



The Solution to This Pandemic: Empathy

By Amy Nam (Canada), age 15

“China has confirmed over three hundred cases of the coronavirus,” I told my school on January 23 in the weekly announcements, as if I were reporting the weather. That afternoon, a classmate asked me if I was Chinese. “No,” I replied, smiling stiffly. “I’m Korean.” My gut clenched at the relief on his face. A few weeks later, I read on the CNBC website that Lyft and Uber drivers were refusing to open their car doors to eastern-Asian-Americans (Farr, 2020). A month after, I cheered upon receiving the news that my March break would extend another two weeks, then sulked along with my brother as our most anticipated events got cancelled. My parents shook their heads and huffed. “Honestly, I hate Chinese people,” my dad muttered bitterly. “Why do they have to ruin everything?”

In a mere few weeks, our world has spun out of orbit, and with it, our sense of morality and empathy. Fueled by ignorance and fear, racism and xenophobia have possessed our minds, leading to verbal and physical attacks on eastern-Asians. But they are not the only ones bearing the brunt of this pandemic. My parents, who are doctors, have been imprisoned in their offices, eye bags deepening, wrists aching from writing countless patient reports, voices hoarse from call after call. “I signed up to take care of sick patients,” said ER nurse Sydni Lane on Instagram. “I did not sign up to be unprotected by their sickness... to be yelled at by angry patients because our government failed to be prepared... to risk mine and my family’s health and safety because people did what they were told not to.” I hear this sentiment echoed in the exhausted faces of my parents when they come home from work, their expressions defeated. The panic stemming from this pandemic has blinded us to the plight of others, preventing us from looking past our mantra of “me, me, me” as we strictly pursue our own interests with little regard for who we might harm along the way, physically and emotionally.

While my parents work tirelessly day and night, others don’t—can’t—work at all. “Financial markets are facing their worst crisis since 1929,” CNBC reported in March. (Smith, 2020). “The upcoming job losses will be unlike anything the U.S. has ever seen.” People stare at their bare cupboards and piles of bills, hopelessly glancing at their children, whose stomachs remain empty at the closure of their schools. Gathering what little money they have, they go to the grocery store, passing by elderly people stuck in the parking lot, terrified to walk inside. Past the doors, the shelves are empty, frantically raided by people the previous night.

Humanity has tumbled into a state of unrelenting panic and anxiety, the needles of our moral compasses spinning uncontrollably, unable to decide on one direction. I clenched my jaw at my classmate’s offensive generalization, but nodded along to my dad’s xenophobic comment about hating Chinese people, too focused on all of my cancelled events to realize the irony. A cashier at the grocery store yelled at my dad for stepping within a six-foot radius of him, then proceeded to talk to a customer across the counter for five minutes. Yet our glaring hypocrisy goes unnoticed by us, and we much rather

condemn someone than stand on the receiving end. We are dividing at a time where unification is most crucial, pointing out fingers accusingly when we should be connecting through our shared vulnerability and fear of the unknown future. Mindlessly stumbling our way through this pandemic with insults as weapons will not get us any closer to the end. We must walk through it, hand in hand, and cross the finish line together.

In this tornado of a pandemic, how can we find the outstretched hands of one another? It begins with empathy, with placing ourselves in someone else's shoes and walking around, feeling every unusual arch, tight space, and loose rip. Stuck inside our homes and unable to physically connect with others, we have the opportunity to virtually reach out through the Internet. At a time when one certainty is dubious the next, it is vital to stay informed and get our daily—or hourly—dose of information. But simply touching up on our facts is not sufficient; to truly gain empathy, we must learn the experiences and perspectives of others, and how and why they differ from our own. Refusing to look through the lens of only one person, we must find editorials and personal essays on news websites, blogs, and social media platforms told from a multitude of perspectives: from the very old, the very young, people of colour, the LGBTQ+ community, and more. For example, the YouTube channel “ASIAN BOSS” covers a variety of eastern-Asian perspectives on the COVID-19 pandemic, and even interviewed a citizen from Wuhan.

Sharing our own voices is just as significant as heeding those of others. By offering our experiences and views to the world, we can help foster empathy and create a wider sense of community by informing others that they are not alone. Write the World is a great place to start, with its thirty thousand users always willing to hear, and to listen.

Most importantly, once we find the hand of another, we must clasp hold, and not let go. We can contact others within our local community, people whose stories we've read, and ask of their opinions, their fears, their hopes. We must demonstrate empathy by being patient with our doctors and nurses, volunteering to do a grocery run for our elderly neighbour, and donating to charities working to help those in need—a step further would be to start our own. There are endless ways for us to tie strings across the community and pull it closer together.

In early March, a Chinese company donated thousands of masks to Italy. “We are waves from the same sea,” it wrote (Fearnow, 2020). Within the chaos and confusion of this pandemic, it is important to understand that our health and concerns are no more important than those of anyone else. Each of our voices holds equal weight, equal value. We are all fighting the same battle, and we all want to win. We're cut from the same cloth, you and me.

