Vernon Andrews on Black Lives Matter

Professor Vernon Andrews, author of Policing Black Athletes talks to us about the motivations underlying Colin Kaepernick's decision to kneel during the anthem and addresses more broadly the question of Black celebrities and social justice activism. We talk about the fraught history of Blacks in America and examine some of the historical reasons for racial tension and distrust in America. We look forward to hearing from you at dveidlinger@csuchico.edu.


Transcript:

Hello, welcome to CORH Values, the religion and humanities podcast produced by the Department of Comparative Religion and Humanities at California State University Chico. I'm your host and chair of the department, Daniel Veidlinger. This season, our theme will be Social Justice, Black Lives Matter, and how the study of religion and the humanities can help us to better understand these phenomenon. Are going to be talking to Dr. Vernon Andrews, who is a professor of sociology. And he in fact went to Chico State as an undergrad. And after that, we went on to the University of Wisconsin, Madison to get his doctorate. And after that, he went to New Zealand, where he lived for 14 years. In New Zealand, what I did was I was the only African-American professor the country, so I was used by the mediates are all matter of questions when everything happened with black people or with sports or politics in the US, they would come to me for response. And then since you've been in the United States for the last few years, you've been teaching at California State University in San Jose as well as a Chico? Yes. And today we're together in Chico. And you recently came out with your book, Policing Black athletes, racial disconnect in sports? Yes, and that's published by Peter Lang, available now. So it's great to talk to you. Why don't you start off by telling us a little bit about what the book is about. If you want to give a short summary of some of the main arguments. Sure. A summary of 261 pages. Let's say the book is a deep dive, a close look at how people behave in society, but especially sport and what we get those ideas from. So if you remember back to the days when you had your first date with your your wife or your spouse or your partner, and getting along with him and then taking them home and see the parents. And you'd say to them beforehand, Hey, don't do this row my parents because they're going to react to it. So it's about how we learn from my parents about how to not only behave ourselves, but to judge other people and how we bring all of that in our neighborhood, in our heroes, into how we behave on the job and in the sports arena. And how those, those norms between black and white clash in the field of sport. Such that our neighborhoods were much different from say, the rural settings of a lot of white athletes and how we manage to, how can we negotiate that's in society. So that we come up with rules in sport and other institutions that are more democratic. That saying, good luck on the book and congratulations, doing very well. I think it will do very well in the future. And my brother is also a professor at the University of Michigan, which you might have heard of I here it has some sports teams are some notes there, and it's a very big deal. But what's interesting to me in terms of this podcast is the way that sport influences people's attitudes in society towards things not necessarily related to sport. And I'm thinking in particular, the Black Lives Matter movement, sure. And social activism, which of course, I guess it was 2016 when Colin Kaepernick first took the knee August. And that was a huge influence on American society far beyond sport. So can you tell me a little bit about who Colin Kaepernick is and how he came to take the knee? Originally? Yes. Colin Kaepernick. I grew up interlock, California, went to the University of Reno and Las Vegas, got drafted by the nighters, played and eventually realize that after Michael Brown and others in society had been killed by police and after hearing about it all of his life, he just fine. He said, I can't can't stand. Salute this flag with a clear conscience. I've gotta take a stand since it doesn't seem white America is paying attention. So I'm going to kneel and just say, you know
what, you're not paying attention. I'm not going to pay attention to that. I'm going to kneel and protest. Other athletes joined in soon it became everything from He's anti-American, he hates our true too. He hates our first responders. All manner of things relate on this versus wait a minute, what's he talking about? Is that true? Do we not respect black lives? So that conversation was, was shelved. Lou of this other vitriol about him disrespecting the flag. And as I write in the Chapter One of my book or the introduction, It's He was saying, well, what do you really worship when you worship this black, the worship the flag in lieu of us? Or how is it that you look at it, look at us in relation to this flag or we American also. So it turns out the people were far more concerned about the Flag than anything else than, than people's lives. Yeah, often, humans tend to focus on symbols more than they do on actual humans. You see black people being killed on TV over and over again. It's