



YOUTH ADVOCACY RISES

Younger generation advances Black Lives Matter Movement

SOPHIA LIU
in-depth editor

MARISSA MATHIESON
in-depth editor

RHEA PATNEY
associate editor

Historical Context

Since the murder of George Floyd June 25, massive protests and demonstrations have erupted around the world, creating increased awareness of the Black Lives Matter movement. In recent months, the movement has evolved into a youth-led coalition with social media and demonstrations being used as ways to garner support.

Throughout history, youth activism has been important when calling for change. More than half a century after the Civil Rights Movement, student voices have remained on the forefront of the country's view of social issues. The ongoing protests regarding womens rights, climate change and the Black Lives Matter Movement demonstrate that the younger generation is not satisfied by simply watching from the sidelines.

"I really think it is so great that all of the Black youth of America have come together and spoken out about the mistreatment of Black lives in society today," junior Maleah Muhammad said. "I also love how many young people have taken the time to educate themselves about the tragedies that occur in the Black community on a day-to-day basis. The fact that we have all come together to advocate for the Black Lives Matter movement is absolutely remarkable and will be an event that is a part of history forever."

Social Media Movement

With the growing popularity of social media, teens have started to use platforms such as Instagram, Twitter and Snapchat as a way to support various movements. According to Pew Research Center, 69 percent of Americans feel these platforms are important for attracting politicians' attention, while 67 percent feel they are creating sustained movements for social change.

"Social media is a way for you to escape and you can't really escape [the movement] on social media right now," senior Lauryn Donovan said. "So I think it's so helpful just with getting the message out and reiterating the fact that this is an important issue that needs to be solved."

However, social media is not perfect. Sometimes, it can cause performative activism, or activism done to simply follow a trend. For example, 22.9 million people posted a black square onto Instagram June 2 to signify their solidarity with the Black Lives Matter movement. Many activists were quick to note that just simply posting the black square could be a form of performative activism.

"Everybody can post a black square, you can post yourself holding a Black Lives Matter sign all you want," Donovan said. "But at the end of the day, if you're not actively trying to dismantle systems of oppression, then it is used more as a trend than actually trying to understand."

Changes in Curriculum

In an effort to start conversations about race at school, students and staff have been discussing inclusion and diversity. Some students have called for classes to examine the origins of racial inequality.

"In January, I went to the school board and talked about how I had an issue with not a lot of history about Black people and people of color being taught in our classes," Donovan said. "I spoke at a district conference to express how, as a Black student, not seeing myself represented in the curriculum affects [my] mental health."

After hearing the concerns of students of color, Black Studies teachers Brandon Murray and Ashley Lock are changing the sequence and content of Black Studies I and II. Murray and Lock aim to educate students on youth resistance through themes related to agency, resistance and empathy.

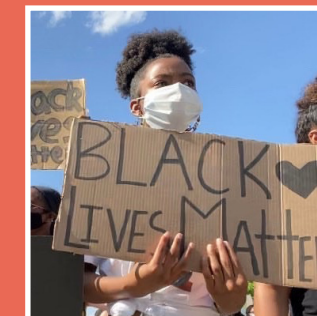
"[Mrs. Lock and I] teach Social Studies and English, and stories are at the heart of both our subjects," Murray said. "The writer R. Eric Thomas wrote 'Every story, whether truth or fiction, is an invitation to imagination, but even more so, it's an invitation to empathy.' Black Studies is a rigorous academic experience, but it's also an experience in empathy-building."

Whether it's through local schools educating students or through massive waves of advocacy on social media platforms, youth activism has had a profound impact on the growth of the Black Lives Matter movement. With the use of technology, students all over the country have been able to share their experiences while calling for change.

"Sometimes members of society [who are] more resistant to radical change, offer as a counterargument: who really cares about this? The presence of the youth — on the streets and on social media — answers that question, definitively," Murray said. "If we briefly scan the history of other movements, we learn quickly that progress was predicated on the involvement of young people; the younger generation's energy, perspective and passion often sustain and advance movements that might otherwise stagnate." □

today's teens get involved

students share why the Black Lives Matter movement is important to them



Kaylia Motes (11)

"The Black Lives Matter movement is important because it forces people to open their eyes to police brutality and how it's impacting the lives of Black youth. The first step to change is educating others on the topic." (photo courtesy of Kaylia Motes)



Avinash Kamath (11)

"Black Lives Matter is an important movement because it's more than just bringing attention to the deaths of Black people. It's making sure that those deaths aren't in vain by using our voices to fight against systemic violence against Black people. It's a call to understand that their fight is our fight too." (photo courtesy of Avinash Kamath)

educate yourself

resources to further understand topics related to Black Lives Matter

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Social Media

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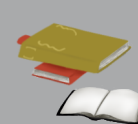
Podcasts

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"The New Jim Crow"
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Films

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