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Red, White, and Blue for Who?

A critical discourse analysis of mainstream media coverage of Colin Kaepernick and Take a Knee.

Kim M Reynolds

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To the people and scholars who continue to give language to the mechanisms of indignity, thank you making us more free.

For those who came before and laid my foundation with their life, thank you for Black, queer, woman resilience.

For love and for struggle.

ABSTRACT

This thesis project examines the media representation and discursive framing of Colin Kaepernick and the protest movement, Take a Knee. In August of 2016, former San Francisco 49ers quarterback Colin Kaepernick began kneeling during the traditional playing of the national anthem, before the start of a National Football League (NFL) game noting that he would not “stand up to show pride in a flag for a country that oppresses black people and people of color”. This movement has resulted in widespread criticism and commentary ranging from condemnation of Kaepernick as unpatriotic, insulting the national flag, military, and law enforcement, to being referred to as a “son of a bitch” by citing United States president, Donald Trump.

Through a critical discourse analysis of six opinion pieces published in three widely read and ideologically differing publications, Fox News, the New York Times, and The Guardian, this thesis seeks to explore the research question, To what extent does the mainstream media news’ coverage of Colin Kaepernick’s Take a Knee movement draw upon racialized discourse?

The conceptual framework of critical race theory in conjunction with critical discourse analysis yielded results that demonstrate that each publication drew upon racialized discourse, with the overwhelmingly majority of this discourse being classified as inferentially racist, liberally racist, or delegitimizing of Kaepernick and the protests overall.

1 INTRODUCTION

"I am not going to stand up to show pride in a flag for a country that oppresses black people and people of color".

This excerpt is from a press statement given by Colin Kaepernick, then San Francisco 49ers quarterback, in August of 2016 to National Football League (NFL) reporters (Wyche, 2016). Kaepernick shared his statement with the press to explain his reasoning behind his recent movement of taking a knee during the pre-game playing of the national anthem of the United States of America. The backdrop to the beginning of the Kaepernick's protest was colored with America's past and present, violence against Black bodies. In the summer of 2016 leading up to the NFL fall season and Kaepernick's kneeling, America saw significant and tangible outrage and reaction in the form of major protests and demonstrations against two murders of Black men. Alton Sterling (age 37) and Philando Castile (age 32) were murdered just one day apart in different parts of the country, but both cases became high profile #BlackLivesMatter cases (National Police Shootings Database). Colin Kaepernick's actions as a major figure with a platform of the NFL brought upon praise and solidarity from anti-racist groups, but largely condemnation, backlash and anger from various groups and individuals on the political spectrum. Kaepernick, and those that knelt with him, have been accused of being unpatriotic, disrespectful to the United States military and troops and were often dismissed as out of touch with oppression as million dollar earning athletes (Erickson, 2016). This criticism was voiced by various media outlets, both sports oriented or otherwise, for the entirety of the season. Fast forward to the 2017 season and while Kaepernick's contract was not renewed for any team, his movement of taking a knee during the anthem carried on within the NFL league as well as to various other social domains such as those singing national anthems (Eleftheriou-Smith, 2016) and high school athletics (USA Today High School Sports). Controversy around this movement was further provoked when United States President Donald Trump referred to Kaepernick and all those protesting as sons of bitches, saying at a campaign rally, "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, out, he's fired. He's fired'" (Stelter, 2017). Following this incident, the hashtag #TakeAKnee began trending a few days later in support of Kaepernick and solidified the action of kneeling as the Take a Knee movement (Jhaveri, 2017).

The interest of conducting a critical discourse analysis of mainstream media coverage and opinion pieces that center on the Take a Knee movement (from its inception in 2016 all the up until late 2018), lies in the use of racialized discourse and the influence of the media. Therefore, this thesis seeks to answer the question *To what extent does the mainstream media news' coverage of Colin Kaepernick's Take a Knee movement draw upon racialized discourse?*

Take a Knee is a movement that is undeniably bound up in race, and it becomes important to crystallize the tensions that have presently and historically affected the reception of anti-racist messages in the United States of America, a country where racism functions as a fundamental pillar (Kendi, 2016; Baldwin, 1963). Critical race theorists acknowledge that the legacy of racialized slavery in combination with colorblind ideologies play out in a way where racism is “ordinary, not exceptional” (Delgado & Stefancic, 2007, p. 136). Moreover, the Take a Knee movement is seeking to acknowledge the prevailing and institutional racism of the United States in an era where the election of a Black president and the adoption of colorblind ideology demonstrate a contested belief that the United States is moving towards a post racial reality or has achieved a post racial status (Alexander, 2012).

With this in mind, the media discourse that has represented Take a Knee across various and prominent outlets is one of great interest as well as one of great tradition. It is media that greatly shapes and informs our ideas of what is normal, natural, and common sense (Dijk, 1996). Hall (1982) acknowledges that the media possess the power to “define the rules of the game” (p. 63) and interrogating the discourse that is legitimized through mainstream outlets can have revelatory outcomes. Moreover, media studies in conversation with critical discourse analysis does indeed point towards avenues of “radical social change” (Bartesaghi & Pantelides, p.162), where we can begin to identify the power dynamics of the media, the underpinnings of such power, and finally, move towards more equitable and dignified practices and foundations. Therefore, this dissertation argues that racialized discourse informs social realities, where whiteness foregrounds the discussion of the racialized other.

Through a critical discourse analysis of six sampled opinion pieces from widely read mainstream media outlets in the United States, this thesis seeks to understand the function of race, the media, and discourse in the framing and representation of Take a Knee.

2 THEORETICAL CHAPTER

2.1 Race and the United States

2.1.1 Race and Racism

This project seeks to understand the presence and implication of racialized language surrounding Take a Knee. As such, this is inline with the racialized past and present of the United States. Race is a social construct dating back to the 16th century, as a European invention of racial hierarchy and supremacy rooted in biological pseudo science, justifying the superiority of whiteness and the inferiority of Blackness through the practice of racialized colonialism and trans-Atlantic slavery (Murji & Solomos, 2005). This pseudo science or “scientific racism” was rooted in legitimizing discriminatory beliefs about the “other”, particularly Black people, in order to justify colonialism and slavery, posing that non-white people were unintelligible and ungovernable, and therefore less equipped for enlightened self determination, all by defined by European standards (Hall, 1995). In this hierarchy, the superiority of whiteness is dependent upon the demarcation “others” (Pajaczkowska & Young, 1992). In relation to whiteness, Blackness was constructed as primitive (Hall, 1997), scientifically less capable of thinking (Washington, 2006), criminal (Muhammed, 2010) and child-like (Fanon, 1967). Following the end of 400 years of racialized enslavement in the United States, race and racism persisted as organizing forces still touching our everyday realities (Alexander, 2012). State sanctioned racism has protected the practice of violence against Black bodies, often in the form of lynching, segregation, voting disenfranchisement, housing, banking, employment discrimination, criminal justice politics, as well as a myriad of other structures and initiatives (Quadagno, 1994; Alexander, 2012; Washington, 2006; Kendi, 2016). Additionally, racism has taken on affective expressions through racial resentment. Resentment in the form of feigned ignorance or denial to racialized experiences of Black people (Myrdal, 1944) or “white rage” (systemic and historic legacy of backlash in reaction to Black success or mobility)

(Anderson, p.1) must be located as structural and historically informed, and not as individual nor arbitrary account of dislocated hate or prejudice. In other words, “if the action [racism] is stripped of its historical, geographical, and political context, racism can indeed be considered a universal phenomenon, as proponents of the idea of ‘reverse racism’ propose” (Lentin, p. 41).

This grounding leads us to the next section of this review which is the precariousness of Black citizenship in America’s democracy and how specifically Kaepernick’s protest, as a Black man, can be contextualized.

2.1.2 Black Citizenship

“From the founding of the nation, the meaning of American citizenship has rested on the denial of citizenship to Blacks living within its borders” (Robert, p. 1574).

Swedish economist Gunnar Myrdal infamously traveled to the United States in the 1940s making key observations on what he described as America’s “negro problem”, highlighting the precarious status of citizenship for Black Americans. In Myrdal’s (1944) view, America’s racial problems derived from the conflict and moral dilemma between white Americans’ strong commitment to the American creed (democratic ideals of freedom, life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness for all its citizens) and their perpetual violation of this creed in the practice of anti-black racial discrimination.

While the legalization of the Civil Rights and Voting Rights Acts in 1964 and 1965 instated full citizenship benefits for African Americans and the election of America’s first Black president in 2008 are helmed as movements of racial progress (Coates, 2017), Black Americans, up to this day, are still relegated to second class citizenship or as Alexander (2012) notes, an “undercaste” (p.139).

