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Amnesty International's Ambassador of Conscience Award

Transcript of speech

Colin Kaepernick

It is only fitting that I have the honor of Eric Reid introducing me for this award. In many ways, my recognition would not be possible without our brotherhood. I truly consider him to be more than a friend—Eric, his wife, his children...they are all a part of my family.

Not only did he kneel by my side during the national anthem throughout the entire 2016 NFL season, but Eric continued to use his platform as a professional football player to protest systemic oppression, specifically police brutality against Black and brown people.

Eric introducing me for this prestigious award brings me great joy.

But I am also pained by the fact that his taking a knee, and demonstrating courage to protect the rights of Black and brown people in America, has also led to his ostracization from the NFL when he is widely recognized as one of the best competitors in the game and in the prime of his career.

People sometimes forget that love is at the root of our resistance.

My love for Eric has continually grown over the course of our ongoing journey. His brotherhood, resilience, and faith have shined brightly in moments of darkness. My love for my people serves as the fuel that fortifies my mission. And it is the people's unbroken love for themselves that motivates me, even when faced with the dehumanizing norms of a system that can lead to the loss of one's life over simply being Black.

History has proven that there has never been a period in the history of America where anti-Blackness has not been an ever-present terror.—Racialized oppression and dehumanization is woven into the very fabric of our nation—the effects of which can be seen in the lawful lynching of Black and brown people by the police, and the mass incarceration of Black and brown lives in the prison industrial complex. While America bills itself as the land of the free, the receipts show that the U.S. has incarcerated approximately 2.2 million people, the largest prison population in the history of humankind.

As police officers continue to terrorize Black and brown communities, abusing their power, and then hiding behind their blue wall of silence, and laws that allow for them to kill us with virtual impunity, I have realized that our love, that sometimes manifests as Black-rage, is a beautiful form of defiance against a system that seeks to suppress our humanity--A system that wants us to hate ourselves.

I remind you that love is at the root of our resistance.

It is our love for 12-year-old Tamir Rice, who was gunned down by the police in less than two seconds that will not allow us to bury our anger. **It is our love** for Philando Castille, who was executed in front of his partner and his daughter, that keeps the people fighting back. **It is our love** for Stephon Clark, who was lynched in his grandma's backyard that will not allow us to stop until we achieve liberation for our people.

Our love is not an individualized love—it is a collective love. A collective love that is constantly combating collective forms of racialized hate. Chattel slavery, Jim Crow, New Jim Crow, massive plantations, mass incarcerations, slave patrols, police patrols, we as a collective, since the colonization of the Americas have been combating collective forms of systemic racialized hate and oppression.

But I am hopeful. I am inspired.

This is why we have to protest. This is why we are so passionate. We protest because we love ourselves, and our people.

It was James Baldwin who said, to be Black in America, “and to be relatively conscious is to be in a rage almost all the time.” My question is, why aren't all people? How can you stand for the national anthem of a nation that preaches and propagates, “freedom and justice for all,” that is so unjust to so many of the people living there? How can you not be in rage when you know that you are always at risk of death in the streets or enslavement in the prison system? How can you willingly be blind to the truth of systemic racialized injustice? When Malcolm X said, “I'm for truth, no matter who tells it. I'm for justice, no matter who it is for or against. I'm a human being, first and foremost, and as such I'm for whoever and whatever benefits humanity as a whole.” I took that to heart.

While taking a knee is a physical display that challenges the merits of who is excluded from the

notion of freedom, liberty, and justice for all, the protest is also rooted in a convergence of my moralistic beliefs, and my love for the people.

Seeking the truth, finding the truth, telling the truth and living the truth has been, and always will be what guides my actions. For as long as I have a beating heart, I will continue on this path, working on behalf of the people.

Again...Love is at the root of our resistance.

Last but certainly not least; I would like to thank Amnesty International for *The Ambassador of Conscience Award*. But in truth, this is an award that I share with all of the countless people throughout the world combating the human rights violations of police officers, and their uses of oppressive and excessive force. To again quote Malcolm X, when he said that he, “will join in with anyone—I don’t care what color you are—as long as you want to change this miserable condition that exists on this earth,” I am here to join with you all in this battle against police violence.

ENDS