going to happen next week and the week after. And it just keeps happening. If you had black police officers shooting white people's dogs, you have more of an upward That's Wow. I never thought of that but you're exactly right. Yeah. Wow. Oh, yeah. The dog lick ferocious. So I had put them down. Uh-huh. I came by your house, the dog ran up to me. It looked ferocious. Sure. It was a poodle, but it was a mid-size poodle. I was scared for my life, so I shot it. If you have hundreds of dogs being killed in America by black police officers, they be relieved of duty. All right. That's really powerful idea. Well, so kappa next protest then spread throughout a lot of different sports teams. I wasn't just confined to football teams in other sports, many women stood up, the WNBA, the Women's NBA, right? They protested and mass and we're threatened with with fines. They kept doing it individually. Lee said, Okay, we'll let it slide. That's because of a high percentage of African American women in the WNBA. If African-American percentages in each of these sports had been 5, 10, 12 percent, Theta been sidelined, find, kick, whatever. But because the MBA, excuse me, the MBA is is 80 percent and the NFL is roughly 70 percent African-American. People had to listen. I see. And do you feel that it has made a difference? Yes and no. The difference we want is much greater than the difference we've seen since then. But I think that change is incremental. And so dead. Did it move the ball down the field? Yes. And but if it wasn't ever codons Capra next issue that all the sports people would kneel and therefore society would change. He was what, what I see in the chat, but he was starting a wave. The wave isn't a stance. You stand up and put their hands up and then it goes around. Well, when you wash that in the stadium, sometimes you get the one section and it just falls flat. Yeah. The way I stopped right yet, right. So the idea was that, okay, I'll do it. Other athletes would do it, then politicians would do it, and then students and then professors and everybody will eventually get this critical mass. Then the magic will happen. What does the magic? White people will listen and why people will respond in time with laws and everything else. So that was the intent. It wasn't the intent that he would do it on his own, right? So in that sense, it, it snowball. In the vinci when the Black Lives Matter movement came around app it's a right on board. They were the first wearing shirts. And so many people half and now you slowly see from last year changes Hopewell. So okay, let me stop asking this and I've never really looked into these numbers, so it's really a good opportunity to ask you about this. She said when he started doing it it's the very first day he did. It wasn't just him that first time or whether did you discuss it with his teammates if he just did it and I believe he just did it and I think I can I think it was the second game, the next because there's a third preseason game, their nine whole pieces again. Okay. And then the next game, Eric read, his teammate, joined them. And so then there were two. So then they were and there was this when Eric group is off African-American? Yes. Because I might so my question is going to be, at what point did white players start to do it? As I say about anything, black music artists don't become successful until they gain white approval. Yes, drugs don't become a problem. Marijuana, heroin, all those issues. Black people were put in jail by the, by the thousands in the sixties and seventies and eighties, marijuana hits the y committee. Oh, this is a social, probably can't put people in jail because this is, this is a disease. So all of a sudden it gets treated in a very different way when it hits the white community. So yes, we always hope that white people will wake up and open up and say, Oh my goodness, without having it happened to them. Now we're in a case in American history were poor white people are now fighting back because they realize that, oh, so this is what it's like to be black? Yeah, exactly. Yes. But we don't storm the state capital in storm the national capital, they're just experiencing early. So if they want to know how to deal with this, they should talk to black people. So yeah, so yeah, now that it's become a national movement, were whites. I've been involved in protests and change. And I've been to some Black Lives Matter marches. And at one March, Indonesia, I decided to step out of line, go back and watch all the white people pass by. That then know that it was great that we had allies and what we need now is accomplices in this issue of social change. And I just said, thank you, thank you for being here for supporting this cause. That's that's greater than the both of us. That's a national issue. It's an issue
