

# The Virgin Islands Consortium

## Op-Ed | To Stand Or Kneel: What The Super Bowl Teaches America

Opinion / **Published On February 12, 2018 10:11 PM /**

Staff **February 12, 2018**



Most Americans see standing or kneeling for the National Anthem as a simple response to these questions. Do you support our men in women in uniform? Do you support those people who put themselves at risk to defend liberty and freedom? Do you support America; the American Flag; the American Dream; American democracy?

Do you support the ideal that your vote matters, that you can vote for everyone who governs you – mayor, county commissioner, state representative, U.S. senator, president of the United States. In other words: that as an American Citizen you have a vote and a voice?

If you answered “yes” to those questions, well, thank you for being a red-blooded American. But you have a job to do. Next time you stand for the American Flag, while giving thanks for this great country, you should think about those American Citizens who strangely (and wrongfully) have been denied fundamental American rights.

Yes, it is true. American Citizens still exist who are robbed of their most fundamental American right – the right to vote for the government that governs them. There are nearly five million American Citizens living on American soil in Puerto Rico, Washington D.C., the United States Virgin Islands, Guam, American Samoa and the North Marianna Islands who have no voting representation in Congress and no vote for president.

What is more amazing is that the rate of military service in these American Territories is higher than in most States. For example, Oklahoma, Connecticut and Iowa each have roughly the same population as Puerto Rico. Yet, person for person, Puerto Rico has a higher rate of military service – and correspondingly higher rate of death, disfigurement, and injury for its military veterans in service to the United States.

The grave stones of brave American Citizens from American Territories are found in Europe, Korea, Vietnam, Iraq and Afghanistan. Yet, for those American citizen soldiers from American Territories – unlike every other soldier from a State – cannot vote for anyone in Congress or the president. They are deprived of the very rights that the United States fights wars to protect – democracy, voting rights, government of the people, by the people, for the people.

Next time when you stand for the Flag, remember that same American flag flies high over the American Territories with American citizens living there. Having a second-class citizenry with no vote taints American as a whole. We are one people - *e pluribus unum*.

It's easy to criticize one football player kneeling. But as President Theodore Roosevelt once said, it is not the critic, but the man in the arena that matters. That person kneeling is challenging us. President Donald Trump has said that we should focus on America. Let's do that – let us put our house in order. Let us start by eliminating the second-class American citizenry. It's a disgrace and embarrassment to all of us. And to make sure that it not just words, but action, here is my brief, but humble plan:

1. *Puerto Rico*. Organize congressional districts and elect five people to serve in the United States House of Representatives. Islandwide, elect two people to serve in the Senate. Send those seven elected people to Washington, D.C., to claim their rightful seats in Congress. If an honor guard is needed, select from your over 100,000 military veterans living in Puerto Rico, a contingent to accompany your representatives to Washington, D.C.
2. Washington D.C. Your time is now too. Convert your shadow Senators and Representative to voting representatives.
3. The Territories: The U.S. Virgin Islands, Guam, North Marianna Islands and American Samoa may be small in population, but we are not so few that our population destabilizes Congress. Alaska, Vermont and Wyoming have one voting congressional representative for about every 200,000 people. That population number is not far off for the American Territories. We could easily convert our current non-voting delegates to Congress to full voting members in the United States House of Representatives. We should restyle our upcoming elections, that

we are not electing non-voting Delegates and instead are electing a full representative that we expect to have voting seat in the House. Like Puerto Rico, military service is extremely high in Guam, U.S. Virgin Islands and American Samoa. The blood of our military veterans has more than paid for full voting representation in the House.

4. President Donald Trump: You have the ability to do something great. To expand liberty, freedom and democracy to American Citizens. To fulfil the American ideal and the American Dream – as we in the Territories are American citizens and Dreamers too. When we Virgin Islanders and Puerto Ricans sued in federal court for voting rights, both Presidents Bush and Obama had their U.S. Attorneys fight against it. Yet, to have two classes of American citizens means one person will always be kneeling. It is time for this practice of citizen discrimination to stop so that we may all stand equally.
5. All Americans: Join us now. Stand for Equality. Stand for Democracy. Stand to end a two tier, second-class American citizenry

**Submitted on Monday by:** Russell Pate, an attorney in the U.S. Virgin Islands. On behalf of American citizens in the U.S. Virgin Islands, he filed two lawsuits for voting rights. Those lawsuits were unsuccessful.