

# Building Healthier and More Just Futures

An Interview with Colin Kaepernick, Founder, Know Your Rights Camp



Colin Kaepernick speaking at a Know Your Rights Camp

**EDITORS' NOTE** Super Bowl QB Colin Kaepernick, and holder of the all-time NFL record for most rushing yards in a game by a quarterback, took a knee during the playing of "The Star Spangled Banner" in 2016 to bring attention to systemic oppressions against Black and Brown people. Since 2016, he has founded and helped to fund three organizations – Know Your Rights Camp (KYRC), Ra Vision Media, and Kaepernick Publishing – that together advance the liberation of Black and Brown people through storytelling, systems change, and political education. Know Your Rights Camp is a fund of the Entertainment Industry Foundation (EIF), a 501(c)(3) tax-exempt organization. EIF is a Charity Navigator 4 Star Charity that meets all 20 BBB Charity Standards and carries the Candid Platinum Seal of Transparency. Kaepernick sits on Medium's Board and is the winner of numerous prestigious honors including Amnesty International's Ambassador of Conscience Award, the Robert F. Kennedy Human Rights Ripple of Hope honor, GQ magazine's "Citizen of the Year," the NFL's Len Eshmont Award, the Sports

Illustrated Muhammad Ali Legacy Award, the ACLU's Eason Monroe Courageous Advocate Award, and the Puffin/Nation Institute's Prize for Creative Citizenship. In 2019, Kaepernick helped Nike win an Emmy for its "Dream Crazy" commercial. In 2021, he released "Colin in Black & White," a six-episode limited series on Netflix exploring his high school years. The show won two NAACP Image Awards. In 2022, he became a New York Times bestselling author for his acclaimed children's picture book, I Color Myself Different.

## What was the vision for creating Know Your Rights Camp and how do you define its mission?

Know Your Rights Camp (KYRC) is about connecting the past to the present and the future through programming that empowers young people to be their best and highest selves. Our mission is to advance the liberation and well-being of Black and Brown communities through education, self-empowerment, mass-mobilization and the creation of new systems that elevate the next generation of change leaders.

The idea for KYRC was conceived in late-2015 shortly after what I describe as the public lynching of Mario Woods. Woods, who was 26-years-old at the time, was murdered by five San Francisco police officers just a few blocks from Candlestick Park, the former home of the 49ers. Woods' killing hit me hard. I was born only a few years before him. I felt angry and a deep sense of loss.

Prison abolitionist organizer, Mariame Kaba, once said that we should allow moments like these – heavy moments, tragic moments – to radicalize us rather than lead us to despair. I think a lot about this idea, as it helps to explain the impetus behind KYRC.

## Will you provide an overview of Know Your Rights Camp's work and programs?

KYRC provides young people with community-based legal, cultural, and political resources to fight back against what I view as systemic oppression, police terrorism, and racial inequality, and to build healthier and more just futures. I intentionally use the term "police terrorism" over the more mainstream phrasing of "police brutality" because the latter implies that brutality is peripheral – not central – to its central function whereas the former situates terroristic violence as core to policing as a practice of racial control and discipline.



Youth participants at a Know Your Rights Camp



**“Our mission is to advance the liberation and well-being of Black and Brown communities through education, self-empowerment, mass-mobilization and the creation of new systems that elevate the next generation of change leaders.”**



*Volunteer staff celebrate after another successful camp*

Our signature program-area is our traveling, day-long and site-based camp. We hosted our first camp in Oakland, California on October 29, 2016. Since then, we’ve organized eight additional camps with our most recent being in Las Vegas on March 23, 2022. Camp participation has ranged from 100 to 450 youth attendees. Each day is full of workshops partitioned into different subject areas like “Know Your History,” “Know Your Legal Rights,” “Tech,” “Art,” “Self-Empowerment,” and beyond. The day is high-energy, participatory, and inspiring. Our curriculum is presented by local community leaders in partnership with our core staff.

Our work, however, doesn’t end with our camps. Over the last several years we’ve launched and maintained a number of survival programs focused on providing immediate relief to our most vulnerable communities. Since January 2020, we have issued over \$2.5 million through partnerships and collaborative grants to Black- and Brown-led organizations and communities. From our COVID-19 Relief Fund to our Legal Defense Initiative to our Autopsy Initiative to our Revolving Bail Funds partnership with Robert F. Kennedy Human Rights, we have stepped up as frontline defenders of Black and Brown communities disproportionately impacted by COVID-19, police terrorism and economic devastation.

#### **How critical are metrics to track the impact of Know Your Rights Camp’s work?**

Metrics will always be critical to our work. At the same time, we know metrics and other

assessment mechanisms are only as valuable as the principles to which they’re anchored. We, of course, use traditional metrics to measure the impact of our work (i.e.: total grant dollars, in-kind donations, and youth served, just to name a few). We’re equally as interested in applying holistic, humanizing, qualitative assessments to our curriculum and strategic programming areas that can give us a more well-rounded window into how our campers are transforming their lives and communities for the better. We also use qualitative metrics to understand the extent to which our political education curriculum provides the foundation for self-discovery, intellectual risk-taking, and community-building.

#### **What are your priorities for Know Your Rights Camp as you look to the future?**

To increase the reach of our current programs and to launch additional initiatives in the coming year, we look forward to substantially amplifying our fundraising efforts in 2023. These efforts will be key as we plan to increase the frequency of our camps – we’ll be hosting three next year – and to launch a free KYRC app whose signature feature allows users to easily search for their legal rights on a state-by-state basis matrixed against various scenarios with cops (i.e.: traffic stops, protesting, etc.).

We’re excited about the year ahead and look forward to continuing to advance the liberation and well-being of Black and Brown communities by any means necessary. ●



*A youth participant on stage at a Know Your Rights Camp*