Quadagno (1994) problematizes the legitimacy of Black citizenship through the critique of racialized policies that have targeted the behaviors and lives of African Americans, such as the War on Poverty and the welfare state, where both seek to make Blackness and criminality synonymous. The racialization of these policies was accomplished through coded language that linked race to certain negative behaviors. Muhammad (2010) also details the precariousness of Black citizenship in

recalling the systematic methods of synonymizing Blackness and criminality or “incriminating culture” (p.88), where inflated and inaccurate criminal statistics coupled with racist rhetoric legitimized the endemic nature of criminality and deviance of Black people. This “black crime discourse” (Muhammad, p. 89) from politicians, sociologists, and public thinkers not only justified racist police behavior, but embedded a sense of fear and danger in Blackness, largely fueling extradited murders of unarmed Black people, the reality that Kaepernick is kneeling for (Balko, 2013). Moreover, the present status of social programs, the racialized criminal justice system, and far reaching racism that targets the lives and dignity of Black people is “the price the nation still pays for failing to fully incorporate African Americans into the national community” (Quadagno, p. 43). In this case it is the legacies of racism that not only affect the reception of Kaepernick in the media, but importantly have legitimized the fear and threat of Blackness.

2.1.3 American Nationalism and Sports Symbolism

While national sports are a major staple of American culture, it has been noted that there are challenges in attempting to politicize or criticize major sports teams and organizations. The perceived immunity of sports for Lipsky (1978) derives from the private and depoliticized nature of the industry, where “sports, in contradiction to politics, has been seen as a moral realm where character is built and virtue pursued” (p. 346). Edward’s work of analyzing the discourse of major sports media outlets supports Lipsky’s observation by demonstrating the construction of a neutral value system that has become a large part of American identity. Edwards (1973) notes, “by infusing exceptional, but “intrinsically” neutral physical activities with socially significant values, societies reinforce prevalent value sentiments regarding acceptable perspectives and behavior” (p.89). Beisser (1967) builds upon the symbolism of sports by elucidating the affective capacity of sports, where a sense of identity, togetherness, and belonging is engendered in relation to fans and teams. Moreover, Novak (1976) synthesizes this discussion by noting that sports are “deeper than politics” and function as “metaphors for paradise” (p. 216), demonstrating that sports can be an escape from the politics of the world while simultaneously, as Lipsky (1978) notes, function as a tool of socialization, fortifying the ideas of egalitarianism and hard work.

The symbolism of American sports has also become entangled with the symbolism of America as a nation. Media and communication scholars have long excavated underpinnings of nationalism through the processing of myth telling and establishing of symbols (Castells, 2009; Billig, 1995; Reynolds & Hunter, 2000). Bourdieu (1990) in expanding upon symbolic power notes that symbols are “the tools of ... social integration”, where symbols are defined as “myth, language, art, and science” (p. 164). These symbols exercise power “with the complicity of those who do not want to know that they are subject to it [symbolic power] (Bourdieu, p. 165). Moreover, dominant culture is defined as “the culture that unifies is also the culture which separates” legitimizing difference and “subcultures” by defining them by their “distance from the dominant culture” (Bourdieu, p.166). Building upon this, one of America’s greatest national symbols is the American flag (Rose,1985; Butz, 2007; Reynolds & Hunter, 2000). As noted by Kimmelmeier and Winter (2008), national symbols are imperative to nation building and in the case of the United States, the flag has come to perform an important role in “focusing and channeling national attachment” (p. 861) as well embodying values like freedom and egalitarianism (Billig, 1995). The national flag is also tied to what scholars have dubbed as American exceptionalism, which gives vocabulary to concept of America’s “moral superiority over the other nations of the world” (Spanos, p. 294). This sense of exceptionalism tied to nationalism and patriotism evoked by the flag has been worked into American society through its presence and reverence at political, sporting, and even religious events, and has taken on a sense of ‘reverence’ and “honor and sacrifice” (Kimmelmeier & Winter, p.860) in the context of the military, especially following the terrorists attacks that took place in September of 2001, generally referred to as 9/11. However, this exceptionalism obscures what Slotkin (1973) refers to as one of America’s long standing practices, “regeneration through violence” (p10). Colin Kaepernick's protest during America’s national anthem, which ritualistically involves pledging to the flag, engages in the rhetoric and sentiment of Slotkin and challenges the hegemony that accompanies nationalism, dominant cultural values, and American exceptionalism while disrupting the neutrality and escapism of American sports.

2.2 Media Representation of Black Social Action

The construct of race and the functioning of racism lay the important foundation for understanding how this system of organization informs and translates into media representation. Dyer (1993)

acknowledges that media representation plays an important role in meaning making; “How we are seen determines in part how we are treated; how we treat others is based on how we see them; such seeing comes from representation” (p.72).

In the context of media, race is often built and constructed through difference and “otherness”. Hall (1997) notes that it is difference that is “essential to meaning” (p.234) and that difference can often take on the form of a binary. The salience of difference is echoed by what Sara Ahmed refers to as the ‘stickiness’ of identities. Ahmed (2004) suggests that our emotions carry currency and “bind subjects together” (p.119). Taken what has been discussed in relation to race, racism, and Black citizenship, the pathology of racism is constructed in part and expresses itself in emotion as the natural ‘feelings’ about Blackness. In a racist framework, subordination, criminality, deviance, low intelligence were manifested as negative aspects in relation to whiteness (Pajaczkowska & Young, 1992), therefore sticking to Blackness much better. Moreover, Kendi and Spivak note that the demarcation of “other” *homogenizes*. In subaltern studies, Spivak (1988) notes that subalterns are homogenized as one collective and disenfranchised group, denying agency to marginalized groups as well as denying a complex lens through which to understand the heterogeneity of oppression. Kendi (2016) then puts this notion into an American context, noting that there is a sustained practice throughout history of “*individualizing* White negativity and *generalizing* Black negativity” (p.43). Ramasubramanian and Martinez (2017) in their work around the racialized media coverage of Barack Obama, build upon this by noting that the homogenization of Black people leads to what they dub as “racialized scrutiny” (p. 41). In the case of Barack Obama, their work found that his hypervisibility as a Black person in a societally central role rendered not only more criticism than former white counterparts, but criticism that was veiled with racist undertones stemming from the aforementioned inscribed myths of racial inferiority.

There is also a rich history and expansive literature that precedes this thesis in which Black social action representation in mainstream media has been analyzed (Mills, 2017; Amer, 2009; Alemán & Alemán, 2016; Boykoff, 2006). Leopold and Bell’s work around the racialization of the media representation of the Black Lives Matter movement reveals key shared frequencies of this project. Leopold and Bell (2017) firstly notes that social movements can be defined as “efforts to change the

existing power structure through sustained and collective actions with elites, adversaries, and authorities” (p. 720). In the analysis of major newspapers coverage of the social movement of Black Lives Matter, their work yielded results that “ran the gamut of delegitimization, marginalization, and demonization” (Leopold & Bell, p.727). These findings derived from following what Leopold and Bell identify as the protest paradigm. This paradigm, introduced into media and communications literature by Chan and Lee in 1984, presents a framework for researchers to identify “a pattern of news coverage that expresses disapproval toward protests and dissent” (Lee, 2014, p. 2727). The protest paradigm becomes a relevant and useful resource for the guidance of this thesis, as this framework articulates these themes and concepts by manifesting the mechanisms media outlets can draw upon to do this work of delegitimization inclusive of demonization, invocation of public opinion that is in opposition to the protest, and the use of official sources which are often a part of the very structures protests form in reaction against.

Therefore, the racialized media coverage and its long history in the US warrants analysis to understand the ways in which the media as “primary definers” (Hall, 1978, p.57) and shape and represent social movements.

2.3 (Racialized) Discourse and Ideology

While critical discourse analysis (CDA) is the chosen methodology to operationalize this thesis, it is useful to contextualize the literature around discourse beyond the methodological justification.

To begin, discourse is understood by CDA scholars as a significant socialization tool where language, rhetoric, images, and semiotics shape our understanding of reality (Wodak, 2001; Fairclough 1995; Dijk, 1996). As such, discourse is bound up in power, functioning to legitimize and naturalize language. Adopting the notion of discourse set forth by Chouliaraki and Fairclough (2010), discourse can be conceptualized with Gramsci’s hegemony in mind where “struggles for closure...never totally succeed, which give rise to resistance” (p.38). Hall (1997), referencing Derrida, acknowledges this site for struggle by emphasizing the power that accompanies our discourse noting that socially constructed binaries like white/black should read with the power balance they possess, therefore instead reading “white/black” (p.235).