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Fostering Community Empathy During COVID 19

By Elizabeth Anderson (United States), age 18

I am a high school senior in the time of COVID-19. Years from now, I will tell friends, bosses, children, and coworkers that I was one of the teenagers who lost their senior band trip to Disney World, their last prom, final dance recitals and concerts and musical productions, senior week, and potentially graduation. I was one of the kids who lost precious moments with people I might never see again, but who I still called friends. I can say that was me.

I have known since January that COVID-19 would affect me, but I never realized it would be like this. I am no longer solely overwhelmed by schoolwork, scholarship applications, and college decisions, but by the news, social media, event cancellations, loss of work, Zoom meetings, and the possibility that I might not see meaningful people in my life until at least summer, if not longer or ever again. These things have caused great anxiety in me. I am someone who feels more comfortable when I am in control of a situation, and right now I feel like that control has spiraled out of my hands. It's only been a few weeks, and I already miss exploring my hometown with good friends and family, surprising people who have had hard days at school and work with cards and chocolate, and even driving to and from school.

But while anxiety is valid in these uncertain times, I know that focusing too much on myself could result in sadness, loneliness, and depression. I have to remember to reach out, especially because so many people are going through the same thing I am right now. "Being isolated is a hard thing to go through," said Molly Rhoades, a senior at Governor Thomas Johnson High School in Frederick, Maryland. "Being a senior, I have a lot of things to look forward to...that might not happen now. I miss being able to hug and laugh with [my friends] at school every day."

Another senior, Dana Kullgren of Linganore High School in Frederick, Maryland, said, "I miss high-fiving people in the hall...feeling like I'm a part of something at academic team practices, and knowing what the next few months will hold."

So how do I--how do we--focus our energy outward rather than inward during this time? I believe our answer lies in empathy. In its simplest form, empathy is a mutual understanding and sharing of feelings between individuals or groups. Unlike sympathy, empathy is a two-way interaction, and for that reason it is important when practicing empathy to know how to listen and share in a balanced way.

Empathy is essential to our mental and emotional well-being, not only because it's helpful to talk to others about our collective experiences but also because empathizing for and with a broader community can provide a sense of fulfillment that we cannot receive by only empathizing for ourselves.

"For me...making sure my loved ones are safe and healthy relieves a lot of stress and anxiety I have right now. And I know it helps them a lot to know they are being taken care of and have help when they need it most," said Molly Rhoades.

"Empathizing with others helps you learn to regulate your own emotions," said author and educational consultant Kendra Cherry [in her Verywell Mind article "Importance and Benefits of Empathy"](#). "Emotional regulation is important in that it allows you to manage what you are feeling, even in times of great stress, without becoming overwhelmed."

Empathy is an ability that anyone can use, but it can also be honed and developed in order to build stronger connections with others. The best way to grow empathically is to strive to see the world at a larger scale. Empathy should not discriminate against people of different backgrounds, characteristics, and values; therefore, it is crucial that those wishing to be empathic seek out different perspectives not only at a local or national level, but at a global level as well. In this way, empathy also helps to break down trivial barriers created to separate people of diverse races, religions, abilities, income levels, and many other traits. To me, exploring a diverse point of view at such a large scale could be referred to as community empathy, and looking at the bigger picture in this way is a pathway to practicing individualized empathy at a smaller level.

To exercise community empathy, particularly without the help of travel or face to face interactions during this outbreak, tools like social media, educational resources, books, and blogs are incredibly useful. If you have newfound time, use it to learn about new cultures, reach out to people in different countries, read about the experiences of a person living in poverty or someone who is LGBTQ+. Start discussions with loved ones about the experiences of others and build a base of knowledge that allows you to understand what a person might be going through and connect with them despite your differences.

Personally, I am taking this time to reach out to friends in other countries and learn how their nations are dealing with COVID-19 as well as listen to their personal experiences. Through these interactions, I have learned that living in different nations or cultures does not necessarily mean that experiences will be different. Other high school and college seniors around the world are feeling the same way I am right now, and some have underlying political and social issues that are making it even more difficult for them. Keeping in touch with those friends has allowed me to keep my own situation in perspective, and certainly to empathize with others.

Empathy is a powerful force in any situation, but particularly right now. It can drive us away from our burdens and toward enlightenment and the sense of fulfillment that many of us are actively seeking. So I urge you--practice empathy. Reach out to others. I may be a senior in the time of COVID-19, but that does not mean I am powerless.

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“ASK NOT WHAT YOUR COUNTRY CAN DO FOR YOU”

By Joseph Mullen (United States), age 18

In my state of Florida, our Governor was widely criticized for failing to act fast enough against the coronavirus.

