

THE BYSTANDER —★—

A Gift for Colin Kaepernick

Published in the Martinsburg *Journal*, October 8, 2016

I stitched together a fluffy seat cushion (it doubles as a kneepad) for Colin so he can be comfortable during the five minutes every week during football season, when the “Star Spangled Banner” is performed for a crowd of fans who have no idea what they are standing up for.

If refusing to stand during the *National Anthem* in order to protest the treatment of Americans of color is his goal, I must warn him that this may take a while: he should be prepared to sit for a very long time.

The cushion top is imprinted with colorful cups of coffee on a black background: perhaps he can take a few moments to tank up while he’s waiting for the anthem to finish. It is tufted with four original military buttons from the US Army Class-A uniform issued to me in Basic Training in 1978. The underside fabric has a snowflake pattern, which represents the freezing reception anyone suffers when they make a controversial public statement. Making a courageous public act of defiance, completely alone in a stadium of 50,000 people who disagree with you, is a very cold and lonely place to be. If you haven’t experienced it, you are probably not worthy of criticizing someone who has.

The truth that Colin speaks, in a country that manipulated its laws to defy the Biblical rule that *no man who believes in Christ shall be a slave* to prevent enslaved Christians from being emancipated, is merely repeating historical fact: it is not an opinion, expressing anger, or showing disrespect. ***There are far more Americans disrespecting the Constitution than there are people disrespecting the flag or the national anthem.*** They disrespect it through ignorance, by willfully ignoring what it is trying to create.

I have driven through thousands of miles of this country, and looked out over millions of farms, prairies, and grazing lands, with the

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knowledge that this beautiful land was stolen and re-settled by Europeans who made sure there was not one acre to be granted, sold, or bartered---even in exchange for honorable military service---to a black person.

So let Colin sit during the National Anthem, for as long as it takes, and experience the euphoria that at least, at least, he has manifested his affection for this country with the simple hope that the future of America will be better than yesterday, and better than today.

But I hope he will use my seat cushion, please, to make it a little less painful.