Racialized discourse then refers to the “collective text and talk of society with respect to issues of race” (Doane, p. 256). Van Sterkenburg, Knoppers, and De Leeuw (2010), in alignment with Dyer (1997), note that “discourses reflect inequalities of power in which powerful groups in society have power to level, categorize, and define the less powerful one” (p. 821). Furthermore, in racialized discourse, “whites are not seen as raced and function as the norm” (Van Sterkenburg, Knoppers, and De Leeuw, p. 821). Both racialized discourse and more general ideas of discourse can be understood as sites of dissemination of ideology (Fairclough, 1995). Ideology, while regarded as a fairly abstract concept, can be contextualized in this discussion by returning to Hall (1989); “Ideologies do not consist of isolated and separated concepts, but in the articulation of different elements into a distinctive set or chain of meanings” (p.65). Furthermore, “ideologies are not the product of individual consciousness or intention. Rather we formulate our intentions within ideology” (Hall, 1989, p.65). For Doane (2006), racialized discourse emerges from the naturalization of global, dominant racial ideology which seeks to “legitimize conquest and dispossession, enslavement, exclusion, discrimination, and the continuing existence of racial stratification” (p. 256). Racial ideologies can range from overtly racist to anti-racist, or in other words, using the discourse of race as resistance (Gilroy, 1987) depending the utilization and contextualization of race. Crucially, colorblind ideology is one of the most prevailing racial ideologies observed by media and justice oriented scholars (Alexander, 2012; Vickerman, 2013; Kendi; 2016). Colorblind ideology, was given its vocabulary following the Civil Rights and Voting Rights era of 1965 where segregation, voting disenfranchisement, and other expressions of overt racism were not longer legal, positioning the country to enter a less racist, ‘post-racial’, and more equitable world (Bonilla-Silva, 2013). However, colorblind ideology both codifies racism and stereotypes as well attempts to depoliticize race. This depoliticizing of race is done through the untethering of race and its histories of violence for Black people. Moreover, colorblind ideology conflates the acknowledgement of race as a racist act and overall transforms overt racism into implicit racism under the veil of equal equivalences of the races. The refusal to acknowledge the material repercussions of institutional and structural racism and violence has not only contributed to the sustained racial subordination that continues to dictate the United States, but muddied the waters of mainstream conversations and understandings of race (Coates, 2017).

Muhammad (2010) also reminds us of liberal approaches to racist discourse that while attempting to challenge racism, ultimately fail to challenge the underpinnings of racism, adopting a reformist and liberal approach. Muhammad (2010) notes that oftentimes white liberal scholars employ rhetoric that seeks to “obfuscate the appearance of slipping into old racist discourses” (p.246) by scapegoating racism, but never challenging the underpinnings of racism nor involving themselves in the history or system of racism. This seeks to assimilate to a majoritarian standard rather than contesting the white supremacist roots from which racial difference originates. In these cases, human value and acceptance are dependent upon one’s proximity to white supremacist standards and ideas of what is acceptable, normal, and well behaved (Obasogie & Newman, 2016).

In the context of sports media, commentators and journalists engage in the maintenance and reproduction of racialized and gendered discourse through different language conventions and what can be considered to be raced stereotypes, ultimately resulting in a “black-white dichotomy” (Van Sterkenburg, Knoppers, and De Leeuw, p. 826). Black male athletes are often referred to as “naturally gifted, strong” while white athletes are regarded as “intelligent and hard working” (Van Sterkenburg, Knoppers, and De Leeuw, p.822). The underpinning of what could be read as admiration is argued to be rooted in a “mind-body dualism” where “black male athletes are explicitly associated with superb bodies and implicitly with unstable minds” (Van Sterkenburg, Knoppers, and De Leeuw, p. 824). Overall this kind of discourse “serves the status quo that privileges white men over black men” (Van Sterkenburg, Knoppers, and De Leeuw p. 822).

Finally, and crucially, in the context of this project, racial discourse and racist discourse are not synonymous, interchangeable, nor one in the same, rather this analysis of *Take a Knee* seeks to reveal how race was utilized and addressed in the opinion pieces that were methodologically selected. In this case, the themes that will be addressed in the discussion and results of this project range from overtly racist discourse to anti-racist discourse. Such a framework will allow for a greater explanatory base.

3 CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK: CRITICAL RACE THEORY

Critical race theory (CRT) is an advantageous framework to adopt to the purposes of this thesis as this system of knowledge gives vocabulary to the ways in which language is racialized, which is grounded in the racialized histories we inherit. In this way, a grounding in CRT will aid the understanding of identifying racialized discourse, how it is employed, and the implications of its naturalization. Moreover, this will aid the research question of this thesis: *To what extent does the mainstream media news' coverage of Colin Kaepernick's Take a Knee movement draw upon racialized discourse? As well as, What predominant forms of racialized discourse are utilized?*

This thesis seeks to synthesize the above reviewed literature and contribute to the field of race and media studies by elucidating how the intricate and contemporary case of Colin Kaepernick contributes to the long standing racialized media portrayal of Black social action, Black male bodies, and American dissent.

Critical race theory is a body of scholarship that emerged out of the ideology that mainstream discourse maintains white supremacy and white privilege, and this warrants race centered analysis and critique. And while CRT is a system of knowledge that first manifested within legal studies (largely credited to Derrick Bell), the core of CRT has proven to be highly transferable, lending its hand to the analysis of systemic racism in other social structures that govern the United States.

Delgado and Stefancic (2007) lay out three major and general tenets of CRT that can concisely speak to the relevance of this thesis.

1. Racism is an ordinary phenomenon and a guiding function of everyday life
2. There is little incentive from those who benefit from white privilege (as a result of white supremacy) to challenge racism. This normalizes the perception that "racism seems right, customary, and inoffensive to those engaged in it, while bringing psychic and pecuniary advantages" (Delgado and Stefancic, 1992, p. 224).

3. Race is a social construct, where race engenders “categories that society invents for particular purposes” (Delgado and Stefancic, 2007, p. 115).

Additionally, it is imperative to highlight the concept of intersectionality, introduced into race and feminist scholarship by Dr. Kimberlé Crenshaw. Intersectionality refers to the interlocking and intersecting functions of power and oppression, recognizing that one can experience many identities (and oppressions) at the same time (Crenshaw, 1991). This interdisciplinary approach to oppression allows for the understanding that “we do not live single issue lives” (Lorde, p. 112) and instead understand that ‘all struggles are connected’ (Davis & Barat, 2016).

CRT scholars map the development and progression of racism in both overtly racist discourse, but perhaps more sinister yet urgent in nature, implicit racism, which has resulted from colorblind ideology. As discussed in the literature review, colorblind ideology and discourse has proven its limitations as such notions “sidestep” the solutions for remedy of white supremacy (Delgado & Stefancic, 1992, p. 138). These side steps include delegitimizing the history and reality of subordination (Alexander, 2012) and whitewashing history or narratives more broadly (Annamma, Jackson, & Morrison, 2017). Additionally, Bonilla-Silva (2013) identify four frames of expressions colorblind ideology: culturally based racism, naturalization of racism, minimization of racism, and abstract liberalism.

Lastly, CRT is greatly complemented by both the protest paradigm (briefly reviewed in the literature review) and the chosen methodology for this project, critical discourse analysis (CDA). The protest paradigm aids this framework in providing empirically based measures of how the media can negatively or inadequately represent social movements (Chan & Lee, 1984). Critical discourse analysis will be thoroughly discussed in the following section, but this methodology of the analysis of long form discourse complements the focus of CRT as the nexus of both systems of knowledge lie in the function of discourse. The historical context and race centered focus of CRT adds organic guidance to the operationalization of CDA, which involves identifying how ideology is expressed through discourse, and in this case to what extent was racialized discourse was utilized.

Moreover, this combination of framework and methodology provide the avenues to situate the discourses naturalized through the sampled texts within existing ideologies, able to identify what is being legitimized and for whose benefit.

This framework, in conjunction with the operationalization of CDA will allow for the analysis of racialized discourse with the following themes in mind

- Racialized discourse: Inferential racism, Overt racism, anti-racism
- Delegitimization
- Omission/lack of context

4 RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

4.1 Critical Discourse Analysis

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is a heterogeneous field of study (Fowler 1996; Dijk 1995; Toolan, 1997; Fairclough & Wodak 1997; Lazar 2005) that affirmatively rejects the neutrality of language both methodologically and theoretically. Through analysis of both text and image, CDA offers a means through which to pull out sentiment, power, and ideology that is disseminated through language. Moreover, CDA provides the tools necessary to identify the “linkages between discourse, ideology and power” (Dijk, 1995, p. 24), making the implicit, explicit. This process of making and unmaking reveal the dialectical relationships between language and our social structures, and moreover the influence of power.

