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OPINION

Divergent Views with Racial Underpinnings

Kaepernick's right to self-expression

BY MARC H. MORIAL

Social protest is a fundamental element of American democracy. The right to self-expression, the right to dissent, and the right to confront those in authority with ones grievances are enshrined in the Constitution.

Thus, San Francisco 49er Colin Kaepernick's decision to protest police violence against African Americans by declining to stand for the National Anthem is a profoundly patriotic act.

While we live in the same country, the reality of day-to-day life for white and black Americans can be vastly different. Most black men and women in America know the humiliation of being targeted – by police, by store clerks, by security officers - for nothing more than



their appearance. Black children are viewed as older and more responsible for their actions than white children of the same age. From minor offenses like being bypassed by a taxicab to the overwhelmingly racially skewed criminal justice system, the experiences of black Americans simply are not the same for whites.

A majority of African Americans support Kaepernick's choice, while a majority of whites do not. According to an informal Twitter poll the National Urban League conducted among our followers, an overwhelming 88 percent say they are proud of Kaepernick.

Some white football fans, meanwhile, have burned Kaepernick's jersey and have engaged in hateful racial invective on social media.

The divergent views on Kaepernick's action reflect the divergent views on the very reason for his protest – the use of excessive and fatal force by police, disproportionately directed at people of color, and the failure

of authorities to hold officers accountable for misconduct.

According to a recent survey, the vast majority white Americans hold a favorable view of police, while a slight majority of black Americans hold an unfavorable view. A majority of whites believe police generally are held accountable for their misconduct, and a majority of blacks believe they are not. A majority of black respondents said police are too quick to use lethal force, while most white respondents said police only use lethal force when necessary.

While I myself will continue to stand for the National Anthem, I support his right to protest. And while I wholeheartedly share Kaepernick's despair over excessive force and the failure to hold police accountable, I would support his protest even if I did not.

Despite the outrage Kaepernick's protest has raised, he has ignited a movement of sorts. Since Kaepernick since first declined refused to stand in late August, 22 NFL players have joined his protest, as have ath-

letes in high schools, youth leagues, and colleges all across the country.

It's interesting to note that, while no white NFL player has yet joined the protest, many of the high school and college students protesting are white. Young people have the power to change the future, and it is encouraging that their eyes are open to the racism and injustice

many of their elders seem unable to see.

It is not merely Kaepernick's right to register his discontent with the status quo. Some would argue it is a moral imperative. As Abraham Lincoln said, "To sin by silence when they should protest makes cowards of men."

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