It took Governor Ron Desantis until April 1st to issue the stay at home order, which was so late that it seemed to be a bad April Fool’s joke. Even this order has been loose, as beaches began to reopen on the same day that we had our greatest death toll of the pandemic. Pictures of Floridians attending beaches in the middle of a global epidemic led to the hashtag #floridamorons going viral.

My fellow Floridians aren’t morons for wanting a reprieve from the policies of social distancing; many Americans are suffering economically due to these restrictions, and at this point 22 million Americans are out of work. Many want social distancing lifted so they can go back to work and not have to face economic despair as the United States economy is bound to be in recession even after the pandemic ends. While it may seem easy to dismiss the protestors, many are desperate for relief from the economic tolls of the pandemic, which they see as worse than the disease itself.

However, many of these protestors have revealed a deeper antagonism, evincing further the need for social distancing. Just as many of the protestors are voicing their frustration for justifiable reasons, there have been protestors with Confederate Flags, Swastikas, anti-Semitic, and anti-Asian American displays. As a result, the protestors have quickly become dominated by far-right organizations, showing how hateful ideologies can manipulate economic frustration and scapegoat others for the crisis, making it harder to distinguish those justifiably concerned about their economic livelihood from those exploiting the anger to espouse hateful views.

It is reassuring to know that the majority of Americans are rejecting this vocal minority’s rush to reopen. For example, 72% of Floridians polled did not want to return to life as normal at the beginning of May. The majority of Americans realize that the discrimination that many of the protestors espouse is no different than the discrimination of the virus itself. African-Americans have overwhelmingly been affected by COVID-19, and Asian-Americans suffer discrimination for as long as this pandemic lasts. Our country has come together to protect the most vulnerable among us, as the social distancing orders are designed to prevent further spread of a disease that has overwhelmingly affected minority Americans. We have to keep social distancing to fight the racial inequality the virus has exploited, but many protestors have pointed out justifiably that social distancing is widening the economic inequality already prevalent in American society. There is a way to balance these two truths, in maintaining social distancing and helping those hit economically by the lockdowns, and it involves abiding by the founding principle of our government: the social contract.

America has always been a nation built on freedom, but during a pandemic the rules change. To the protestors: realize social distancing isn't just in place to protect you. It's in place to protect your older relatives, your children, your neighbors, and the most vulnerable in society. The government exists based on the principle of the social contract - to protect the people with the consent of the governed. However, the government cannot protect us if we do not agree to relinquish some rights in time of crisis. These protestors want to work, but as Kevin Cassidy, the US representative to the International Labor Organization said, the right to work cannot infringe upon the right to a healthy workplace. We don't have to weaken these restrictions to stop the protests, but we do have to convince protestors, themselves suffering, that social distancing is for their good as well as the common good. According to health experts, America's death toll will continue to grow if we do not continue the restrictions, as painful as they may be.

This situation emphasizes a clear problem: the more we use social distancing to stop the disease, the worse the economy will be hit. But we can't save the economy without stopping the disease, and to put it bluntly, our freedoms are less significant if we are no longer alive to exercise them. Thus, we must find ways to help workers while in quarantine. Our government can fulfill the social contract by providing economic relief to protestors, many of whom are furloughed workers. The government can start by passing more direct relief to the average worker, rather than diverting much needed stimulus money to bailing out big corporations yet again during a recession. We can continue sending out direct stimulus checks. While the pandemic necessitates social distancing, the government can bridge the divide and expand the social safety net to protect workers at risk of economic suffering. Together, these actions will uphold and further the social contract.

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Gen Z and Elders: Finding Common Ground

Evie and Me: A Special Grandmother

By Maxwell Surprenant (United States), age 16

I'm so lucky. Every year, Evie, my 88-year-old "adopted" grandmother, bakes me a heavenly, chocolate, birthday cake. "No slivers today" she would exclaim as she cut the biggest piece for me.

For the first ten years of my life, Evie was my next-door neighbor when my family and I lived in an apartment in Boston, Massachusetts. Now, I'm 16 years old, and my family and I live in a house in the suburbs, and Evie is settled in an assisted senior living center only 10 minutes away. But, even as we live near each other, Covid-19 keeps us apart. At the senior living center, residents are isolated in their rooms, no gatherings in the dining room or meeting spaces and no visitors. We can only call and FaceTime, which is difficult because Evie's challenged with technology and has trouble hearing over the phone. It's been over two months, and I miss Evie's face as much as she misses mine.

Since I was a baby, Evie would hold my face in her hands and call me her "Shayna Punim," which is Yiddish for "pretty face." I'm Catholic, but I have learned about the Jewish religion from her. We celebrate each other's holidays together like Christmas and Hanukkah, which has given me a greater appreciation for different cultures and traditions. Evie taught me to treat everyone with respect. Evie has traveled all over the world. She gave me her collection of postcards, and I cherish them. Someday, I will visit these places, too.