about democracy. And most people just see it as an issue about black people. The what, The team for Washington Football Team DataSite it altogether to not play game. There was something that had happened, a shooting a guy got, I think is what you shot the back and it was near Washington DC as high as maybe as in Baltimore. Anyway. They talked about it and decided let me tell you what happened. I wasn't at the meeting, but let me tell you what happens in these meetings with these teams. They get together for talk session. We gotta talk this out. They sit around, maybe no coaches there. The black players, 260 pounds meter than anything on the field, will get up. They'll talk about their cousin, cousin being shot in front of them, their uncle, their sister being raped by a cop, whatever it was. And eventually they break down in tears in front of all their teammates. And as a quarterback or as a receiver who was white. You're going to look at that like really that guy, he kill me last week. He's always killing me. He's crying. And you have 40 athletes on the team who break down in tears because more than like the, every one of them has either experienced it or has a close relative or very close friend who has. They've got stories to tell. They tell their stories, they cry, they sit down. At the end of that. You can't be in that room as a white person and have no empathy for your team. So I was asking myself, well, white on black people take vaccines and people say whether scare, unnecessary fear. Well, I can list you all the reasons we don't take that vaccine and we are scared of taking that vexing because everything in our history says, You don't want us around. And when I say you, I mean the, the, the, the american, you white, you upper middle-class, ultra rich. Don't really, we don't really matter in any way, shape, or form. So we came up with the phrase Black lives matter because we have to first convince ourselves of that before we can ever convince you. And that were worth fighting for. What kind of authority do you think? Celebrities, such as sports people and actors? What type of authority should they have to give opinions on the state of society? Well, I think anyone who is a citizen has a right, first of all, to speak up about issues, and especially for African Americans, regardless of what field of endeavor you're into, you have a right to speak about your condition and the condition of people that you know. I think on top of that, there's always been this imperative in the blank and blank culture to each one, teach 12 to be the brothers, your brother's keeper, to take a village to raise someone or whatnot. I think it's imperative on blacks to actually reach out and actually be that spokesperson. Now I know from a white framework that people are compartmentalised. You know what, if you're an athlete, ban athlete, your professor B IP address, if you're a musician, be a musician. We want, I come to sport because I want to be entertained and relax. I don't need all that talk here. Well, you know what, sorry. You don't need that talk and that disturbance. We don't need the ********. So you know what, we're going to give you that until you at least do something about this larger issue. So I don't begrudge any person for speaking up against their own oppression in whatever field. And someone would say to me, Well, what Dr. V. You're not oppressed. You black, you've made it, you kind of house, you have to save, you use, you're going to retire nicely. I blah, blah, blah. So we'll watch is keep your head down. And that's just the very reason I should speak up because if I don't, I'm condoning it. And and we all know that we've stood on the shoulders of the people before us. So why not reach down, reach your handout, pool people up. So my job as a, as a professor is not to go with the party line. My job is to actually move past that, to let people recognize it, even though I have quote unquote made it, that there's still issues we confront and issues that everybody else behind me is confronting also. That's why on 60 Minutes on suddenly they had the black general, who has become a head of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. He was in the Cabinet representing the military. He talked about all the racism he's faced and he knows the racism, all those other generals and people who face down the line. So he's speaking out about it so they can change the military. But I don't want to keep white side of this argument. Whites have even a bigger responsibility because whites are sitting around the system and condoning it by not saying anything also. So they say that that's why again, if you're silent, you're going along with flow. It's okay. It's not a big deal. So I want to call out whites more than blacks, that they should stand up. And that's what am I quote from? White comedian. She says, Hey, I want to stand by those men who kneel. That's a sexist thing a man can do and not for proposal, just doing that, fighting up for your group. And she said, But I wonder, the White athletes who were the teammates of their athletes, why aren't they standing or kneeling to? Why aren't they, they coming into the fight? They're keeping their heads down. The ideas, the tall poppy pseudonym, chapter anatomy. But if people stand out, they get their heads cut off. And then you say, I shouldn't have done that for them. I should have kept my place. That's what they want you to think. There's one particular incidents that many people have heard the name of the Tuskegee experiments. Now I'm wondering, since we're on the topic of why the black community might not trust the medical community that well, if you could say a little bit about what happened in Tuskegee, when did it take place and what what occurred? It took place from 1932 to
