

# Nike under fire for recalling flag shoe at Kaepernick's request

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This undated product image obtained by The Associated Press shows Nike Air Max 1 Quick Strike Fourth of July shoes that have a U.S. flag with 13 white stars in a circle on it, known as the Betsy Ross flag, on them. Nike is pulling the flag-themed tennis shoe after former NFL quarterback Colin Kaepernick complained to the shoemaker, according to the Wall Street Journal. Photo by: Nike via AP Photo

NEW YORK, New York — Business has been good for Nike since last year's "Just Do It" advertisement. The famous ad featured former NFL quarterback Colin Kaepernick.

Now, the company has listened to Kaepernick on a merchandise issue. He recently raised concerns over a Nike sneaker featuring an early American flag.

## **Kaepernick Says Flag Is Offensive**

In response, Nike pulled the Air Max 1 USA shoe from store shelves. The shoe included a U.S. flag from Revolutionary War times on its heel. Kaepernick explained that the flag brings up a time when black people were enslaved. He also said the flag has been used by racist groups.

Nike recalled the shoes from stores. It was set to go on sale the week before the July Fourth holiday, according to the Wall Street Journal.

The decision caused instant anger among conservatives. They accused Nike of insulting American history. In Arizona, Governor Doug Ducey, a Republican, asked a state agency to withdraw tax breaks promised to Nike. The company plans to build a factory in the state. Often times, states or local governments use gifts like tax breaks to attract companies to their states.

Others expressed surprise that the symbol known as the Betsy Ross flag could be considered offensive. The flag is named after the beloved Philadelphia woman credited with designing it during the American Revolution. Some extremist groups appear to have used the flag for their own message. Still, it is not widely viewed as a symbol of hate.

### **Experts Think Nike Will Survive Backlash**

Nike defended its decision in a statement. It said it did not want the shoe to take away from the Fourth of July celebration. The company also pushed back against criticism that the decision was "anti-American."

Nike is showing consistency by listening to Kaepernick. He was the first NFL athlete to take a knee during the national anthem to protest police brutality. This act continues to cause controversy throughout the sports world. After last year's "Just Do It" ad with Kaepernick, some people called for boycotts of Nike.

The boycott calls fizzled, and business has been growing for Nike ever since. The company's yearly sales have jumped 7 percent to more than \$39 billion. That's more money than some countries' economies produce in an entire year.

Still, the sneaker recall has led to new criticism. Several Republican politicians quickly condemned the company, including Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell of Kentucky. "If we are in a political environment where the American flag has become controversial to Americans, I think we have a problem," he said.

Matt Powell studies sports from a business perspective. He does not think Nike will suffer from the shoe recall. In fact, he thinks their stand will speak to customers who want to see companies reflect their values.

"Today's consumers really want brands to be vocal on social issues, especially the younger consumers," Powell said. "This very much aligns with the social position of their core consumers."

### **Flag Was Allegedly Used In A Racist Incident**

Still, there's a question on whether or not the flag is offensive.

In 2016, the flag had reportedly been used to intimidate football players from a mostly black school. The incident occurred in Michigan and was detailed by a local chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. It is called the NAACP for short. The NAACP is the nation's oldest civil rights organization. It was originally founded in the early 1900s to fight for better treatment of African-Americans.

Lisa Moulder is the director of the Betsy Ross House in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. She said she has never heard of the flag being used as a hate symbol. "Personally, I've always seen it as a representation of early America," she said. "The young nation was not perfect, and it is still not perfect."

## Quiz

1 Read the section "Kaepernick Says Flag Is Offensive."

Which sentence from this section supports the conclusion that some consumers are upset that Nike chose not to sell the Air Max 1 USA shoe?

- (A) Kaepernick explained that the flag brings up a time when black people were enslaved.
- (B) In Arizona, Governor Doug Ducey, a Republican, asked a state agency to withdraw tax breaks promised to Nike.
- (C) Others expressed surprise that the symbol known as the "Betsy Ross" flag could be considered offensive.
- (D) Some extremist groups appear to have used the flag for their own message.

2 Read the selection from the section "Experts Think Nike Will Survive Backlash."

*The boycott calls fizzled, and business has been growing for Nike ever since. The company's yearly sales have jumped 7 percent to more than \$39 billion. That's more money than some countries' economies produce in an entire year.*

Which of the following is an accurate explanation of what this selection means?

- (A) Despite threats of a boycott, Nike continues to be extremely profitable.
- (B) Nike is the most successful company in the world.
- (C) Nike's sales have been hurt by working with Kaepernick.
- (D) People hope that a boycott will bring back the Air Max 1 USA shoe.

3 Read the paragraph from the article.

*In 2016, the flag had reportedly been used to intimidate football players from a mostly black school. The incident occurred in Michigan and was detailed by a local chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. It is called the NAACP for short. The NAACP is the nation's oldest civil rights organization. It was originally founded in the early 1900s to fight for better treatment of African-Americans.*

HOW does this paragraph support the main idea of the article?

- (A) It shows why the "Betsy Ross" flag is a national symbol.
- (B) It explains why the NAACP was created.
- (C) It shows that Americans are proud of the "Betsy Ross" flag.
- (D) It explains why some people view the "Betsy Ross" flag as offensive.

Read the summary of the main ideas of the article below.

*Nike recently pulled its Air Max 1 USA shoes over concerns that the "Betsy Ross" flag was offensive. Former NFL quarterback Colin Kaepernick claimed it was a symbol for hate groups, while many conservatives were upset by Nike's decision.*

Which answer choice would complete the summary?

- (A) The governor of Arizona has even threatened to take away tax breaks from Nike for the factory it is building in the state.
- (B) Betsy Ross designed and created the flag in Philadelphia during the American Revolution.
- (C) The "Betsy Ross" flag was once used in a racist incident with a Michigan football team.
- (D) Some people threatened boycotting Nike, but the company has successfully survived other controversies.