To begin, it is advantageous define what is meant by the words language and discourse in the context of CDA. Language can be generally understood as a “system of signs in which the value of any sign derives from its relation to other signs” (Chouliaraki and Fairclough, p. 47). Language in this sense is a foundational tool where discourse is then understood as “language use in speech and writing” (Fairclough and Wodak, p. 258) or more broadly as “social practice” (Hodge and Kress, p. 10).

The diction choice of “social practice” in understanding discourse emphasizes the dynamic nature of language where meaning and discourse are not fixed. Hall (1995) notes that it is through discourse that ideologies are both worked upon yet can become invisible; “Ideologies tend to disappear from view into the taken-for granted 'naturalised' world of common sense. Since race appears to be 'given' by Nature, “racism is one of the most profoundly 'naturalised' of existing ideologies” (Hall, 1987, p. 19). Overarching, CDA as methodological practice acknowledges the ways in which discourse is naturalized and legitimized (Dijk, 1995). This notion of legitimization becomes incredibly focused with the coupling of a CRT framework that is rooted in the historical context and practice that has entrenched our language in race.

4.2 Research Design

This thesis is suited by the collaborative nature of Norman Fairclough’s three dimensional approach to operationalizing CDA (Fairclough, 1995). This three tiered approach analyzes discourse on the levels of *text, discourse, and social practice*, with each tier building upon another allowing for a holistic and far reaching discussion on both where ideology is worked upon in discourse as well as what are the potential implications and further discussions that can be built upon following this identification.

4.2.1 Text

Fairclough (1995) notes that on a textual level, the sampled discourse can be analyzed through grammar, diction choice, and sentence structure. On this first level of analysis, I noted the choices in sentence structure that shaped the meaning of the sentence.

4.2.2 Discourse

The second tier of Fairclough's approach builds upon the textual analysis to arrive at the identification of discourse, which is greatly rooted in interpretation. Much of the analysis on this tier involves determining sentiment, racial discourse, and affect that was conveyed in the sample of articles. Fairclough (1995) summates this process as identifying the “differences and commonalities

between discourse” while keeping the following considerations in mind: “how they [discourses] represent event and action and the social agents, objects, institutions etc. that they involve; how they narrate past and present events... how they justify actions and policy proposals and legitimize imagined changed practices and systems” (p.19).

4.2.3 Social Practice

While Fairclough (1993) notes that ideology and power “may arise at each of the three levels” (p.137), the discussion and results section of this thesis is enriched by the culmination of the three tiers, which is social practice. This tier is greatly concerned with situating the findings of the first two tiers into dominant ideologies, interpreting what power structures are maintained or challenged and moreover what discourse is being worked upon and legitimized (Dijk, 1996). Furthermore, this tier allows for the identification of the discussed ideologies in the literature review that contextualize race, racism, American nationalism and sports symbolism, media portrayal, and protest coverage.

4.3 Sample Selection: Purposeful sampling: mixed method of Intensity sampling and Maximum Variation (Heterogeneity) Sampling.

For the needs of this project, I executed a mixed method of sampling in attempts to yield a rich, relevant, and focused sample set of data. In this case, I employed purposeful sampling drawing up both intensity sample and maximum variation (heterogeneity sampling).

It is imperative to define both of these methods in order to fully comprehend the benefit and functionality of their combination. Intensity sampling involves choosing samples that embody the phenomenon of interest in both successes and failures, but do not represent the extreme (Patton, 2002).

Maximum Variation sampling is operationalized by identifying criteria of variation and then selecting cases, in this case opinion pieces, that are relevant and possess variation from each other. This attempts to engender a sample that is possessive of “important shared patterns that cut across cases and derive their significance from having emerged out of heterogeneity” (Suri, p. 67).

The combination of these two methodologies allow for the sampling of six pieces from highly varied news media outlets(heterogeneity), while also understanding each of these widely read outlets produce content that is not highly unusual, but in fact paints much of the landscape of mainstream news media (intensity).

Therefore, the selected news media outlets for this project are *Fox News*, the *New York Times*, and *The Guardian US*. These outlets were selected for their high readership and cultural significance. According to Statistica (2017), the *New York Times* and *The Guardian* are amongst the top 8 leading multi platform print media websites based on views and subscriptions in the United States. Additionally, while *Fox News Network* has been the most watched cable news outlet for 16 years per Nielsen data (Katz), the *Fox News* online platform boasts 86 million page visitors in 2018 (Guaglione, 2018). These platforms were also strategically selected for their heterogeneous ideological leaning where (generally) the *The Guardian US* sits left, the *New York Times* sits center, and *Fox News* sits right on the political spectrum in respect of each other.

The op-eds themselves were firstly generated through LexisNexis through an individualized search with the terms “Colin Kaepernick” and “Take a Knee” for each publication with the index term of editorials and opinions as well as time range of August 2016 up through May of 2018. Then each result was reviewed and evaluated as representative, purposeful, relevant (with greater emphasis on years 2016 and 2017 proving to be more discourse rich and relevant), then numbered, and finally these numbers were randomized through number generator, resulting in the selection of two op-eds per publication that were yielded from the available samples.

4.4 Justification of opinion editorials and op-eds

Op-ed is an abbreviation of the phrase “opposite the editorial” and their history and understanding in American newspapers has been of great significance. First introduced in the *New York Times* in the 1970s, op-eds as well as opinion pieces were well received and the practice was largely adopted by other newspapers (Sommer & Maycroft, 2008). Fast forward to today, and newspapers and news media outlets release two to three op-eds and opinion pieces a day with the two terms becoming synonymous (Sommer & Maycroft, 2008). For the purpose of this project, op-ed and opinion editorial will be used interchangeably as most sample articles are labeled as an op-ed, but the pieces

themselves generally align with the political ideology of the paper rendering them more in line with the editorial rather than opposite. In this case, op-eds offer subjective perspectives that can shape public opinion both by countering the deeply entrenched and sometimes rigid power structures that dictate the “news gathering norms of traditional journalism” (Dawson, p.301) as well as serving as maintain and fortify existing power structures (Squires, 2011). This makes op-eds a discourse rich site to analyze a deeply complex issue and protest like Take a Knee.

4.5 Limitations of CDA

The centering of discourse as both the means of analysis as well as a significant and viable site of the construction of power and dissemination of ideology has also brought about criticism from post structuralist theorists. Scholars Simons and Billig (1994) argue that discourse is relative, rendering all discourse equally constructed and therefore equally worthy of critique. This kind of critique is further supported by Stubbs (1997) who understands CDA to be a methodology that is highly subjective, stating that CDA analysts “find what they expect to find, whether it is absences or presences” (p. 204). These critiques align with that of Widdowson who finds that CDA homogenizes action and language. For Widdowson (1995), CDA has not provided thorough and rigorous enough mechanisms through which to substantiate the analysis of language. Some phrases, tenses, and grammatical choices for Widdowson are more arbitrary or structurally functional more so than a dissemination of ideology (Widdowson, 1995).

However, Foucault's discourse work can anchor CDA in its complexity, serving as somewhat of a rebuttal. Foucault (1979), amongst many CDA scholars, does not seek to simply reduce discourse to pure subjectivity, but on the contrary, seek to “make it emerge in its own complexity” (p. 47). Furthermore, criticism of CDA that seeks to equalize discourse can ironically engage in the very practice out of which CDA emerged to critique. CDA attempts to challenge the neutrality of language by acknowledging systematic methods of oppression and dehumanization that don't require physical touch, but are perpetrated by print, by voice, and by image, establishing that while all discourse is indeed “socially constructed relative to the social positions people are in”, this does not constitute that “all discourses are equally good” (Chouliaraki & Fairclough, p. 8).

4.6 Ethics and Reflexivity

This thesis was completed and guided under an appointed dissertation supervisor and an ethics form was submitted to the London school of Economics and Political Science. While no ethical concerns arose from the completion of this project, there are reflexivity concerns to be addressed and accounted for.

While one of the great strengths of CDA is the malleability of operationalization, this malleability can potentially translate into bias towards the object of research. As noted by Bartesaghi & Pantelides (2018), it is imperative that “CDA scholars acknowledge their own involvement in the tensions, multiple identity positions, and fragmentation of neoliberal discourse” (p. 169). For myself as a researcher, I executed these points of self reflexivity by adhering to a sampling method that prevents cherry picking and situated this project in the well developed field of media and communications studies, with a specific emphasis on race, racialized discourse, and media power. In this regard, it was crucial as a researcher to shift my pursuit of analyzing discourse from “reflecting underlying social or psychological realities” (Gill, p.144) to instead understanding discourse as a construction and focus on the ways this construction can manifest.

