



# COLIN KAEPERNICK & NIKE:

WHAT HAPPENS WHEN A COMPANY GOES AGAINST THE GRAIN?

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# BACKGROUND

On September 11, 2016, ex-NFL quarterback Colin Kaepernick took a knee during the pre-game national anthem in solidarity with the Black Lives Matter Movement.



# BACKLASH

Following this form of protest, Kaepernick was met with immediate national attention. Kaepernick started a movement within the National Football League (NFL) which caused outrage from coaches, fans, and sponsors. Kaepernick also received attention from former President Donald Trump who believed that Kaepernick and other players' actions were disrespectful to the flag.

Many companies withdrew their support from Kaepernick for his protest of racial oppression, however, Nike decided to make a statement that changed the way major companies define corporate social responsibility.





# NIKE, INC.

JUST DO IT.

Nike, Inc. formerly known as Blue Ribbon Sports was founded in 1964 by Bill Bowerman and Phil Knight. The company opened its first retail store in 1966 and launched its first Nike brand shoe in 1972.

As the Nike brand expanded across the world it acquired other companies like Converse and Cole Haan, and the company continued to grow in part to its athletic endorsements. Athletes like Michael Jordan, Tiger Woods, Roger Federer, and Mia Hamm are all among the long list of stars that represent Nike. With an incredibly diverse roster that entertains millions of supporters, Nike faces the cultural challenge to appeal to minority youth communities while retaining consumerism from the white, conservative, majority.

A vintage Converse advertisement titled "CHOOSE YOUR WEAPON." It features Larry Bird and Magic Johnson. Bird is on the left, wearing a green jersey, and Magic is on the right, wearing a yellow jersey. They are both holding up a Converse sneaker. The text "CHOOSE YOUR WEAPON." is prominently displayed in the center. Above them, a blue banner reads "LOOK FOR THE SWEET SPOT PARTICIPATING AT CONVERSE DEALERS". Below the main image, there is a block of text describing the shoe's features, including superior traction, cushioning, and ankle support. At the bottom, there are images of three different Converse sneaker models and the Converse logo with the tagline "Reach for the stars." and a phone number for finding a dealer.

LOOK FOR THE SWEET SPOT PARTICIPATING AT CONVERSE DEALERS

## CHOOSE YOUR WEAPON.

Larry Bird and Magic Johnson. When they play, they push themselves to the limit. And they trust their performance to Converse. The shoe they choose to do battle in is the Converse® "Weapon"™—a shoe biomechanically designed to help players play their best.

These shoes offer superior traction because of their natural rubber outsoles. They're incredibly cushioned as well, due to the Center of Pressure outsole and a shock absorbing EVA midsole. And for the strong ankle support that Bird, Magic and every other ballplayer needs, there's the unique Y-Bar Ankle Support System.