constellation of ideas that you would find? Well, I think there may be some overlaps, right? And I think
attend church very often and feel that religion is a big proud of their lives? Or is it a different
conservative values, the same sorts of values that you would find there amongst black people who
tends to be more conservative. And there's also unfortunately views about race involved in that
just statistically between the amount of times you go to church per month and your Outlook which
tends to be more conservative. And there's an issue that's on everybody's minds right
right, right hands. I've heard that there's some reticence amongst the black community. I wrote, I
wrote down some things. Okay, I'm doing a study with another professor as to what's really going on
here. Yeah, So the theory, because I think it's so deeply entrenched in African-Americans
that sometimes we don't even up the top of our tonnes know all the reasons the background, the
Tuskegee study is just one and it's a small one. However large it might have been to those
individuals. And however it, it resonates and the mindset. But listen, you know, slavery. Okay, Let's
wait for all those years. That tells you right off that your value, your life isn't valued in the greater
American community. And then Jim Crow segregation for another 100 years. Well, that shows you that
you're not really value. If you can't live here, you can't work there. You can drink water here, you can
go to that bathroom. He can't write that trend. What does that tell you about, about this apartheid
system in the US? Your lesser than environmental racism and toxins in black communities, higher
levels of asthma. Because yes, we don't want in our backyard. Their backyard were fine with it. So this
is also going reasons because your mind goes up, are we really doing really matter here? And you
always come to the conclusion no less than they used to put women in the 1800s. They put women in
prison with men, black people just on your all, you know, they're all the same anyway, you're all
cattle. So women would get raped, they get pregnant sometimes by the guards, sometimes by the
inmates. Those children were then they let them nurse for about 10 years. The mother take them away
and they were sold off. And that was just what you did because those people are less than human. So
again, techni...
maybe that's what you're pointing to. What are the overlap? Yeah. Okay. So let's see what are the like. Does it tend to align with an anti-abortion stance? I think, I think the two big social issues that resonate and that might be overlaps with the black church and the white church. Sadly, is feelings towards abortion. You know, the, the, the sanctity of light, so to speak, right? And homophobia that, that is abomination before God for man to be with a man, home to be with women. And for many people that is, that is sacred. Adam and Eve, not Adam and Steve. It's kind of yeah, Right? Right. Right. These types of quips because if it rhymes, I must be right. So I think that, that, that some people hear that. And, and that was the, that was benchmark for a lot of years right. Now, black ministers are realizing, and I talk about it in my book, that there are many gays and lesbians that are active in their church, in the choirs playing the piano or direct and acquire as other members of the congregation who tie than everything else. And so there has to be some cognitive dissonance, some idea of a battle between two things, which is, I want to love people and, and this was said once in, in company, some friends down in the Bay Area when when minister said that and he was gay friends. And they're like, Well, we don't think it's a sin. And they had a big battle about it and eventually apologize saying that calling that a sin was was probably wrong. That stuff for me to judge you. And you know, in San Francisco Bly memorial for years, they've accepted prostitutes, drug addicts, whatever in their church because they call it, he calls it the house of God. And he says, this is your place to. I'm not going to turn you away just because you've sent and maybe we'll send tomorrow. I'm not going to judge that. So I mean, I'm not a religious Scout, but being around African Americans, I can, I can tell you the differences and I've been in many different African American churches and white churches to kind of observe some of those thicknesses. And what about attitudes towards Islam and war in the Middle East and things like that. We're again in the white churches. Evangelical you are, the more in support of the war in Iraq you were likely to have been. Sure and the more the word terrorism easily comes to you this when you hear about any sort of violent throwing on. And I want if that's the case in the black too, That's an easy one. That's an easy one. No, right? Black people, very skeptical when white people start demonizing other. And we had way back to Muhammad Ali who said, You know what? I'm not going to go over them, fight against the VA, can't read anything to me. Our problem is right here. We get more terrorist attacks in our country, them from people outside of our kind of our concern is with you, not with them, so I'm not going to go fight them