

Abstract

This paper aims to analyze NFL's stance and approach towards racial issues since Colin Kaepernick's protest in 2016. Colin Kaepernick is an African American athlete who started to protest against racial and social injustice by kneeling before NFL games when the national anthem was played. His protests caused many controversies because many people saw his actions as disrespectful towards the military, flag, national anthem and towards the USA. NFL's stance is analyzed through a qualitative content analysis of all NFL statements, which were issued since the beginning of Kaepernick's protest until the end of 2020. The statements are analyzed by use of the critical race theory, which focuses on the topic of race, white supremacy and institutionalized and hidden racism. The results of the analysis are that NFL's stance towards racial issues changed substantially. In 2016 and 2017, the primary concern of the NFL was the form of Kaepernick's protest as it was understood as a disrespectful and un-American act. In these years, NFL was trying to have a discussion with players about the causes of the protests, however, its primary concern was the form of Kaepernick's protest. In 2018, NFL briefly introduced a set of rules, which prohibited players from taking a knee during the national anthem while being on the football field. This rule was put on hold shortly after its introduction. In 2020, NFL completely changed its approach and started to support African Americans in their causes much more, NFL even admitted making a mistake in not listening to players' protests before.