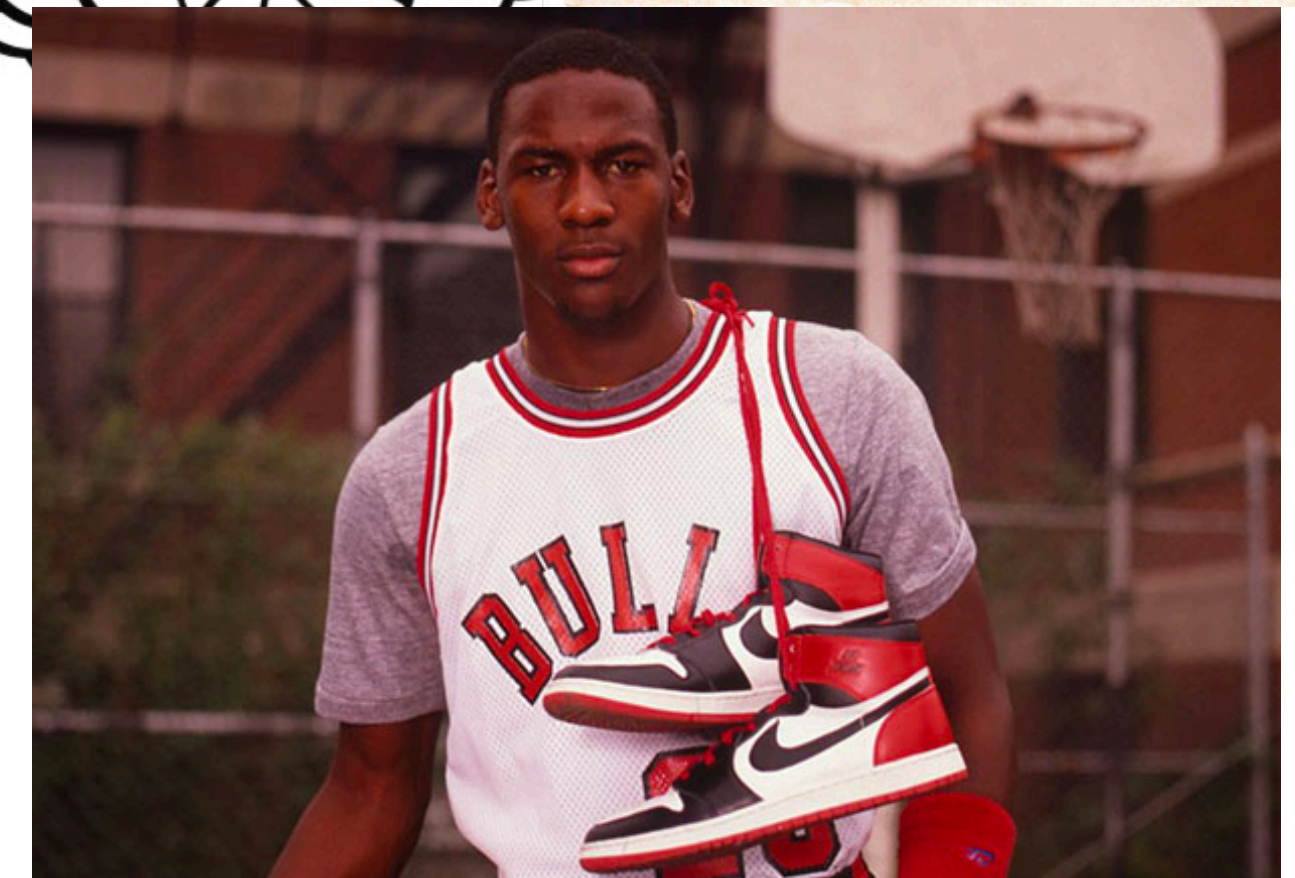
Besides all these features, the Converse Weapon has a comfortable, removable insole and an extra padded collar that combines with the Y-Bar System for enhanced ankle support and comfort.

Bird and Magic have chosen their weapons. Now choose yours.

The Converse Weapon. One more reason why athletes like Bird and Magic depend on Converse for the best possible performance.

THE CONVERSE WEAPONS™

©1986 Converse, Inc. For your nearest Weapons dealer call: 1-800-545-4323 (in Mass. 1-800-637-5215)



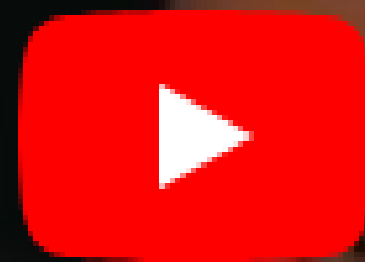





# 'Dream Crazy' - Colin Kaepernick Nike Ad 2019



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**1K**  
Politicians

**1.7K**  
NFL Players

**390 MIL**  
Fans

# PUBLICS



**41.99 MIL**  
Black Community in the U.S.

**OVER 100 MIL**  
Nike Customers





AlterAtYeshiva

@alteratyeshiva · Follow

1:38 AM · Sep 4, 2018

19.1K

Reply

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Watch on X



1:38 AM · Sep 4, 2018

19.1K

Reply

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Sean Clancy

@sclancy79 · Follow

First the @NFL forces me to choose between my favorite sport and my country. I chose country. Then @Nike forces me to choose between my favorite shoes and my country. Since when did the American Flag and the National Anthem become offensive?