Sometimes young people think that old people are boring and can't find common interests with them, but that's not the case with Evie and me. We love going out to restaurants, movies, and museums. We also like cooking together, listening to Sinatra and Broadway records, and playing board games. During these times, she shares stories with me about how she grew up in Dorchester, Massachusetts. Evie was born in 1931, and she lived through The Great Depression and World War II. Her father was a blue-collar worker, and her mother stayed home; neither went to college. They did not have a car, so they walked everywhere. But Evie never talks about a lack of material things; she's always been content reading the newspaper and Jewish literature, whatever her dad was reading. Neither does she complain about her childhood chores like cleaning, cooking, and sewing. She recalls how neighbors helped neighbors, and everyone watched out for each other. She has fond memories of playing with the all the kids on the street. They played the old-fashioned game of "kick the can" with whatever tin can was laying around. Evie laughed, "We didn't need much, we were happy."

Evie's carefree attitude is calming and refreshing. She doesn't want or expect presents, but she's very thoughtful and giving. She sends cards, thank you notes, and letters by snail mail,

written in her fine, cursive. Evie has taught me to be grateful for the little things and reminds me of what's most important in life: family, friends, love, laughter, and kindness.

Evie worked as a nurse at Beth Israel Hospital in Boston for many years. After she retired, she continued to do some volunteer work there. She has always been a caregiver, but now she needs people to help take care of her. She has cardiac and respiratory issues and diabetes, which makes her more vulnerable to Covid-19. She's the reason why I stay home, wash my hands, and follow social distancing guidelines. If the roles were reversed, she would do anything to keep me healthy.

I long for the day when the lockdown ends, and I can safely visit Evie again. When she turns 89 on her next birthday, I'll bake her a cake. And we'll enjoy eating it together.

To ME

By [Chloe Sow](#) (United States), age 14

Dear fellow Asian-Americans,

In this ongoing war between the police and black people, we may not feel we are involved in any way. When Asians came to America in the 1860s, yes, slavery had already been started since 1619. We were not part of the start of prejudice and racism against African-Americans, and we, like black people, have also suffered through discrimination.

Coming from Malaysia, I am an Asian-American only because I was born here. My family was never directly influenced by the Chinese Exclusion Act, Japanese Internment Camps, etc., historical events against Asian-Americans. Sometimes, I find it hard to relate to America's history, simply because my family wasn't in America until a few decades ago.

However, that does not mean that we, including myself, have no part in the recent events of George Floyd's death. Yes, Derek Chauvin, the man who placed his knee on George Floyd's neck was a white man. However, the bigger picture shows something entirely different. Out of the four policemen who were involved, one of them was Asian-American. And the shop that called the police on George Floyd? It was owned by an Asian-American too.

Sometimes, I feel that we may assume that 'serious' racism only happens between black and white people. But the truth is, racism is a problem that affects all of us, not just in America, but around the globe, and the recent events of COVID-19 only highlight why.

Asian-Americans have often been targeted because of others' racial bias, and not just here in America, but around the globe. In one year alone, more than 1,500 cases of discriminatory acts directed at Asian-Americans in the United States have been reported, consisting of physical attacks, verbal abuse, the derogatory language in the media, political statements, etc. Such acts of discrimination have also been happening in Russia, United Kingdom, Australia, India, Sri Lanka, Africa, South Korea, Malaysia, Japan, Indonesia, France, and many more places.

The fear and tension we as Asian-Americans have experienced should compel us to understand what African-Americans feel every single day of their lives.

In 1982, a man named Vincent Chin was beaten in Detroit by white men who thought he was Japanese. Later, the white men received punishments, but it was minimal. In 2007, 18-year-old Chonburi Xiong, a Hmong teenager who lived in Detroit, was shot 27 times in his home by white policemen. His community fought back, and in 1975, 27-year-old Peter Yew underwent a harsh beating during the protests. There is something wrong with our police system, and we need to take action to fix it.

Let's not forget how black communities and Asian communities have stood up for each other before. In 1968, the Third World Liberation Front, formed by the Black Student Union and other ethnic student groups at San Francisco State University — including Asians — demanded a radical change in admission practices. The group led a month-long strike to pressure the university's administration to respond to their demands, which resulted in several beatings and arrests of students of color and, eventually, the

establishment of an ethnic studies department. In addition to this, in 1978, black people called for the US to accept Indochinese refugees, paying for a full-page advertisement in *The New York Times*.

Right now, Asian-American communities need to speak out instead of lying low. Please don't ignore the pleas of help; stand up against the police brutality and acts of discrimination that affect African-Americans. Although we have been split apart because of the color of our skin, in reality, we should be working together because we are all of the same race: humans. At this moment, we must reflect on our actions and support one another because as America progresses through its good times, we stand with America when it struggles too.

