

## **Standing for the National Anthem**

Colin Kaepernick is a 29-year-old NFL quarterback going into his 7th year of professional football. During the 2016 NFL season, he refused to stand during the national anthem. Kaepernick explained his actions: "I am not going to stand up to show pride in a flag for a country that oppresses black people and people of color. . . . There are a lot of things that are going on that are unjust [that] people aren't being held accountable for. And that's something that needs to change. That's something that this country stands for — freedom, liberty, justice for all. And it's not happening for all right now." Kaepernick seeks to call attention to racism and in particular to ongoing racial violence.

This act of political protest set off a national debate. Some claim that Kaepernick's act of protest shows that he is unpatriotic and does not have respect for the flag, the Constitution, and the military. They believe that refusing to stand for the national anthem shows that he isn't grateful for all that the country stands for. As a role model, they argue, it is important that Kaepernick stand with his group and set a good example for youth by demonstrating respect for this country and its traditions. If he wanted to protest, some say, he should have talked with his team and community first before making such a public statement, and called attention to these issues in a way that didn't negatively affect the symbolism of the national anthem and upset many who have fought for the country's values.

Others suggest that Kaepernick did what he did because of the importance of the issues he is raising. Black people disproportionately are victims of police brutality and continue to be harmed by race discrimination. Kaepernick, supporters say, simply exercised his free speech rights, and protesting is a form of patriotism. As an athlete-celebrity, Kaepernick is in a powerful position to call attention to these issues and, some might say, a moral responsibility to do so. Further, others argue, we should admire people who risk hurting their careers to take political stands. They point out that people of color are often at greater risk of their careers being affected when they become politically active and note that in fact Kaepernick's actions seem to have affected his employment prospects as he remains without an NFL contract.