Watch on X



10:56 PM · Sep 3, 2018

40.6K

Reply

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Read 20.5K replies



NFL

@NFL · Follow

We, the NFL, condemn racism and the systematic oppression of Black People. We, the NFL, admit we were wrong for not listening to NFL players earlier and encourage all to speak out and peacefully protest. We, the NFL, believe Black Lives Matter. #InspireChange

Watch on X



10:31 PM · Jun 5, 2020

44.6K

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Mark Medina

@MarkG\_Medina · Follow

LeBron James on kneeling during the anthem to protest systemic racism: "I hope we made Kaep proud." LeBron then explains his gratitude for the military

Watch on X



Black Lives Matter  
#BlackoutTuesday



Dave Hogg

@stareagle · Follow

Replying to @NFL and @TDLockett12

Colin Kaepernick still doesn't have a job.

3:18 PM · Jan 18, 2021

21

Reply

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The Evolving Arm

@leftarmisme · Follow

I've always been a New Balance girl. But I'm gonna go get me some Nikes today.

1:38 PM · Sep 4, 2018

34

Reply

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Read 6 replies



Jonathan Capehart

@CapehartJ · Follow

So, what you're saying, @Nike, is that I'm going to have to go out and buy sports equipment.... 🍌🏈

10:52 AM · Sep 4, 2018

1.1K

Reply

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Read 82 replies



Justin Pugh

@JustinPugh · Follow

I will be STANDING during the National Anthem tonight. Thank you to ALL (Gender,Race,Religion)that put your lives on the line for that flag

4:08 PM · Aug 27, 2016

7.5K

Reply

Copy link

Obama discusses Kaepernick's anthem protest

Watch on YouTube



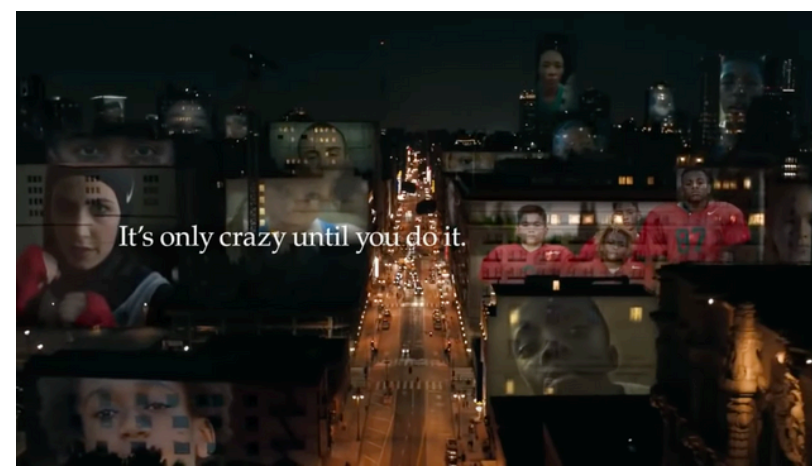
# NIKE, INC. RESPONSE



Nike realized that pleasing all of its publics was an impossible task. So, the company chose to respond to the scrutiny and criticism by standing with Kaepernick.

The brand followed the advice of its Just Do It campaign by believing in its decision to advocate for equality, even though it meant losing some customer sales.

This decision marked the beginning of a strong relationship between Nike and Colin Kaepernick.



November 2018: Nike releases a full-length video commercial titled "Dream Crazy," with Colin Kaepernick narrating. Former Nike CEO Mark Parker said, "We feel actually very good and very proud of the work we're doing with 'Just Do It.'"