5 RESULTS AND INTERPRETATION

This chapter will detail the results and analysis of the research questions: *To what extent does the mainstream media news’ coverage of Colin Kaepernick’s Take a Knee movement draw upon racialized discourse? And What predominant forms of racialized discourse are utilized?*

This chapter will benefit from the conversation these pieces have with one another, and what their differences, intersections, and similarities reveal about racialized discourse.

The discussion will begin with a brief overview of each publication (3 subsections) and then will follow a discussion of the aforementioned extracted themes in the conceptual framework:

Racialized discourse: Inferential racism, Overt racism, anti-racism; Delegitimization; Omission/lack of context.

5.1 The New York Times

The two sampled pieces from the *New York Times* (see appendix, #1 &2) drew upon anti-racist discourse as well as liberally racist discourse with the two pieces significantly differing in ideological sentiment.

To begin, both pieces drew upon the rhetorical tools of comparison in efforts to cast a light on Colin Kaepernick, but this light differs for both authors. In article #1, on a textual level, the author often used the descriptors “humanity”, “humility”, “vulnerability”, and “piety” to describe Kaepernick’s action of kneeling, denoting a sense of moral standing in attempts to elicit sympathy. However, this sense of sympathy is achieved discursively through the negative juxtaposition of Kaepernick and the Black Power movement:

“Given the fiery responses to Colin Kaepernick’s protest during the national anthem — taking a knee, a gesture now being adopted by a wave of professional athletes — you would think that it was a militant motion, full of anger and menace, akin to the Black Power salutes raised by Tommie Smith and John Carlos at the 1968 Olympics. But kneeling during the national anthem is a gesture of humility, not ominous ire.”

In this opening paragraph, the textual choices of “militant”, “anger”, “menace”, and “ominous ire” to describe the Black Power movement and the actions of Black athletes who raised a Black Power fist all connote an antagonism and denouncement of this anger and militancy as unproductive in a protest space.

This tool of comparison remains consistent throughout the piece, intertwining the language of sports with the language of protest.

The piece closes with this through line of the comparison of the Black Power Movement with, “Kneeling in protest is out of the playbook of Dr. King, not Malcolm X”. This consistent comparison through means of disparagement will be further discussed in the inferential racism portion of the discussion.

The second piece from the *New York Times* also engaged in anti-racist discourse and interestingly differed from the first piece in their stance on racial protest in sports. In alignment with article #1, article #2 acknowledges the criticism that has inundated Kaepernick and the Take a Knee Movement, but diverts from any distancing rhetorical devices, by instead aligning Kaepernick with the same athletes (John Carlos and Tommie Smith) that were described as engaging in a power fist “full of anger and menace” (article #1) by noting that “these and other charges rain down on those who dare challenge the nation to do better by blacks” (article #2). Furthermore, the author historicizes Muhammad Ali, prominent Black male boxing athlete whose career was based in the 1970s, as someone who “paid for his dissent” and was “cast as a villain, racial pariah, a traitor, a coward, a clueless and unpatriotic dupe” for speaking out against the Vietnam War and racial discrimination. In utilizing past discourse, the author seeks to contextualize the scrutiny or “racial scrutiny” (p.41) as Ramasubramanian and Martinez (2017) articulate, that Kaepernick is currently experiencing. The discourse utilized in article #2 contextualizes Kaepernick in what the author notes as the long history of how “black entertainers and athletes have used their fame to break down barriers of discrimination” and “combat fear of black culture” (article #2).

Furthermore, on a textual level, words like “galvanized”, “humanity”, “act of conscious”, and “black excellence” engage in anti racist discourse as well as liberally racist or reformist discourse that seek to positively associate Kaepernick with protest that is steeped in justice. This legitimizes Kaepernick’s worthiness of attention, sympathy and legitimacy on less conditional basis than article #1.

Overall, the two sampled pieces from the *New York Times* drew upon racialized discourse quite explicitly through the means of anti-racist discourse as well as liberally racist discourse which will be discussed further in this section. Both authors brought race into the conversation using “black” and “white” and to a degree contextualized the police brutality Kaepernick was kneeling for.

5.2 Fox News

Unlike the sample data from the *New York Times*, the opinion pieces from *Fox News* (see appendix, #3 &4) were much closer in ideological sentiment and utilized identical rhetorical tools that read as antagonistic and racist.

Both articles used textual qualifiers in describing Kaepernick, connoting a suspicion or untrustworthiness in the respective described actions. Words that comprised sentences such as “Kaepernick *appeared to be* echoing both a broader condemnation of race relations in the United states as well as a veiled commentary on his *apparent* belief that the American law enforcement community is engaging in systemic, racially motivated murder” (article #3), and “the reason, *we are told*, is that he is protesting racism and police brutality.” (article #4) (emphasis added by me) demonstrate the oppositional tone of the discourse on textual level. Building upon Fairclough’s textual level analysis, the broader interpretation of this discourse signals a delegitimization of Kaepernick’s movement and beliefs by downplaying and questioning his awareness of the subject matter. This is further strengthened by the dubious portrayal of racial injustice realities.

Article #4 engages in a color blind rhetoric of equal equivalences asking readers “I have a list of things I don’t like about America. Should I take a knee too?” This question is answered later in the discourse:

“This got me thinking: Are there things that I don’t like about America? Yes. Quite a few, in fact. Violence against the unborn, the highest violent crime rate in the industrialized world, sordid social agendas, the destruction of the family, high taxes and a creeping socialism are all high on my list. With these things in mind, perhaps I should take a knee, too? Maybe you have your own list of things you don’t like about America. Shall we all kneel and stick it to the man, as they say?

No.”

The rhetorical comparison of protests against racialized police brutality and the list of things the author does not like about America serves a function to delegitimize and depoliticize Kaepernick's racially charged points. In doing so, this colorblind discourse protects white majorities “from feeling undeserving of their privileges” (Jayakumar, Adamian, & Burke, p.916). This is further strengthened by Pajaczkowska and Young’s (1992) analysis of the aspect of denial in the construction of white identity; “the mechanism of projection, when employed as a defense, can serve to protect the subject from knowledge of its own ambivalence. In order to deny knowledge of its own ruthlessness and aggression the subject has to maintain the fiction that ‘foreigners are dirty’

or that ‘black men are violent’”(p. 201). In this case projection can be read as racialized discourse in legitimizing the the angers of the author as equivalent with the angers of Kaepernick, overall detaching the racial, economic, and political underpinnings of what Kaepernick describes as “[Black] bodies in the street and people getting paid leave and getting away with murder” (Wyche, 2016).

Concluding, both articles utilized discourse that was antagonistic towards Colin Kaepernick more broadly. In the phrases “after he *refused* to stand during the playing of the National Anthem” (Article #3) “explained his reasoning for the *overt act of disrespect*” (article #3) “Kaepernick *turned his back* on the thousands of police officers” (article #3) and “Colin Kaepernick’s decision to kneel during the national anthem *do nothing to advance the cause he advocates*” (article #4) [all emphasis added by me] demonstrate a definitely oppositional stance to Kaepernick. Overall, the sampled pieces from *Fox News* drew upon inferentially racist discourse which will be discussed in the following sections.

5.3 The Guardian

In alignment with the findings of the analyzed discourse of *Fox News*, the two sampled opinion pieces from *The Guardian US* (see appendix, #5 & 6) were also in close ideological sentiment. Both pieces were in opposition to the backlash Kaepernick faces noting that “We can’t hear Colin Kaepernick anymore. He’s being drowned out by the noise” (article #5) and “The protest was – and always has been – a way to draw attention to racial injustice in America. It was supposed to start a long overdue national conversation” (article #6). The racialized discourse, similar to the *New York Times*, varied in the expression of racialized discourse, ranging from anti-racist to liberally racist.

Article #6 drew upon statements from the NFL and then contested these with context that was in advocacy for Kaepernick:

“The one-page document and accompanying half-page statement from commissioner Roger Goodell, released on Wednesday, contain the phrase “show respect for the flag” five times. And those pages do not acknowledge that the anthem protest started two years ago by Colin Kaepernick had nothing to do with respect for the flag.”