Sincerely,
Another Asian-American

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A Letter to My Hoodie

By [Alli Lowe](#) (United States), age 16

Dear hoodie, growing up in California heat has made me, if anything,
more susceptible to using you;
being hot so often makes seventy degrees feel like a chill
The moment the sun dips behind the sleepy horizon,
the moment the air begins to cool,
you are there:
warmth

Dear hoodie, I know you have never traveled far outside my closet,
but I can tell you this: growing up in Florida is a lot like growing up in California
Living in hot and humid weather causes a temperature drop
to feel like a sudden winter
One Florida evening, the air began to chill,
and Trayvon Martin wore a hoodie a lot like you:
dark and heavy and warm
For Trayvon, this hoodie made him “suspicious”
For Trayvon, this hoodie was a death sentence
But for me, you are nothing more than an article of clothing

Dear hoodie, you may protect me from rain and cold weather,
but my white skin, my privilege, has protected me from countless more dangers
It has kept me alive
while driving,
while babysitting,
while running,
while sleeping,
and while going to the grocery store

It has protected my life from the same prejudiced fates that fell upon
Trayvon Martin,
Philando Castile,
Atatiana Jefferson,
Ahmaud Arbery,
Breonna Taylor,
George Floyd,
and countless other black Americans

Dear hoodie, I hope you agree with me when I say,
“Black Lives Matter”

Rethinking the Police Narrative

By [May Zheng](#) (United States)

Race and its role as a factor in violence has been thrust into the forefront of the American psyche in the form of seething social media and widespread protests, demanding the government to respond to a moral imperative to stop perpetrating injustice against those of color.

Over the past decade, black people being killed by the police have made harrowing headlines, sending people to the streets and internet in outrage. George Floyd's death has reinvigorated a movement transcending combating police brutality, instead aiming to purge all institutions of racism. In regards to racial violence, their narrative is that there is a war on black people, "all cops are bastards," and the historical roots of police being racist are still fully intact- essentially, the primary perpetrator of violence towards people of color, especially black people, is racist law enforcement.

In fact, the narrative of the police are at the front lines of a systemic, society-wide "war on blacks" is actually causing an increase in intra-racial violence in black communities, and a decrease in interracial violence – ultimately amounting to more deaths of people of color. In order to address the roots of violence that disproportionately harm people of color, the media-smear reputation of law enforcement must first redeem itself through fundamental policy changes, so that they can be reinstated where they are needed, in high crime areas.

We should aim to change the way the role of police officer, or law enforcement, is presented to trainees and working officers. News reports and ex-police officers' testimonies expose the aggressive rhetoric that trainees are imbued with – to view every person as a potential criminal or threat to themselves as officers and to the civilians around them, and to not hesitate in using force when danger is perceived as present. As a result, officers seem always on the defensive, ready to escalate into aggression not out of a desire for violence or conflict, but fear and desire for self-preservation that has been amplified by training.

The disparity of accountability between police and other occupations can be illustrated

clearly: If a pilot is incompetent and crashes, that pilot is deemed incapable of his job and removed. Conversely, police get away with misconduct through a myriad of structures- ruthlessly protective police unions, Qualified Immunity, unwillingness of prosecution to act, and inadequate misconduct records. A pilot union defending a member after they crashed a plane, or the unique circumstances of the crash preventing the crash from being seen as punishable, sounds ludicrous- yet that is how the police are treated. Almost 25% of police officers fired for misconduct were reinstated through clandestine maneuvers within the court and union, an alarming retention rate of individuals who proved themselves incompetent and dangerous.

In terms of accountability and misguided training, the terrible stigma that has latched onto, and nowadays defines policing, seems justified. Until officers are effectively penalized for wrongdoing, the anti-police rhetoric will continue to cripple communities who need policing.

A main characterization of a crime area is disadvantage and segregation, and more recently, broken relationships between police and their communities. Between 2014 and 2017, violent crime increased for the first time since 2005, predominantly in colored communities. An unmistakable factor in crime's uptick in 2014 is increased media coverage of police brutality against black people. Overwhelmingly, black communities have been losing their trust in the police, resulting in increased violence in two ways: first, not notifying police as frequently when crime occurs, leading to more unsolved or unregistered crimes; second, residents "taking matters into their own hands" through violence.

Throughout recent years, following publicized cases of police brutality, calls to 911 decreased across cities for about a year, especially in colored neighborhoods- even if crimes were occurring or increasing in these areas, and allowing this trend to continue. In 2015, following Ferguson, under-policing in South Central neighborhoods in Los Angeles led to a "ghettoside" authority system, where gangs became loci of power and a "no snitch" culture prevented crimes from being reported. Similar patterns can be seen in spikes in gang violence in Chicago's African-American communities in 2016 after a period of decline, and the dramatic increase in unsolved murders, corresponding with nationwide decline of trust in law enforcement.

