# Colin Kaepernick’s Decision to Kneel during the National Anthem

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## Introduction

The Constitution of the United States ensures the provision of freedom of speech and freedom to peaceful protest to all its citizens. In fact, these principles form the very foundation of the United States. However, despite his best efforts to demonstrate respect for his country during his peaceful protest, the NFL player Colin Kaepernick has been surrounded by controversy since he decided to kneel during the National Anthem (Wyche, 2016; Boykoff & Carrington, 2020). Most Americans consider it a demonstration of disrespect towards their beloved country and its brave military women and men. However, the protest was not meant to hurt anyone’s feelings or to disrespect the country.

## Thesis Statement

I agree with Kaepernick’s decision, as it is his fundamental right as an American citizen. The American Constitution has granted him the right to express his feelings and to engage in peaceful forms of protest against any aspect that he considers unfair.

## Description of the Issue

Colin Kaepernick is an African American who played in the NFL. In 2016, while the American national anthem was playing, he decided to kneel instead of remaining standing. His action was meant as a protest against the highly disproportionate killing of unarmed African Americans by law enforcement authorities. Also, such killings went without any repercussions for the police officers responsible for the killings.

However, many people perceive his decision to sit down during the national anthem as derogatory and disrespectful towards the United States. The veterans of the United States Army are the ones who are incredibly furious over Kaepernick’s decision, as they consider it a sign of disrespect for the brave women and men of the United States Army who gave their lives to protect the lives and the rights of Americans. Therefore, Kaepernick discussed the issue with the veterans, and they ultimately decided to kneel down instead of sitting down. The action of kneeling down in protest is not a new concept. In

fact, it has long been utilized as a form of peaceful protest during the civil rights movement. The movement of the 1960s is notable for its peaceful and respectful demonstrations. However, despite these facts, Kaepernick's action led to a severe backlash from the American public, and he eventually was dropped from the team.

The NFL's decision to drop him from the team led to some other athletes kneeling down during the national anthem. The issue gathered more coverage and was brought to the forefront when United States President Donald Trump openly called for firing any such individual who knelt during the American national anthem. Still, many athletes continued to boycott the NFL.

# Arguments in Favor of the Decision

Although merely meant as a political protest against the unjustified killings of unarmed African Americans, Kaepernick's actions generated a lot of controversy. Different people viewed the decision in different lights. Most of his teammates have supported his choice and regarded it as his constitutional right. The same can be said for social media, which has been stormed by arguments both in favor of and against his decision. The Black Lives Matter Movement is especially supportive of his decision to kneel. The movement has been very vocal about the brutality of law enforcement authorities towards African Americans.

Although the vast majority of American people have attempted their best to misrepresent Kaepernick's action in a negative light and as sheer disrespect for the United States and its military, the right that he holds to express his feelings is inalienable. Thus, it is imperative to first understand the real reasons behind his decision before branding him as a traitor or disrespectful towards his country. Colin Kaepernick has always been very expressive of his feelings. He observed the ongoing brutality of the police against his race and felt discomforted by it. The absence of punishment of the police officers responsible for mistreating African Americans further caused unease for him. Therefore, he considered it his moral responsibility to use his status as an NFL player to bring the issue to light. After the game ended, he even told the media in an interview, clarifying his intentions and the reasons he chose to kneel during the national anthem.

Another primary reason for such a massive backlash against Kaepernick is that White people own almost all the teams of the National Football League (NFL), despite the majority of NFL players being African Americans. Moreover, these white people are represented in a much more dominant fashion than the black ones. Therefore, being an African American, Kaepernick was highly criticized for his actions.

Colin Kaepernick acted responsibly, and the fact that he chose to kneel down instead of sitting down after proper consultation with the military veterans further affirms that he is an American patriot. If he intended to disrespect the very country he lives in, he would not have bothered discussing the issue with the veterans. Moreover, the ground realities regarding discrimination against African Americans

point towards racial inequality. One has to keep in mind the context of Kaepernick's protest. Although black people were granted "equal" rights after the end of the American Civil War, they still faced massive hardships to achieve actual equality with White folks. The Constitution merely acts as a theoretical framework for the establishment of equal rights, while practically, it is ineffective.

Also, his decision has been viewed mainly in an unfavorable light by President Donald Trump's continuously rising number of supporters. These people follow the ideology of militant nationalism, and anyone who even remotely expresses a hint of displeasure towards the mistreatment of specific racial groups is immediately branded as disrespectful towards the United States. Also, his decision inspired several other African American athletes to publicly support the cause of the Black Lives Matter movement.

# Arguments against the Decision

Certain people regard Kaepernick's actions as entirely wrong. Their leading case is that even though Kaepernick has a right to express his discomfort against a situation, as ensured by the American Constitution's freedom of speech, he should face the negative consequences of his disrespectful actions. Although a person may choose to use his right to free speech, he cannot escape the consequences of his actions. These people argue that as not standing up during the national anthem is a show of disrespect towards the country, Kaepernick deserves severe punishment. However, this is not true. None of his actions resulted in disrespect towards the country or the women and men of the American Armed Forces. Kneeling is not a new form of protest. As stated earlier, it has been used as a peaceful and respectable form of protest through the civil rights movement of the 1960s. Therefore, the opinion that Kaepernick deserves severe punishment is entirely unfounded.

Furthermore, other arguments against Kaepernick's decision state that he is a wealthy millionaire and is therefore unable to comprehend fully the real extent of racial discrimination and prejudice that average African Americans are subjected to daily. Consequently, he can never be the representative of the African American community, and his decision to kneel was nothing more than a publicity stunt. It is, however, a baseless excuse that contradicts human experience. Kaepernick himself responded to this argument by acknowledging his high-profile status. He stated that it was his very status that made him use his platform to stand up for impoverished African Americans who lacked any adequate platform to raise their voices on the issue. Kaepernick rightfully decided to use his status and position to speak for the average African American who faces discrimination and unjustified police brutality on a daily basis. In fact, his decision led to an increase in public focus on the issues faced by the African American community of the United States and brought them into the limelight.

In addition to the arguments mentioned above, a number of the opponents state that Kaepernick is not suited in the first place to protest for the rights of African Americans. They say that although he is a black person, his mother was white. Moreover, he was adopted by white parents who raised him. Therefore, his background renders him incapable of empathy towards the constant struggle of African

Americans for economic, social, and political equality. A person with such a history can never fully understand the dire circumstances faced by these struggling African Americans. However, this logic is moribund and relates morality, personal identity, and ethics exclusively to race and biology. A White family raised Kaepernick, and the very same family taught him the life skills and the moral principles to stand up against any injustice regardless of any negative consequences. His very family made him the man with the conscience that he is today.

# Conclusion

In conclusion, I undoubtedly agree with Colin Kaepernick's decision to kneel during the national anthem. He is just one among a lengthy list of athletes who use their status to protest against social injustices. Influential athletes like Jackie Robinson and Muhammad Ali utilized their platforms to raise their voices against racial discrimination. Kaepernick's decision has inspired athletes from all forms of sports to protest against the social injustices against African Americans. The massive hostility and anger towards his action are because many individuals have the misconception that buying tickets to see a game makes them the owners of the social and political conscience of the players when, in reality, the conscience of a moral person can never be bought.

# References

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