The contextualization of Colin Kaepernick as well as the challenging of the official sources and policy demonstrates a discursive disengagement from Chan and Lee's protest paradigm (1984) aspect of over reliance on official sources. In this case, the discourse seeks to point out the misrepresentation of Kaepernick's protest that is being perpetuated by official sources and the NFL itself and instead inserts what the author believes to be Kaepernick's motivations with the Take a Knee movement.

In article #5, the use of "simple", "lucid", "candid", "conviction", and "vision" as descriptors of Kaepernick's mission as well as the delivery of his message demonstrate a positive orientation toward Kaepernick.

Additionally, both articles referenced the current president of the United States, Donald Trump, by means of comparison and criticism. Article #5 uses the reported comparison of the two men highlighting Kaepernick's contributions to racial and social welfare contrasted by Donald Trump's policies that cut public funds for meal supplements for low income Americans, approval for construction of a highly contested oil pipeline, and repealing immigration status programs. This discourse serves to humanize Kaepernick in comparison to the what the author connotes as dehumanizing or condemnable social policies of Donald Trump. Article #6 harshly criticizes Donald Trump in the textual choices of describing his twitter activity as a "rant" as well as positioning the president as one of the main antagonists and detriments to the NFL;

"And yet after a few days of standing against Trump and bigotry they wavered, shriveling in the fire of a president's tweetstorms. Ultimately, they caved. They gave Trump what he wanted, and this week they finally got those players off the field".

Overall, *The Guardian US* yielded the most anti-racist discourse through means of contextualization, eliciting reader responsibility in the social issue of racism by using the first person plural "we" when addressing readers (article #5), and criticism of Kaepernick's most vocal and visible critics, namely president Donald Trump. However, liberal racism was also drawn upon and will be discussed in the following section.

5.4 Racialized Discourse

5.4.1 Inferential Discourse

Hall (1995) makes the important distinction that overt racism unequivocally states racist ideas, arguments, etc, while inferential racism operates on a more covert level where ideology is “worked upon” (p. 105) and expresses itself in less explicit ways, yet is built on the same unchallenged naturalized ideas of race.

Returning to article #1 in the final sentence, the author more explicitly likens Kaepernick to Dr. Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. by again distancing Kaepernick from Malcolm X, a major figure in the Black Power Movement and a peer of Dr. King (X & Haley, 1992). It is in this final sentence that the author attempts to legitimize Kaepernick by means of disparaging and delegitimizing Malcolm X and the broader Black Power Movement. This discourse is engaging in the larger social practice of demonization of the Black Power Movement. While both the Civil Rights Movement and the Black Power Movement were disparaged in the media, largely denounced as unpopular movements, and actively sabotaged by the federal United States government, the Civil Rights movement has been remembered in warmer light than than of the Black Power Movement (Churchill & Vander Wall, 1988), largely on the basis of the pacifist nature of Dr. King. However, this remembrance of non-violence has been weaponized to silence or delegitimize Black protest deemed too aggressive, as practiced in the media coverage of the Ferguson protests (Blitzer, 2015; Mills, 2017). This discourse further legitimizes the merits of non-violent protest without engaging in the politics of violence of racism.

Additionally, article #4 drew upon a racial stereotype of Black anger by asking “Is he [Kaepernick] MLK or Dennis Rodman? A Civil Rights leader or just another obnoxious athlete with a bad attitude?”. Black feminists have long criticized the stereotype of the angry Black woman that has mythologized women to be “aggressive, unfeminine, undesirable, overbearing, attitudinal, bitter, mean, and hell raising” (Ashley, p. 28; hooks, 1994; Hill Collins, 1990). This same kind of anger, while gendered differently, is applicable to the discourse used to describe Kaepernick. Attitude can be understood as raced in this context as the minimization of the effects of racism attempt to portray Kaepernick as juvenile and without credibility.

5.4.2 Physicality

Articles #1, 3, and 4 drew upon Kaepernick's physicality and/or talent, reflecting discourse that is in alignment with the previously discussed literature surrounding Black, male, and athletic bodies.

Article #1 contextualized the violence Black male athletes generally experience as football players:

"Three-quarters of the players in America's most popular and most brutal sport are black. There is something gladiatorial about professional football, for all the money being made by athletes whose wealth will be of little use to them should they sink into dementia, beginning as early as their retirement in their mid-30s."

While this discourse can be racialized in the way race is recognized a factor of reality in the NFL, the article goes on to discuss the natural ability of these athletes;

"Such a situation could well incite a fury of anger and frustration. Yet with the act of kneeling, these rare, gifted, often doomed human beings are shrouding their protest in a kind of self-abasement".

The use of "rare, gifted, and often doomed" points to inferentially racist discourse that is acknowledged by Van Sterkenburg, Knoppers, & De Leeuw (2010). They note that the descriptors of gifted or naturally talented, which is often reserved for Black athletes while hard working or in possession of "decision making skills" (p.822) are often reserved for white athletes. Furthermore, these attributes are "not racially or ethnically neutral" because society has attached "inferior and superior values to them" (Van Sterkenburg, Knoppers, & De Leeuw, p. 822).

On another hand, this adornment can be deployed in order to collapse difference, invisibilizing race while heightening natural talent that supersedes the baggage of race. This folding in of identities mobilized by the propagation of positivity as a shared and agreed upon aspect of society serves the function of eliminating racial difference, which skirts discussion of the realities of injustice and inequity of racial difference (Taguieff, 1990).

Lastly, the use of "doomed" further detaches agency from the athletes themselves as this textual choice connotes an impending and inevitable future that is out of the control of the athletes. The

lack of control discursively communicated in this case can be situated in the infantilization of Black men where they are often talked down to and assumed to be less intellectually attuned (Fanon, 1967).

Articles #3 and #4 instead downplayed Kaepernick's credibility as a protest leader through means of his lacking physical ability.

Article #3 notes that "Many celebrities -- and yes, even a back-up quarterback on one of the worst teams in the NFL qualifies as a celebrity nowadays -- use their status within pop culture to advance their beliefs and opinions, often without acknowledging differing perspectives", while article #4 notes that kneeling is reserved is reserved for "*winning* quarterbacks" and a result Kaepernick "hasn't had much opportunity to kneel on the field, but he has more than made up for it off of it". In this case, both discourses qualify Kaepernick's skills as further criteria in the reception of his protest, which can be arguably irrelevant to the issue of social justice. Returning to Lipsky (1978), there is an emphasis on the "drama of sports" and how the aesthetic of sports has been integral in "facilitating the internationalization of 'proper' attitudes towards mobility, success, and competition" (p. 351) and in this case Kaepernick's actions as both a described unsuccessful competitive athlete as well as someone challenging the justice of the United States has violated said "proper" ideas and attitudes.

5.5 Overt Racism

From this analysis, none of the sampled articles yielded overtly racist discourse, such as racial slurs. While this thesis and sample is lacks a large or generalizable scope, these findings are inline with what Alexander (2012) dubs as the "colorblind era" (p.1) where racism has been codified, yet still actively communicated in covert and pervasive ways.

5.6 Anti- Racist Discourse

Anti-racist discourse, as briefly mentioned in the literature review, can be generally understood as discourse that seeks to challenge rhetorical racist tropes.

In article #2, the use of idioms like “white fragility” and “[white] indifference” work to further contextualize the backlash that often results from protesting as a Black athlete by pointing out the “contradiction between American ideals of fairness and justice and their arbitrary application to people of color”. The author follows this with, “A black person had to be a superstar athlete and beloved icon to enjoy only some of the perks that many white people could take for granted at birth”. While the precariousness of Black citizenship was previously reviewed, it is important to locate the race fueled backlash the author refers to. As interpreted Jayakumar, Adamian, and Burke (2017), they understand by Robin DiAngelo’s (2011) white fragility as “lacking capacity to deal with the stressors that come with confronting racism” (p. 916) and such fragility can result in “outward display of emotions such as anger, fear, and guilt, and behaviors such as argumentation...” (DiAngelo, p.54). In this case, the author explicitly draws upon what they have perceived as reasoning behind the backlash Kaepernick has faced by other critics, utilizing anti-racist discourse in order to challenge the institutions that are have garnered racially veiled criticism against Kaepernick.

Article #5 also reflects anti- racist discourse in the explicit condemnation of racialized police brutality and the recognition of oppression:

“Kaepernick was the architect of this protest. He was candid with his convictions, and clear with his vision. He could not take it anymore. He wanted to talk about black lives being crushed by law enforcement. He wanted to bring attention to the many tentacles of systemic oppression. Kaepernick has been true to his message.”

The textual choice of “architect” as well as the phrase “clear with his vision” connotes agency and ownership in Kaepernick. In a larger discourse and social practice, this delivers agency to Kaepernick while also justifying his anger. This kind of agency disengages from the over determination of Black male identity which is plagued with stereotypes that construct Black men as “animals, brutes, natural born rapists, and murders” (hooks, 2004, p. xii).