Data indicates that renewed, and often visceral, attitudes towards policing, claiming that

police intentionally target people based on their race, only hurts people of color. In order to stop this deadly pattern, we must become educated about the nature of race's relationship with violence and think before we speak or act. Although it is tempting to view police violence only through the lens of racism, we must instead use a wider lens of how police are trained, evaluated, and enculturated.

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Notes on Privilege

By [Elizabeth Anderson](#) (United States)

I have a privilege that I cannot hide--
one that is written into the lines of my face
and the arches of my fingers that
 taptaptap
at the mistake-worn 'Backspace' of a wearied keyboard
(which likes to taunt my failure to stand up for others
with a heart unfazed by ridicule).
This privilege, so starkly contrasting
the diversity borne by a hypocritical American creed,
clutches at straw-stained hair and eyes so
 blueblueblue
that I wonder what I would've been like
if I lived in World War II Germany.
I cannot shake it, cannot coax it to leave my pale side,
cannot reconcile it even with my anti-privileges:
 "woman" and
 "bi."
See--Liberty, bowlegged and shipwrecked among people
who needed her but did not deserve her,
has changed her colors not only by verdigris, has stood in solidarity
with those seeking ultimate refuge,
but she does not stand with us, the ones
who refuse to acknowledge her beyond a statue.
Yet how can we change when our screens are washed in white,
and our beauty is judged in white,
and our right to live is based upon
 whitewhitewhite
and never upon whether we are
 goodgoodgood or even
 peoplepeoplepeople?
How can we listen when our ears are stuffed

with the pages of history books framed in white for centuries?
With the pages of a Bible we think we know God through
when God is weeping in rainbow hues,
wearing every shade of skin and standing with the victims
of my kind of privilege?
Day after day, I wonder when this will end,
when 'Backspace' will become the least worn of the keys
and we will move forward.

It is a change that will not be derived from the root of our words,
vowels and consonants drowning out voices of color,
nor is it a change that will stem from social media,
which may encourage good intentions
but cannot help slinking back to masquerade shadows
when posting and sharing is no longer
easyeasyeasy.

It is a change that we may only truly experience
by stripping ourselves of our drive to attack,
to be heard and be seen and be right,
because we have to make room for those
who have never been heard or seen or right.

We do not like to be shown the error
of our ways, to be ridiculed and condescended
with skewed statistics, fury-full facts,
so let us allow ourselves to step back,
to be immersed in a symphony of voices never heard before,
and know then what
has been
missing.

We must rid ourselves of our violent will to hate,
because even turning our hate on our own privilege
bears witness to where we turned our hate for centuries,
and this is an age in which we stop lynching
even ourselves.

Accepting the privilege that I cannot hide,

living with it, breathing through it,
is the only way to quiet my voice and lift up the ones that
mattermattermatter.

Because black lives do matter.

An Open Letter to Jennifer Senior of the *New York Times*: Who Are You to Tell Us What to Do?

By Stellawstn (15, New Zealand)

With today's heightened awareness of political correctness, how we portray ourselves and our image, and how we phrase our viewpoint is crucial to our daily interactions. Our internet presence is so accessible, and with our society increasingly divided over issues of acceptance, we have to be careful that the message that comes across in publications, and even conversations, is the message that we intend to deliver. Due to the way that it was phrased, Jennifer Senior's letter to liberal arts students published in the *New York Times*, came across as patronising, and I found its generalisations simplistic and outdated.

Senior argues not only that liberal arts students aren't useful to the world, but also that a college education itself isn't useful, and rarely gives students "the chance to productively engage with the world". In fact, this is a time in our lives to learn and explore intellectually, so that we can contribute to the world after college, with a broadened perspective and multifaceted understanding. Senior also implies that, in contrast to community college students, liberal arts students work far less and that they are pampered because their colleges are "cloistered, passive settings."

Even as a New Zealander, I know personally that these arguments are simplistic generalisations. My brother, Paddy is enrolled at Pomona College, a liberal arts school in California. Covid-19 has led to Paddy being forced to take a year off college. Yet he and his American friends (who will be returning to online study) are already 'making themselves useful'. Paddy is currently volunteering on an economics human rights project, and his closest friends are currently emergency paramedics on the front lines of the fight against Covid-19. The vast majority of Pomona students work as well as study, and first generation and/or low-income students form one of the largest groups on campus. (1)

"We may regard teenagers as unruly and rebellious. But what they may really be is restless, pining for greater agency and productivity, utility," Senior writes.

The idea that we are rebellious, and lacking direction is almost laughable to me. It is our generation (Gen Z), led by Greta Thunberg, who sparked a worldwide movement of Climate

Strikes, with over 4 million attendees in September last year (2). It is our generation who has accepted gender fluidity and diverse sexual orientations like no other, (3) and we have taken part in Black Lives Matter protests at a crucial time.

