

First Place Winner
Division I– 7-9th Grades
Uncomfortable
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“Believe in something, even if it means sacrificing everything.” These nine words spoken by Colin Kaepernick truly express his image and self as a whole. In the decades that have been scarred and bruised by racism and police brutality, one man immeasurably stood up for what he believed in. With the moral courage he stood by, he risked many things, his notability, and even career, but it ultimately led to a nationwide protest against the racism still engraved in our country.

On August 26, 2016, 49’ers player, Colin Kaepernick, showed his first demonstration of protest against police brutality of people of color, by sitting on the bench on the sidelines while his teammates stood for the national anthem. It wasn’t the first time he had stayed seated, but immediately it was noticed by reporters who sparked conversation about it after the game. To the question, “Why did you do it,” he replied by saying, “I am not going to stand up to show pride in a flag for a country that oppresses black people, and people of color.” He explained, “To me, this is bigger than football and it would be selfish on my part to look the other way...”

A few days later former Seahawks player and U.S. Veteran, Nate Boyer, got in touch with Colin Kaepernick to discuss a better way to protest while still showing respect for the country and flag. They came to an agreement in which Colin Kaepernick would kneel for the flag instead of sit on the bench, showing his willingness to modify his actions and see it from someone else’s perspective, especially someone with a military background. Boyer explained, “Soldiers take a knee in front of a fallen brother’s grave, you know, to show respect.” With this new form of protesting in mind Kaepernick started kneeling the following game, this time joined by his teammate Eric Reid.

It began to cause a great rift in the country, everyone picking sides and many people openly bashing or praising Kaepernick. Some of these people claiming it was a contemptible act, that he had no respect and was unappreciative for his country. It began to become more political as then presidential candidate, Donald Trump, started to criticize him. One week after he first took a knee, eleven other NFL players began to join in, and it grew from then on, even leading to team owners going out on the field to link arms with their players before games to show their support for their players, especially the ones who experienced the police brutality and racism that Kaepernick was fighting against. Eventually, Kaepernick’s football career came to an end. Some speculate he was blackballed, while others argue there were just better candidates to be drafted. Despite him being done in the NFL he still campaigns for black rights, and anti-police brutality, and has encouraged other people who have a platform to speak out with Kaepernick against racism in our country. A few of these people include Zendaya, Nick Cannon, Janelle Monae, Jaylen Brown, Lebron James, Kevin Durant and Stephen Curry.

How do I, a white 14 year old girl, relate to Colin Kaepernick? I've never been discriminated against because of my race, and I've never been called racial slurs. I've never been asked if someone's my sibling just because they're a person of color too, and I've never been the butt of a racist joke. But I've been surrounded by racism my whole life, and I'm tired of it. My school often gets really tendentious, and since it is primarily a white filled school many people say racist jokes or words, and in some cases slurs like the n-word, with no consequences or lashback. And embarrassingly I never know what to do, so I usually just sit there uncomfortably. Now I realize I'm part of the problem. Not doing anything is almost as bad as taking part in it, because I'm normalizing people not getting in trouble for serious, hurtful things. And it's not just racial innuendos, but also homophobic and ableistic remarks too. "No homo," "Does your mama know you're gay," and "Are you on the spectrum," are just a few of the insensitive remarks that are made on a daily basis by people I've known almost my whole life. For the longest time I would be contemplating, "What do I do?" I don't want to be the one girl no one can't have fun around, with people talking bad about her behind her back because she doesn't find inconsiderate remarks funny. Now I realize, I don't care if I'm that girl. Being liked for going along with malicious "unharmful" jokes is not the person I want to be. I would rather be disliked by them for standing up for what I believe in because that's who I am, and this is what I believe. Being liked isn't everything, especially when it risks my integrity.

If we all spoke out respectfully like Colin Kaepernick maybe people would finally listen. Maybe all it takes people to hear you out is numbers. If that's the case, then why don't we. I know why. Society is based on the principle that you have to be liked. Well I'm tired of society. One day the sun will explode, or a zombie apocalypse will actually ensue, so what's the point of being liked? Stand up for what you believe while you're on earth because why not. You're living in a world of contradictions if you believe that going along with mean jokes rather than holding on to what you truly believe will make you happy. From now on, I can't do that. I have to stand up for what I believe even if it makes other people uncomfortable, especially when it makes other people uncomfortable.