5.7 Omission

5.7.1 Lack of Context

While many of the results discussed thus far have focused on the function of existing discourse, it is worth exploring how the omission of discourse shapes and frames what is being said about Take a Knee and Colin Kaepernick. Articles #2, 3, and 4 lacked statistics or context to the subject of police brutality that is at the core of Take a Knee.

Article #4 engages in the omission through means of evasion. Article #4 acknowledges the realities Kaepernick is protesting in noting: “The reason, we are told, is that he is protesting racism and police brutality. These things are real, run in every direction, and are worthy of a national discussion”. But the discourse and sentence following then proposes that Kaepernick is not going about protesting the correct way, using a narrow definition and comparison to ground his rationale:

“But Kaepernick’s movement has achieved something altogether different, and this because there is no logical connection between his actions and the things he is protesting. Rosa Parks refused to go to the back of the bus because black people were not permitted to sit in the front of the bus. The connection was clear. What, exactly, is the connection here?”

In this case, the focus of social justice shifts to critique the means of protest, evading the problem Kaepernick has named entirely.

This discursive practice can be aligned with what Leopold and Bell (2017) note as “public nuisance” or “carnival” news framing which shift emphasis away from the message of the protest and instead minimize social issues or focus on the spectacle (p.721).

Article #2, while providing context for racial scrutiny, does not provide context for the police brutality.

Contrastingly, Article #5 was in defense of and contextualized the statement provided by Kaepernick. Article #5 made use of direct statements and quotes from Colin Kaepernick himself and

further contextualized the issue of police brutality in efforts of elucidating and advocating for Kaepernick:

“To Kaepernick his protest was: ‘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 was referring to the fact that many police officers involved in high-profile killings of black people do so with apparent impunity. The killers of Tamir Rice, Alton Sterling, Eric Garner, Terrence Crutcher, Philando Castile and Freddie Gray (to sadly name a few) have all gone unpunished. They either were acquitted or, even worse, were never charged with a crime at all. His message is being slowly erased. That is what Kaepernick wants to talk about. Instead, his message is being slowly erased. Some want to make Kaepernick’s protest all about Trump. Others want to ignore what he is saying completely and shift the conversation to patriotism, the military and respect for the flag”

5.7.2 Dispossession

Articles #3 and #4 drew upon the dispossession of racism, decentering the role of whiteness and therefore white people in the solution of racial injustice.

Article #3 suggests that Kaepernick's protest indicts innocent people:

“By contrast, not only does Colin Kaepernick’s decision to kneel during the national anthem do nothing to advance the cause he advocates, it further divides an already deeply divided nation by unnecessarily offending and alienating people who are in no way guilty of the offenses he decries.”

The discourse utilized here could be codified by Bonilla-Silva (2013) as colorblind discourse and ideology within the abstract and naturalization frame. While no mention of race is used, the codification of white and black are present in the use of the indictment of a guilty party, namely white people to the detriment of Black people. It is this colorblind frame that can “shield whites from acknowledging institutional racism and white privilege” (Jayakumar, Adamian, & Burke, p. 915). In using the discourse “offending and alienating people who are in no way guilty of the offenses he decries”, there is an attempted legitimization that there are innocent parties in the

realities of racism, fortifying the shield of majority groups, and in this case white people, from “feeling discomfort, shame, or personal responsibility for the realities of racism” (Jayakumar, Adamian, & Burke, p. 915).

This contrasts with article #5 where the repeated use of “we” invokes a sense of connectedness. This is exemplified in the title of the piece as well as in the following excerpt:

“We need to eliminate the noise. We need to listen to what Colin Kaepernick is saying, pay attention to what he is actually doing, and why”.

Beyond the textual choice of “we”, the explicitness with which the discourse elicits a sense of shared social responsibility starkly contrasts with colorblind or liberal racial discourse and ideology and instead involves the reader in advocating for the message of Colin Kaepernick.

Article #4 draws upon American nationalism in delegitimizing Kaepernick's approach to protesting:

“Of course, Kaepernick can kneel. So far as I know, no one has tried to deny him this trivial right. Rather many have criticized him (as I am doing in this column) for reasons that are not trivial because they recognize what he apparently does not:

That standing for the national anthem is not an affirmation of social injustice; on the contrary, it is a symbolic gesture affirming that we as individuals—divided as we are by color, ethnic background, socioeconomic status, and religion—unite in this belief:

“We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.”

The choice of “trivial” to describe the right to protest contradicts with the positive invocation of a foundational document to the United States, the Declaration of Independence. Here the minimization of the right to protest for Kaepernick is in alignment with the precarious extension and recognition of citizenship rights for Black people. Moreover, the invocation of unity under the decree of “life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness” is void of the systemic racism that hinders this pursuit in Kaepernick’s statement and mission. Returning to Bourdieu (1990) “the culture that

unifies is also the culture which separates” (p.166), and this is strengthened by Moufee’s (2014) understanding of consensus as a state that requires marginalization of minority voices and other “hegemonic practices” (p. 183) that maintain the status quo. This analysis of power is reflected in the discursive disregard for the essence of Kaepernick's protest and instead invocation of American unity where “darker aspects of American history, such as the enslavement of Black Americans or the genocide of Native Americans, are virtually never viewed as relevant to the essence of what it means to be American” (Kemmelmeier & Winter, p.862).

5.8 Delegitimization

While delegitimization was touched upon in the broader analysis of each publication such as article #1 and #4 from the *New York Times* and *Fox News* respectively, it worthy touching upon the delegitimization employed by articles #3 and #6.

Article #3 invoked the American flag and American military in the discourse surrounding the protesting noting:

“Kaepernick’s comments weren’t just an insult to the over one million Americans -- many thousands of whom were African-American -- who have given their lives in defense of the United States from wars as far back as the American Revolution to the more recent conflicts in the Middle East.

Kaepernick also turned his back on the thousands of police officers -- again, a tremendous number of whom were African-American - who have died defending their communities and upholding the rule of law at home.”

The discourse here attempts to universalize the struggles of the United States by emphasizing the number of African Americans involved in the military and police. The delegitimization occurs with the conflation of Black soldiers or police officers with the lack of institutional racism. Here the protest is depoliticized and legitimized by seeking to make the existence of Black police officers and military personnel and institutional racism that inform police brutality mutually exclusive.

Article #6 utilized discourse that is in alignment with what Muhammad described as scapegoating racism:

“I know many decent people who work for the NFL, people of honor and dignity, people who believe in treating everyone with respect. I also know many decent people who work for the NFL’s teams. Until today I believed that many of the owners I’ve met in the past to be good and decent people too. Deep down, I think they still are. (Indeed, there are signs some executives are uncomfortable with the new policy; New York Jets chairman Christopher Johnson says he will pay the fines of any player who chooses not to stand for the anthem.)

But fear does bad things to good people. And Trump, by waving his fake patriotism to fire up old racial hatred, has filled the once-mighty NFL and their owners with worry. They fret their league won’t seem American enough and that television ratings might drop and advertisers, who love nothing more than to drape everything from toothpaste to tires in the stars and stripes, might disappear.”

This discourse is can be considered delegitimizing in two ways.

Firstly, the textual choices of describing NFL owners who are implicated in a ban penalizing player who took a knee as people who are “good and decent people” signalizes a morality and consciousness to actions that are bad or indecent. Ahmed (2012) recognizes that racism can become individualized, where “responses to racism tend to exercise the figure of “the racist” as the one who can be charged and brought before the law” (p. 150). The differentiation of racism and a racist prove to be problematic in that racism becomes a condemnable and conscious action informed by a “a false set of beliefs” (Ahmed, 2012, p.150) rather than the product of an inherently racist society where racism is, returning to Delgado and Stefancic (2007), “ordinary, not exceptional” (p. 136).

Secondly, the textual choice of “old” yields an interpretation that racism has a past tense and it is presently being stirred up by Donald Trump. It is the scapegoating of racism onto individuals and the inference that racism is a thing of the past that negates the systemic functions of racism that happen everyday, overall downplaying the lived realities of Black people in America.

6 DISCUSSION

The results of this analysis yielded rich and varied results. Conclusively, all six articles drew upon racialized discourse through different means, with a high propensity and overall majority of covertly racist discourse being present across all six articles from the three publications.

Overarching, *Fox News* emerged as the most antagonistic outlet towards Colin Kaepernick and *Take a Knee* and drew upon inferential racism in much of the language used in both pieces.