I do agree with the statement saying we are pining for greater agency. We do have something to say, we do want changes in the world, but it isn't easy for young people to actually achieve this. The very reason that we are 'rebellious' and involved in these protests is that we have no voice, no given platform, no power. Because of this, we have been forced to find our own platforms — be that poetry and protests, or even Instagram stories and Tiktoks.

I believe that while external factors such as our upbringing, whether we are a minority, how much power we are born with, and even the opinions of our parents are definitely relevant to our sense of agency, it is during our years of secondary and tertiary education that we truly gain the tools to effect change.

Senior's central message that college students should consider the covid shutdowns of colleges as an opportunity and shouldn't think that they have lost something, is therefore offensive. Students have lost more than, "The stimulation of late-night conversation..."

Senior's tone and phrasing of this is demeaning to students, as their university years are about learning and working hard, learning who they are, gaining life experience and building this sense of agency.

"Having the chance to be useful — not to their families, but to the world — is a luxury at this moment. Students ought to embrace it. They may be astonished by what they find," Senior says, attempting to develop her argument,

However, what Senior seems to be missing is that there is a limit to how far you can strain your eyes to look on the bright side of things when the context is a global pandemic. Many students' families have been directly impacted by COVID-19 or are essential workers, so the idea that the students should be making themselves useful to others outside of their families ignores the reality of this time.

The truisms in this piece — that we learn by doing, and that now is a good time to build new ways of caring for each other and the planet — are lost due to Senior's patronising delivery. Covid-19 and the closing of colleges is not an opportunity, but an obstacle.

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The Key to Safely Reopening Schools? Listen to Science

By Caroline Gao (15, United States)

I'm a 15-year-old girl who loves learning. School is my "thing," my sanctuary, a little academic bubble of textbooks and test grades where I'm undeniably and unabashedly good at what I do. But now, amidst the COVID-19 pandemic, I see the deteriorating mental health of myself and my peers. I see the ever-widening achievement gap between my friends who have technology access and those who don't. I see and experience firsthand the lostness and loneliness that accompany shut-down schools.

At the same time, I see places like Georgia's Cherokee County School District, where [nearly 1,200 students returned to quarantine](#) after one day of in-person instruction. I see the jam-packed hallways of the newly reopened [North Paulding High School](#), where not a mask was in sight and where a girl was suspended for spreading the truth. I see the teachers who are [dying from COVID-19 and preparing wills](#) in case they become the virus's next victim.

So, when it comes to the question of whether students should return to school this fall, the only firm, unequivocal truth I know is this: we must listen to science -- plain, objective, nonpartisan science.

To be clear, it's nearly impossible to overstate the importance of reopening schools for in-person instruction. Parents need to work, not babysit; kids need collaborative, kinetic, hands-on instruction; and students from troubled families need a safe space away from home. However, nothing should be prioritized above the survival of our teachers, students, and families. We can and must reopen schools, but only once some crucial prerequisites set by science have been met.

COVID-19 must be under control in the local community. The [Harvard Global Health Institute](#) recommends that localities hit fewer than 25 daily new cases per 100,000 people before considering any in-person school instruction. WHO advises a 5% or lower COVID-19 positive-test rate as a benchmark for any community. In addition to these global guidelines, input from district, state, and federal public health officials is critical: the more locally fine-tuned schools' responses are, the safer schools will be. Through it all, we must maintain universal mitigation strategies supported by scientific evidence shown to be effective [time and time again](#) to reduce the spread, including social distancing, mask wearing, and hand hygiene.

As a politically engaged teenage girl, I'm no advocate for blindly following authority, but we must abide by the insights of public health officials and the research of scientists with decades of medical and academic knowledge and experience. You don't have to understand how gas combustion works to know you should turn off your engine while at the gas station. Maybe you want to listen to music while you pump gas; however, as a rational human being, you understand that listening to 2 minutes more of Taylor Swift is not worth the risk of blowing up the entire station and risking the lives of you and those around you. You don't have to understand how fuel vapor reacts with sparks from vehicle exhaust pipes to follow this rule.

In the same way, you don't have to understand the complex research behind scientific guidelines for school re-openings to abide by the guidelines if you want to preserve the well-being of our communities. You don't have to understand the science of aerosol particle propulsion and airborne diseases to follow mask-wearing rules set by health authorities such as the CDC, WHO, and countless others. (Though, to be fair, understanding the efficacy of masks is as simple as watching a [laser-light video](#) of oral fluid droplets released while talking with and without a mask.) Now more than ever, it is imperative that we follow the lead of science.

For schools that are unable to reopen fully, the big question is how to ensure proper social-emotional development and high-quality live instruction for all students. Just as science is the central consideration for whether we reopen schools, equality and innovation are key to successful learning in partial or fully online instruction. Again, here we can turn to facts and numbers. Districts can conduct surveys of students, parents, and teachers. Comprehensive collection of data will be crucial to averting rash decisions.

