who introduced me to the various resources available at the library. Since I am a regional student, I had only ever been to the Rentschler Library on the Hamilton campus. Prof. Spencer introduced me on how to request books from the multiple libraries on various campuses to be sent to Rentschler library. I also became acquainted with the databases of Communication and Mass Media Complete and Race Relations Abstracts. Knowing that there were hundreds of databases just waiting to be searched upon made my fingers itch with excitement.

From here I requested books on anything related to police brutality, race, and riots and began database searches on keywords like "Kaepernick", "kneel", "protesting", and "Black Lives Matter". While Rahtz's *Race, Riots and the Police*, and the library's access to the e-journal *Communication and Sport* led me to more information on the background of Kaepernick's message, I was stumped with finding articles and books that tied into what the kneeling image was representing. Meeting again with Prof. Spencer led me to a more refined question: what were the rhetorical components that composed the image of Kaepernick, and what did these elements represent to the African-American community and the world as a whole?

I went back to my database pursuit, but this time explored the keywords "kneeling", "symbol", "visual image", and "NFL protest". I also delved into resources like OhioLink to find books related to African-American hair and systematic oppression in America throughout the years. I was now able to construct a paper that not only dealt with Kaepernick's message of police brutality against the African-American community, but also the symbolism presented within kneeling in society and Afros (which is the hairstyle of choice Kaepernick wears in the image).

After writing the paper for class, I was encouraged by Prof. Spencer to continue with my rhetorical research on the image. Instead of solely looking at the image from an activist lens, I switched direction somewhat to the critical lens of image events. Kevin DeLuca's *Image Politics* (2009) greatly helped me to establish the basis of image events, but I started having trouble figuring out how image events were framed in the 21<sup>st</sup>-century media. I had scoured for hours one night in what I thought to be all the relevant databases to my research and was coming up with nothing. By fortunate luck, a pop-up appeared on my screen stating a librarian was available to chat. I entered the chat room and was greeted by Jenny Presnell. I explained to her my dilemma and how I felt hopeless because I thought I had searched every possible keyword and similarity out there. She immediately jumped into action and introduced me to the Academic Search Complete database. Through her, I was able to find multiple articles related to social media and images. I also was able to delve deeper into the militaristic presence that is resonated throughout the NFL. Because of the librarian Jenny Presnell, I felt like a weight had been lifted off my shoulder, for now, I could move forward in the process.

Through Miami's libraries and many resources, I was able to construct a research paper analyzing the kneeling image of Colin Kaepernick. Multiple databases and many requested books from various libraries helped me craft the numerous subsections of the paper: the NFL's militaristic presence, image events throughout the past half-century, the protesting of the racial divide, and Kaepernick's own rhetorical elements presented in the image. The representation and message behind Kaepernick's stance have provided me a greater pride for my African-American ancestry. The diverse array of resources provided by the Miami library, both physically and digitally, has given me new-found respect, and fondness, for librarians, and the conduction of research.

## References

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