February 2019: Nike releases the Kaepernick Icon Jersey, five days after Kaepernick settled his collusion case with the NFL. Kaepernick said the jersey was made "for those true to themselves on and off the field."

June 2019: Kaepernick encourages Nike to cancel its release of a U.S.A-themed Air Max 1 due to the inclusion of the Betsy Ross Flag. A company statement said, "Nike made the decision to halt distribution of the Air Max 1 Quick Strike Fourth of July based on concerns that it could unintentionally offend and detract from the nation's patriotic holiday."

December 2019: Nike releases the Air Force 1 x Colin Kaepernick sneaker to match the Kaepernick Icon Jersey. A Nike spokesperson said, "Nike partnered with a collective of collaborators to design an AFI that connects to their life personally. Colin was identified because we believe his voice and perspective inspire many generations on and off the field."



# STRENGTHS & WEAKNESSES

Used social activism to raise awareness which strengthens company profile

Clear in stating intentions regarding equality (backing values especially at the cost of potential customers)

Strategic position to listen to the large segments of its consumer base - the active public

Nike stands on their Just Do It tagline: incisive articulation of company POV in history. It has retained value as the business has evolved

Not many public statements or release news release for this campaign - hinders getting the message out effectively

Pitfalls in logical strategies, or appeals to logos  
- No uses of statistical fact or evidence use; just showed apparel

Ethos Fallacies or "Ad Verecundiam": Appeals were based on authority used in advertisement which mainly focused on popular athletes (Kaepernick was featured because he was blacklisted within the NFL for protesting; Nike made a connection that he was a former NFL player)

Risk in overexposure: Message may become appropriated by a larger audience that may undermine the intent of campaign and the Just Do It celebration (in the time where "there's not such thing as bad publicity")



# COMPARING CASES

## Civic Activism and Political Leadership Pg. 454

- BLM advocacy on social media increased and there was controversy around removing New Orleans confederate symbols.
- Request the removal of four Confederate statues and monuments
- Arguments for the removal were considered - "heritage not hate; true remembrance is required, not blind reverence".
- City Council approved the removal.
- Criticisms of Mayor's leadership with claims of him co-opting and taking credit of earlier activist who successfully lobbied to rename 31 schools. Many people also wanted more Confederate symbols removed, like the President Andrew Jackson statue.

## Starbucks - Pg. 333

- Two black men escorted out of Starbucks in handcuffs due to discrimination
- CEO response: More training with managers and unconscious bias to stand firmly against racial profiling
- Addressed root of the problem as opposed to an individual situation and public response results in an apology with the repeated theme
- Applied policy in the wrong way. Didn't try to portray the situation in a defensive manner, more open, frank admission of what happened, promising assurance "this will not happen again by doing our internal change", emphasizing training the old employees etc.



# LESSONS LEARNED

Consistent willingness to amplify marginalized stories, increase representation and create dialogue around persistent issues

Risking short term loss for long term gain: negative backlash from campaign from alt-right groups, conservatives, and others that opposed their campaign

Nike utilized power (ability of public to influence organization's behavior) , legitimacy ( others views tactics as socially acceptable) and urgency in their campaign when assessing their response

Two power working together ( a company and a social activist) for a common cause through motivational framing, or call to action

Nike understands their target audience and how to retain them effectively by living vivaciously through their mission statement.



# FUTURE PR STRATEGIES

It can be a double-edged sword for companies to take a political stance unless it directly relates to their product or service (don't want to alienate too much of consumer base)

- Some consumers may perceive this as unjustly commodifying politics for financial gain

Purpose is action, not just words: what happened after the headline-grabbing piece? In the words of its ad, is ready to 'sacrifice everything for its beliefs' They should avoid only illuminating the promise of innovative creative forms with advertising.

Refrain from using social action into a marketable commodity. the "Just Do It" campaign may be characterized as corporate appropriation to secure larger profits.





**THANK YOU!**

**QUESTIONS?**