In the end, if scientific evidence shows that partially or fully online learning is necessary for our safety, then we should take it in stride. We should think of online instruction not as a loss, but as an opportunity: an opportunity to reach kids normally too shy to raise their hand in person, to teach in new and exciting mediums, and to help students typically overwhelmed by stressful schedules and overloaded extracurriculars recharge and rethink their priorities.

Let this be the year where we recognize learning in all its beautiful and diverse forms. Let this be the year where we bring science back to the forefront of local decisions. Let this year of insanity be the year where we change for good.

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Young People for Policy Change

By [Rani Chor](#) (16, United States)

Generation Z is not afraid of speaking out against policies that assault democracy and the American people: we are starving for justice. Behind each youth activist is a gargantuan crowd fueled by determination. But during that post-rally rush, even I have to admit that there is a nagging question in the back of my mind: is this going to change anything?

As someone born into Generation Z, my world seems to be surrounded by alarm bells: there is the constant fear that we have indeed reached Plan Z, the last plan, which is dependent on what could be the last generation. But through that haze of anxiety, my little brother comes to mind: a reminder that our fight isn't just a scramble to save ourselves but to fight for generations to come.

Because we aren't naturally born organizers and activists, I have compiled actionable steps that we can all take to ensure that action fuels our advocacy.

Make good trouble.

U.S. Senator Alan Simpson told [The Washington Post](#) that nothing would change until a young person "could walk into his office and say, 'I'm from the American Association of Young People. We have 30 million members, and we're watching you, Simpson.'" Generation Z activists are unique in the vitality with which we attack today's most pressing issues-- from climate change to mass incarceration, housing inequality, and school segregation. If you live in a critical state, engage the members within your community. Take initiative. Schedule training for hard organizing skills and stress the importance of supporting local organizations with financial resources so that they can continue to organize despite the difficult circumstances of the pandemic.

It is incredibly important to remember that not everyone can be out protesting in the streets. Some students are waking up at the crack of dawn as young workers laboring to support their families or to afford a college education. Their stories are woven into the American narrative and need to be told. After placing their votes, companies, unions, and perhaps even your parents have lobbying organizations that will continue to represent them. However, young people, even college graduates just entering their fields, can lobby local congressional officials about issues and policies that impact them. This is an opportunity to directly expose a congressional staffer to the heart of America, its people, and the impacts of their proposed policies.

Pay attention to the world around you, especially to current events.

American author [Alfie Kohn](#) once said, "Students should not only be trained to live in a democracy when they grow up; they should have the chance to live in one today." It is not enough for policies to be non-racist, they must actively be anti-racist. With [81% of Gen Z](#) saying that protests have made them more aware of race issues in America, they've not only taken action but also taken initiative: About half (46%) have made an effort to learn more about actions they can take to support racial justice in the United States, and 64% have initiated conversations with their friends and family on the topic.

The mighty "We" holds power because of the words "the people" that directly follow.

Upholding our democracy and saving this planet is not our burden to hold alone, especially when we have 7 billion other people to support us. Politicians are expected to put their finger on a set of answers to very large questions that tend to perplex humanity as a whole. Who are we fighting for? And how do we arrange our priorities and policies to reflect not just an audience but the safety and psychological needs of our people? We need to send a clear message to the next generation that being political doesn't principally mean caring about what party wins the next election; to be political should mean to care for the wellbeing of all people.

Operating under the umbrella of American democracy, policymakers are strangely ambivalent when it comes to honoring the needs of those who are most vulnerable in this world, children. America might love its families but its policies sure don't show it. The [2019 UNICEF report](#), "Are the world's richest countries family friendly?," details that, when compared with 40 other countries, the United States ranked last in terms of paid leave for mothers and fathers. It is a disheartening reminder that policymakers need to center more policies around families and children. Meanwhile, millions of youth organizers around the nation are operating under the guise of facing extinction otherwise. Talk about priorities.

It is no secret that the current administration is using our fears and vulnerabilities during this shutdown to undermine our ability to vote in what could be the most important election of our lifetimes. For instance, the funding cuts to the United States Postal Office (USPS) are being administered amidst quarantine, when many polls are closed due to COVID-19. As a result, the number of mailed-in votes this election season is set to explode, but without proper funding, the [USPS](#) is not set to handle such a heavy load.

We cannot stand for such actions. We cannot be heard if we do not speak up, speak out, and fight back. As Barack Obama once said, "We are the ones we've been waiting for. We are the change that we seek." Our intention is not to cause fear. Rather, we hope that by recognizing the truth of our future we can ignite change.

This year, justice is on a ballot. Please register to vote, check your registration, and tell your family and friends to vote for your future. You can request your absentee ballot by visiting vote.org today.

Note: As we are still in a pandemic, the most precautionary thing you can do is to wear your mask, stay safe, and social distance.