

# The fight for free speech in the united states of america

[Life](#)



The United States of America has fought for nothing less than life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. From the beginning, the citizens of the now-U. S. A. did not take kindly to those who took their unalienable rights – their freedom of speech, of religion, of press, of assembly. To put it simply, their freedom of choice. If nothing else, the simple act of choosing has shaped the United States tremendously. It was a choice for the colonies to take up arms and fight for their liberty against their mother country. It was a choice to march into Washington D. C., preaching words of peace and protesting against violence with pacifism. It was a choice to speak out against the silencing of both men and women alike in the media of today with the #MeToo movement. And on September 1, 2016, it was Colin Kaepernick's choice to kneel during the national anthem in protest of police brutality against the African-American community.

Free speech, as defined by the dictionary, is “ the right to express any opinions without censorship or restraint.” Being a part of the National Football League as a player for the San Francisco 49ers, Kaepernick used this to his advantage. Formerly, he had been known to sit during the national anthem; this did not attract the kind of attention his kneeling did for he was off on the sidelines, not standing next to his teammates (and not in sight of any of the cameras). It did, however, attract the attention of former-NFL player and veteran Nate Boyer. Despite his initial grievances with Kaepernick's protest, Boyer understood the reason behind the protest. Kaepernick even reached out to talk with the veteran to try and find a compromise between their two viewpoints. In the end, they reached a happy

middle when Boyer suggested for Kaepernick to kneel, seeing as it was more respectful than sitting.

Despite the fact that an ex-Green Beret was the one who prompted the 49er's controversial protest, many are against the action. They see this as highly disrespectful towards the United States and its veterans. The Star Spangled Banner is the anthem for all those who support freedom, and veterans are the people who fought for said freedom; not partaking in honoring the United States' history of fighting for liberty was just plain insulting. On the other hand, athletes who have joined Kaepernick in "taking-a-knee" have stated that yes, they may be kneeling, but it isn't disrespectful; it is just a quick way to catch an audience's attention and direct it towards a bigger issue. This debate was pushed farther into the limelight by President Trump, who voiced his opinion on the subject in a series of tweets as well as at some of his rallies. It has grown like wildfire ever since. Even today, just over two years later, the flame has been rekindled with the unveiling of Kaepernick's Nike ad. Eventually, the fire will die back down, but one question will still remain in its ashes: which side is in the right? Like everything else, the answer is not as simple as the question. In defense of the athletes, many actions portrayed in today's media is, more often than not, blown out of proportion. It is either Heaven sent or touched by Hell, no in between. Also, like mentioned previously, the athletes who partook in this activity had no ill-will towards the United States; they just wanted to do their part in bringing light to a long-standing issue in the country: racism. They even chose to do so in the most courteous way possible because, despite this country's faults, they love it wholeheartedly.

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Eric Reid, another 49er and one of the first to adopt Kaepernick's way of protest, remembers thinking that "[the protester's] posture was like a flag flown at half-mast to mark a tragedy" and that when the protest is seen as disrespectful, it is being misconstrued. It is not about protesting the U. S., it's about protesting the mistreatment of African-Americans and other peoples of color by the police. Like Reid, many other athletes have shared Kaepernick's sentiments and are using their platform as nationally recognized individuals to make a difference. Bruce Maxwell, the first Major League Baseball player to take a knee, wrote "...Right now we're having a racial divide in all types of people. It's being practiced from the highest power that we have in [the United States], and he's basically saying that it's OK to treat people differently. [It's not]." These athletes are kneeling in hopes to eradicate a mindset that has hung around since the colonial era. A few feathers may have been ruffled, but if nothing ruffles, nothing flies. Conversely, the opposition towards taking a knee is mostly from those connected with the military. As U. S. citizens, we ask these men and women to lay down their lives in order to protect our country and its ideals. Since these protests usually require the participant to go against the norms of respecting both the song and the U. S. flag, they are seen as attacks against the United States government. It's essentially the equivalent to spitting or burning the flag. President Trump even deemed Kaepernick's kneeling as "unpatriotic" and went as far as to say that the NFL should be boycotted entirely.

Many people are also upset over the fact that some of these athletes, including Kaepernick, are grouping themselves together with those who are currently oppressed; it may be true that these people have been persecuted

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due to racial reasons in the past, but not as of present (at least, not publicly). Jerseys, posters, and other memorabilia are being burned by angry fans to show their distaste for such comments. Shane White, a lifelong 49er fan who torched a jersey on a Facebook video, wrote, “ Colin says he’s oppressed making \$126 million. Well, Colin, here’s my salute to you.” This country has always been a prideful one, and in nearly 250 years later that has not changed. It is understandable why many people’s reaction to these protests felt like a slap in the face rather than a weight being lifted off their shoulders. Human nature is not something that can be defined by just one simple action. Unlike the media outlets these kinds of controversies are printed on, these protests are not black and white. There are layers upon layers of thoughts and actions that must be analyzed in order to understand why one person feels one way and why another feels the opposite. T

he #TakeAKnee movement versus #BoycottNFL is a debate that may never be laid to rest as more and more evidence of racial injustice by authority figures comes to the surface; a lack of understanding on both sides is not beneficial for anyone either. Perhaps Nate Boyer, the man who helped start it all, has the correct idea towards a resolution. The only way there can be any hope to heal as a nation is if Colin Kaepernick and President Trump do what they should have done back in 2016: sit down and talk. After all, that’s how it all started.