“Still StanDing: Colin Kaepernick made me think about all the reasons i salute the flag in a still imperfect america” by Doug Glanville, *US News and world report*, 9/2/16

1 When i first heardabout Colin Kaepernick and his protest, I immediately thought about my life and its relationship with the national anthem. After playing in 1,750 professional baseball games over my career, I have heard my fair share of national anthems. It was a daily ritual and it never dawned on me that I should even consider whether I should honor the flag or not. Every game, I took off my hat, I put it over my heart, and I stood tall. Every single game.

2 Now thinking about it, I stood with my hand on my chest out of respect and pride, but there were also times when I attached the flag and our anthem to a moment of support. I stood up on the day when children impacted by Columbine were at a Colorado Rockies game, I stood up after the Oklahoma City bombing when we were the next team arriving to the city to play the 89ers, and I stood up after 9/11, when I was with the Phillies and we uncertainly returned to playing baseball. It felt right, it felt helpful, it felt therapeutic, it felt like America could be part of the solution, even if part of America helped create the problem. I was not only standing for our country, but I was hoping that the strength of America would heal those families, and make it all right.

3 I am an African-American male in his 40s who is the fruit of the American dream in many ways. My father was an immigrant from Trinidad and Tobago, my mother hails from North Carolina with all the challenges of the black South. Both were first-generation college graduates. They were able to put me and my brother through college, provide a stable and resource-filled life. I had uncles and relatives who served, I work for an American fixture, ESPN, played Major League Baseball, and everyone in my immediate family has always voted. I drive a minivan.

4 My hometown was a beacon of diversity and inclusion, isolated in a then homogeneous Bergen County. Teaneck, New Jersey, was a pioneer in voluntary integration through busing in the early 60s.

Once I graduated high school, it became clear that America was a lot different than my perception of it during my upbringing. Race was front and center. Although at an Ivy-league college, I fielded questions all of the time about why I was even at the school. My academic achievement was chalked up to affirmative action, my athletic achievement was chalked up to natural talent. That was a tough freshman year.

5 I could tell story after story on my enlightenment of how racism impacted my life, but I could also tell story after story of how diversity gave me great optimism for our country. It is alright to be conflicted at times with America's past, present and future. I find that to be a reason for us to work harder at making a perfect union. America to me was always a work in progress, building on great ideas, a "to be continued" design that evolves by what we all put into it.

6 In the last two years, I can point to two direct experiences that refocused my relationship with our country. First was when a police officer from a completely different town from where I lived questioned me in my driveway by asking whether I was making money shoveling people's driveways. The other was when an LAX taxi driver told me to go across the street and take the bus, rather than do his job and take me to the hotel downtown. Yes, this is America.

7 In light of the racial tension and frustration on a crescendo in our country, I understand the undercurrent of those experiences, but I also was in a position to do something about it and in both cases, through collaboration with all kinds of people from all walks of life, lawmakers and non-profit organizations, taxi drivers and law enforcement, concerned friends, and loving family, Muslim mayors, and Jewish thought leaders, I was able to help change the law and policy, aided by the privilege of time, resources and access. This is also America.

8 It is hard in this climate to admit that we have a land that has privilege and utter disenfranchisement in the same place. By superficial and self-congratulatory standards, I am supposed to be the one who made it "out," by the looks of my resume. America, at its best, giving opportunity to a man of color whose father was not even born here. The Ivy-leaguer, the monied professional athlete, the awesome wife, the turbo dream job, the access to power circles, the ability to meet my favorite band. But yet I am still haunted and trapped at times by what race does in our country.

9 Kaepernick made me think of why I salute the flag and I am thankful that I finally had to answer that question. I have come to realize people salute it for a variety of reasons. It could be nostalgia, thinking about the good old days, the traditions, the memories, the way it used to be, the way it should still be, the sacrifice, honoring history. It could be about today, the America that has a world presence, a fantastic Olympic team, a lot of resources, more diversity than ever, a black president, a female nominee, an inspiration to freedom. It could be about the future, what I hope for, what I see in America's greatest potential, the dreams of people who came before me. It accepts that we are not there yet and what makes us American is our constant competitive spirit to get there.

10 When up against the most difficult aspects of our racial reality, it is important to understand that so many people do not even know what to fight or how to fight it. Fighting an enemy that is so clearly visible in the moment, that instantaneously retracts into the shadows in its aftermath, creates desperation. We have seen horrific violence as a response, we have seen a rejection of our sacred symbols and servants in the most public forums. It stems from deep, unaddressed issues that have festered since the dawn of our country, and via institutions that perpetuate it to a privileged gain. So people are scared, as I imagine Kaepernick is, lost, afraid to get pulled over, having conversations like I am with their eight-year-old son because he is on the darker side of the color scale. Conversations that should be reserved for an 18 year old.

11 Yet I choose to stand and still stand facing our flag, even after I am profiled, because my hometown Teaneck police department is full of baseball teammates from my childhood; even after I watch school systems ignore an entire generation of urban children, because I have seen caring city teachers who genuinely love the children; even knowing that the fear generated from every exchange between citizens of color and law enforcement is palpable, because we can exercise the right to change the culture as taxpaying citizens; even after fitting the description of every suspicious black man walking in the wrong neighborhood because I still can breathe for those who can't; even after knowing poverty is a business and sometimes, so is racism, because we cannot foreclose on the next generation who could be better versions of ourselves.

12 People are people, we have flaws, we are all biased, we can be selfish, we can be great, we can change the world, we can also be divisive, provincial, and complex, but I have decided that the tenets are worth supporting, history worth recognizing, the laws worth upholding, the future is worth seeing in our children and in our symbols. We must keep standing for something, even if you are just standing for your rightful belief. We ask people to stand up, so let them take a stand so we can know where we stand. I certainly know Kaepernick made me stand. Now we have to ask if we will continue to stand divided.

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