for you. Now, of course, there are some people who are black and conservative and Republican who would fall into the common trope of, oh yeah, sure, they're bad. Oh, they're evil. All we got to fight because America is the best thing, right? And no big dredging. Republicans or conservatives, or black people who go to church. I just always take a stand for people who were being downtrodden in general. And I know that terrorism is bad. But we ought to say, we ought to say terrorism as bad everywhere. And until we apologize to black people that they've done for 400 years, pointed in two years now. There's you can't get me to look over there, right? Yeah, I'm here Is it means something very different to have that crazy because S isn't so much terrorism. There has been perpetrated against and come down. It's not call Ta Ka Kb still around exactly. White supremacy is growing and getting stronger and theirs, and they've never call them terrorists had never want to call them terrorists because they're there as my neighbor I use on the police force. He can't be all that bad at all. These types of, of ways where you allow your mind to simply categorize it, compartmentalize and put it over there. Those are the people, those bad apples who get on those police forces. They're the ones we're concerned about and not the good apple, but the good apples are no more good apples unless they tell the battle was that. I've been reading recently, there's some discussion amongst the school board about removing the names of certain well-known American figures such as Abraham Lincoln and from school. And the reason being that Lincoln said a number of things disparaging of black people. In fact, in my own field of South Asian studies, this has come up in the case of Gandhi as well, who also said things that were disparaging of black people. And as you might know, he didn't. He started his career in South Africa fighting against apartheid there. However, he was much more energetically fighting in favor of the South Asian community being seen as equal than he was with the black community. They're being seen as yoga. And he's come under a lot of criticism for that. And some statutes in fact of him had been brought down. We probably have a similar thing with Abraham Lincoln where, where he fought to eliminate slavery. But it doesn't mean that he personally necessarily thought, therefore the equal, and I guess evidence has come out recently and some of his writings and speeches that he didn't think that. So the question is, how much racism can we tolerate from historical figures put in context of their day and time? Before we want to make moves where we significantly change, of course, we should change our attitudes towards them. But this ties into the whole statue removal thing. Where we get to the point where we should remove the name from high schools and things like
we're doing and dial back all this critical thinking and college and race critical thinking, take all that
male. So the idea is, let's shift this back. Let's take a few steps back and, and look at really what
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everybody was happy. That's what they think. That's what they want to make us believe. And that's not
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whatever reasoning was, he came in and yeah, and and it says let's go back to the time where
we've saw so many guns in the last five years. I mean, Obama came into office and then the next guy,
to answer those big group question. And I don't think it's any I don't think it's any accident that
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sexist because all I'm in guess who was doing the most of the shootings and all these places around
that's why you have people right now getting a little fearful and little xenophobic and homophobic and
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into the future, as long as those things stand staring at you all. Who was that while Sun, this is who that
what they stood. And as long as that stands, why people would be brainwashed forevemore, centuries
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we're doing and dial back all this critical thinking and college and race critical thinking, take all that
out. That's, that's mess and people's heads up. This is a really interesting discussion. We covered a lot. And I'm certainly going to be thinking about a lot of the things that you've mentioned. And a lot of it is in the book Policing Black athletes by Dr. Vernon Andrews. That's right here, Rachel, Hey, everyone, get on Amazon. You know that that's probably the one place right now. Yeah. Yeah. So make you think for for 10 chapters. Absolutely. Well, thanks so much, Dr. Vernon Andrews. Thank you, Daniel. Good job. Alright, take care, peace. Peace out. If you'd like to learn more about the Department of Comparative Religion and Humanities, please go to our website at CSU Chico.edu slash CORH. That's CSU CHICO.edu slash CORH I want to point out that the opinions expressed here do not necessarily reflect those of the faculty and staff of our departments. And after that, he went to New Zealand where he lived for 14 years teaching there. And he also had a radio show? No. He didn't have a radio show. He had a barbecue sauce.