The *New York Times* drew upon both anti racist discourse as well as liberal racist discourse that engaged in inverting racial traits, but fundamentally legitimizing these racist traits needing reformation rather than abolishment or critique of those who conceptualized the traits originally. This is exemplified in the previously discussed discourse of physicality utilized in article #1 as well as the likening of Kaepernick's "gesture of pain and distress" to a "religious genuflection, a gesture of self-surrender before the greater reality of human suffering". In this case, the positive light of Kaepernick disregards negative stereotypes or antagonistic discourse, but does not challenge the function or foundation of racial inferiority that serves as the roots for the very stereotypes being worked upon.

The Guardian proved to be similar to the *New York Times* in the presence of anti racist and inferentially racist discourse. However, *The Guardian* pieces sampled outweighed the *New York Times* in regards to contextualization of *Take a Knee*. Moreover, the condemnation of the critics of Colin Kaepernick as well as evoking responsibility from the reader in hearing Kaepernick through what the author identified as noise places *The Guardian* as the more anti-racist of the two publications.

7 CONCLUSION

"If you're not careful, the newspapers will have you hating the people who are being oppressed, and loving the people who are doing the oppressing."

Malcolm X

This project sought to contribute to the intersections of race studies and media and communication by examining the use of racialized discourse in the coverage of Colin Kaepernick and Take a Knee. In conducting a CDA analysis of discourse rich opinion pieces from three major US online and print media publications, it has been argued that racist discourse, either inferentially implied or liberally coded, was the most prevailing use of racialized discourse surrounding Take a Knee and Colin Kaepernick. This assessment was made through the discursive review of the construction of racialized discourse by means of colorblind discourse, inferentially racist discourse, anti-racist discourse, as well as delegitimization, and omission. This was largely contextualized within the raced, class, and gendered media landscape of the United States. This conclusion is unfortunately inline with scholarship and media projects that measure the prevailing effects of racism that continue to limit public understanding and leave racial resentment, stereotypes, and minimization of racism as a whole unchallenged, hindering racial progress and intersectional justice. In avenues of further research, perhaps larger and more holistic research could contribute to theoretical grounding about how the functions of white supremacy render discourse less able to reckon with the realities of racism. Content analysis may also yield more quantitative results that could demonstrate a frequency of racialized codes. Lastly, multimodal discourse analysis may lend itself to such research combining visual and discourse analysis to highlight the saliency of race and how such saliency is worked upon. Such research may also contribute to theorizations of race, race relations, and popular media.

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APPENDIX 1: SAMPLED ARTICLES

1. **The New York Times** (09/25/2017) *Why Kaepernick Takes the Knee*. Retrieved from <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/09/25/opinion/nfl-football-kaepernick-take-knee.html>
2. **The New York Times** (10/21/2017) *Famous Athletes Have Always Led the Way*. Retrieved from <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/10/21/opinion/sunday/famous-athletes-have-always-led-the-way.html>
3. **Fox News** (08/29/2016) *NFL's Kaepernick insults Americans, law enforcement officers everywhere*. Retrieved from <http://www.foxnews.com/opinion/2016/08/29/nfls-kaepernick-insults-americans-law-enforcement-officers-everywhere.html>
4. **Fox News** (09/13/2016) *I have a list of things I don't like about America. Should I take a knee, too?* Retrieved from <http://www.foxnews.com/opinion/2016/09/13/have-list-things-dont-like-about-america-should-take-knee-too.html>
5. **The Guardian US** (09/27/2017) *We can't hear Colin Kaepernick any more. He's being drowned out by noise*. Retrieved from <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2017/sep/27/colin-kaepernick-protest-nfl-take-a-knee>

6. **The Guardian US** (05/24/2018) *The new NFL anthem policy may as well call black players sons of bitches*. Retrieved from <https://www.theguardian.com/sport/2018/may/24/nfl-national-anthem-policy>

APPENDIX 2: ANNOTATED SAMPLE ARTICLE #1 UTILIZING NORMAN FAIRCLOUGH'S THREE DIMENSIONAL SYSTEM

See end for full image:

#1

Opinion- NYTimes

OP-ED CONTRIBUTOR

Why Kaepernick Takes the Knee

By Lee Siegel

• Sept. 25, 2017

Given the fiery responses to Colin Kaepernick's protest during the national anthem — taking a knee, a gesture now being adopted by a wave of professional athletes — you would think that it was a militant motion, full of anger and menace, akin to the Black Power salutes raised by Tommie Smith and John Carlos at the 1968 Olympics. But kneeling during the national anthem is a gesture of humility, not ominous ire.

attempting to defend Kaepernick by distancing him from what the author describes as "full of anger and menace" that accompanied a similar sports protest

In youth sports, players take a knee when another player is hurt. It is an acknowledgment of the vulnerable humanity that, for the moment, has been obscured by the intense competition of the game. Taking a knee in that context is, like a religious genuflection, a gesture of self-surrender before the greater reality of human suffering.

making comparisons - evoking sympathy from a place of empathy w/ pain

↳ legitimizing + emphasizing pain. ↳ this comparison, unlike the Black Power one, humanizes Kaepernick with associations with religious

Likewise, when black players take a knee during the national anthem to protest police violence against African-Americans, they are making a gesture of pain and distress. They are putting America in a more honest context — our "Star-Spangled Banner" dimly seen through the mists of deep injury. It is like flying an American flag upside down in a moment of emergency.

Still, black players kneeling in this way has a disorienting quality. Clearly, however humble and sincere Kaepernick's intentions, his critics have decided that he is disrespecting a growing list of American institutions: the flag, fallen service members — even the perceived line between playing professional sports and speaking out on issues of national importance.

disorientation stemming from the method of protest in the arena of sports

Perhaps that is why so many players, eager to sympathize but wary of joining Kaepernick completely, have instead stood and locked arms. Yet by doing so, they have, deliberately or not, diluted the original gesture of kneeling.

- Condemns the act of locking arms as dilution ↳ Building upon this, linking arms is ambiguous

Standing with linked arms during the national anthem could signify any number of things, from protest against racial injustice, to a gentle dissent from a style of protest that has alienated so many people. Likewise, the decision of some teams to stay in the locker room during the playing of the national anthem is ambiguous. Even players raising their fists lacks the relevance, and the unsettling resonance, of the Black Power salute from which the gesture is derived.

implying kneeling has alienated many

The unique gesture that embodied a cry against, primarily, the murder by the police of unarmed black citizens — and, as an extension of those actions, a criminal-justice system that

Key

- - Text
- - Discourse
- - Social Practice

countenances those murders — has now been customized, if you will. The primal act that has incited so much passion has been marginalized as a gesture of protest.

→ noting that kneeling has been misconstructed & unfairly seen as an act of protest - contradicts early statement as understanding kneeling as a sign of protest

President Trump seemed to understand the significance of variation as concession when he announced Sunday afternoon that standing with linked arms was acceptable, while kneeling was not. There was something disquieting about Shahid Khan, the owner of the Jacksonville Jaguars and a Trump supporter who contributed \$1 million to the president's inaugural committee, joining arms with his players, who were standing, not kneeling.

insinuating Trump & white team owners to be those who are in position to the protest, connects to the dilution point

Trump's dispensation for standing with linked arms must have come as a relief to the white team owners who, despite their loud defenses of the players' right to air their views, still have yet to make a job offer to Kaepernick, a very talented quarterback, effectively blackballing him.

Three-quarters of the players in America's most popular and most brutal sport are black. There is something gladiatorial about professional football, for all the money being made by athletes whose wealth will be of little use to them should they sink into dementia, beginning as early as their retirement in their mid-30s. Here are these black athletes about to be hurt for the enjoyment of so many white fans, even as the white world tolerates the "lawful" injury of ordinary black people.

of locking arms, which comes at the fault of other (black) players

Points out the dissonance of the reception of the protest & the politics of the NFL

"lawful" legitimizes Kaepernick's movement and injury is connected to the affirmative pain black athletes feel

Such a situation could well incite a fury of anger and frustration. Yet with the act of kneeling, these rare, gifted, often doomed human beings are shrouding their protest in a kind of self-abasement; a display of vulnerability and piety in the face of iron injustice. It is a humility couched in a majesty of pride, dignity, strength and unusual accomplishment. Kneeling in protest is out of the playbook of Dr. King, not Malcolm X.

Depicting those who kneel as a humble and opposing in the face of injustice

↳ comparison again of Black Power vs. Civil Rights or what may be seen as a more legitimate protest stepped in "humility + piety" rather than "anger + menace"

taking away of agency when understand my players as people of circumstance - "rare, gifted, doomed"