

Refusing to Stand for the National Anthem: Top 3 Pros and Cons



The current debate over kneeling or sitting in protest during the national anthem was ignited by Colin Kaepernick in 2016 and has escalated to become a nationally divisive issue. San Francisco 49ers quarterback Colin Kaepernick first refused to stand during "The Star-Spangled Banner" on Aug. 26, 2016 to protest racial injustice and police brutality in the United States. Since that time, many other professional football players, high school athletes, and professional athletes in other sports have refused to stand for the national anthem. These protests have generated controversy and sparked a public conversation about the protesters' messages and how they've chosen to deliver them.

People who support refusing to stand for the national anthem argue that athletes are justified in using their celebrity status to bring attention to important issues, and that refusing to stand for the national anthem is an appropriate and effective method of peaceful protest. People who disagree argue that football games are an inappropriate place to engage in political protest, and that not standing for the national anthem shows disrespect for the country and those who proudly support it, some with their lives.

Is Refusing to Stand for the National Anthem an Appropriate Form of Protest?

Pro 1

When one believes the United States is not living up to its ideals of freedom, liberty, and justice for all, refusing to stand for the national anthem is appropriate and justified.

Colin Kaepernick said, "I'm not going to stand up to show pride in a flag for a country that oppresses black people and people of color... To me, this is bigger than football and it would be selfish on my part to look the other way. There are bodies in the street and people getting paid leave and getting away with murder." Many other athletes have since refused to stand for the national anthem for similar reasons. Denver Broncos linebacker Brandon Marshall, who also has knelt during the national anthem, said, "the message is I'm against social injustice... I'm not against the military or police or America at all."

Con 1

Refusing to stand for the national anthem shows disrespect for the flag and members of the armed forces.

The national anthem pays respect to the people who have risked their lives, been injured, or died defending the United States. Carole Isham, a great-great-great-granddaughter of the writer of the national anthem (Francis Scott Key) stated that "it just blows my mind that somebody like (Kaepernick) would do what he does to dishonor the flag of this country and the national anthem when we have young men and women overseas fighting for this country, people that have died for this country." Drew Brees, New Orleans Saints quarterback, supported Kaepernick's message but disagreed with the delivery: "It's an oxymoron that you're sitting down, disrespecting that flag that has given you the freedom to speak out."

Pro 2

When a national figure such as an NFL player refuses to stand for the national anthem, it shocks people into paying attention and generates

conversation. Many people were shocked and offended when Colin Kaepernick refused to stand for "The Star-Spangled Banner," and the resulting debate has continued as additional players joined the protest. NFL Commissioner Roger Goodell originally disagreed with those actions, but later praised what he called a movement from protest to progress: "I truly respect our players wanting to speak out and change the community... We want them to use that voice." Social media has given a voice to strong opinions on both sides, including members of the armed forces who express support for Kaepernick's right to protest by posting under the hashtag #VeteransForKaepernick.

Pro 3

Not standing for the national anthem is a legal form of peaceful protest, which is a First Amendment right.

President Obama said Kaepernick was "exercising his constitutional right to make a statement. I think there's a long history of sports figures doing so." The San Francisco 49ers said in a statement, "In respecting such American principles as freedom of religion and freedom of expression, we recognize the right of an individual to choose and participate, or not, in our celebration of the national anthem." A letter signed by 35 US veterans stated that "Far from disrespecting our troops, there is no finer form of appreciation for our sacrifice than for Americans to enthusiastically exercise their freedom of speech."

Con 2

Not standing for the national anthem is an ineffective and counterproductive way to promote a

cause. Clemson University football coach Dabo Swinney said in a press conference: "I don't think it's good to be a distraction to your team. I don't think it's good to use your team as the platform." President Obama expressed concern that not standing for the national anthem can get in the way of the message: "As a general matter, when it comes to the flag the national anthem and the meaning that holds for our men and women in uniform and those who've fought for us -- that is a tough thing for them to get past to then hear what his [Kaepernick's] deeper concerns are." Malcolm Jenkins, safety for the Philadelphia Eagles, supported Kaepernick's message but said, "My grandfather served [in the military]. And this is a country that I love. So, me not standing for the national anthem isn't really going to get me the results that I want."

Con 3

Refusing to stand for the national anthem angers many and sows division in our country.

Kaepernick and others who have refused to stand for the national anthem have caused division among their teams, their fans, and across the country. The Santa Clara police union hinted they would boycott providing security at games after Kaepernick revealed his reasons for protesting the national anthem and wore socks depicting pigs in police uniforms. Fans have been burning Kaepernick's jersey to show their distaste for his actions. One video of a jersey on fire posted on Facebook was captioned, "He says he's oppressed making \$126 million. Well, Colin, here's my salute to you."

Name: _____

1st Amendment Activity #2

Read the Top 3 Pros and Cons on refusing to stand for the National Anthem. Then answer these questions in paragraph format. One paragraph (4-6 sentences) per question.

Is refusing to stand for the National Anthem an appropriate form of protest?

(continue on the back if you need more space)

Should kneeling during the anthem be protected as free speech?

(continue on the back if you need more space)