

Setting the movement backward

The self-sabotaging effects of uninformed protest

By Itamar Fiorino and Amanda Liu

STAFF WRITERS

AN OPINION

“Hands up, don’t shoot!”

The well-known Black Lives Matter chant is juxtaposed by a sea of white faces and pale, outstretched hands. The protestors’ signs read slogans like “Arms R 4 Hugs” and “Peace not guns!”—nothing to do with the Black Lives Matter movement at all.

In reality, the protestors gathered in front of the Capitol on March 14 are there to protest gun violence in schools, not police brutality. While their actions may seem benign, their inappropriate chants not only impede their own movement, but also detract from the efforts of the Black Lives Matter movement.

The reality is that the two movements, March for Our Lives and Black Lives Matter, are almost entirely independent of each other. While ideas from both efforts are included in the Democratic platform, the Black Lives Matter movement, at its core, is a racial issue, while March for Our Lives is about gun control. Partisanship can seem to make them a package-deal, which dilutes the efforts of both movements.

Conflation of the two is not uncommon. Emily Schrader, the communications head of MoCo For Change, said the chants were “in solidarity with the intersection between the gun violence prevention movement and the Black Lives Matter movement.” As One Blair co-head Jansi Medina-Tayac explained, the fusion of these unrelated issues is sourced in unawareness and can lead to a dilution of efforts that use the phrase correctly. “When people take the ‘hands up, don’t shoot’ phrasing and associate it with the March for Our Lives movement, it disregards where all of this started,” she said. “It started with the Black Lives Matter movement. It’s completely different from what the

March for Our Lives kids are trying to do because it really is about police brutality and not so much about mass school shootings.”

The “hands up, don’t shoot” chant was likely started with good intentions. As Medina-Tayac said, “I don’t think any group did it to purposely offend anyone; I think students just... took it out of context, and thought ‘don’t shoot’ is about gun violence, when really it’s about police brutality... when someone starts to chant, people just start

chanting along.”

Regardless of intentions, it is critical for protestors to be knowledgeable about subjects of protest. Studies have shown that when individuals are misinformed, their views on subjects tend to be far more extreme than warranted by reality. The Background Checks Expansion Act (HR-8) at the center of the March gun control movement, for example, is more nuanced than some protestors may understand. These nuances

can conflict with the Black Lives Matter movement, setting apart the two movements and making conflation even more dangerous.

Advocates for the universal background checks proposed in HR-8 might take more moderate stances, for instance, if they knew that background checks are often infected with prejudices related to race—principles that are fundamentally antithetical to Black Lives Matter. Although the two movements share certain similarities, fusing the two can be contradictory. An individual’s choice to persist in this contradiction and support both movements should be conscious and well thought-out.

History has shown that time and time again, movements have co-opted other movements’ forms of peaceful protest for their own benefit. In recent years, modern movements, including Black Lives Matter, have adopted die-ins, a form of protest where participants simulate death in public areas to maximize attention. These modern movements use die-ins with little regard to where they originated: environmental activist groups.

That is not to say that movements “own” particular forms of protest. Sharing forms of protest among movements can be beneficial to all. Die-ins, for example, are particularly useful during the advent of social media: a haunting photo of unmoving bodies strewn across the floor elicits strong, disturbing emotions; strong emotions prompt change. It is okay for the usage of a form of protest to evolve over time, as long as we do not silence the voices of those who came before.

The inappropriate chants from the March 14 gun violence protest elucidate some of the dangers of uninformed protesting. Nonetheless, this mistake paves the way for future movements to ensure that their protestors are informed about the issues they are fighting for.



COURTESY OF JORDAN BONDO

HANDS UP, DON'T SHOOT Students at the March For Our Lives protest on March 14 co-opt the Black Live's Matter chant and hand motion.

Pay teachers all they are worth

By Khushboo Rathore

STAFF WRITER

AN OPINION

For many, a 40-hour work week is the norm. But many teachers are at school before 7 a.m., and sometimes do not leave until after 4 p.m. In addition, they use their weekends to grade work, summers to plan out curriculum and complete trainings, and, sometimes, work other jobs to support their families during the summer. According to Blair math teacher David Stein, the amount of time they truly spend working is not what they get paid for. “A full time teacher is paid for 40 hours a week, but I think a good teacher probably works sixty hours a week,” Stein said.

Even with all of their hard work, they are told that “those who can’t do, teach.”

America should be ashamed of the stigma surrounding teaching. Teachers serve as the foundation to society and creating a culture that perceives teaching as “less than” only adds more harm to the world. They are disrespected by the government, often having their field ignored. “I think at least within our political system, our money goes to the defense budget or something like that...sometimes education is pushed aside because a lot of places, at least in our country, have decent education, but I think that teacher pay isn’t really something that people tend to focus on,” junior Kasey Hammond said.

Without teachers, there would be no robots, no modern medicine, and no great works of literature. The world would not be how it is right now, yet teachers are criticized and mistreated every single day. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, their mean pay is \$59,980 per year in the USA, which comes to about \$17 per hour. On top of that, they deal with frustrated parents and stressed students, both inside and outside of the classroom.

Teachers are the people that watch over

students as they grow up and develop. Ten months out of the year, they make sure that students are respecting each other, staying healthy, and taken care of. “I was doing a project at one point and there was a reason I couldn’t complete it due to a personal issue that I have,” Hammond said. “I have PTSD and something in the project triggered it... I was talking to my teacher about it and she was fine with it. She gave me an extension and sort of let me work things out. That was something that not only was helpful for the assignment itself, but was helpful for me as a student and with my relationship with academics.”

Teachers deserve to be paid more, and that change would help to create a huge impact. Higher pay would mean bringing better teachers to public schools, rather than private schools and universities, along with encouraging people to try teaching rather than move to the private sector. “I think teachers should be paid more because it is increasingly difficult to attract people to teaching,” Stein said. ... “Teacher salaries need to be attractive enough that we can attract the best people to do it.”

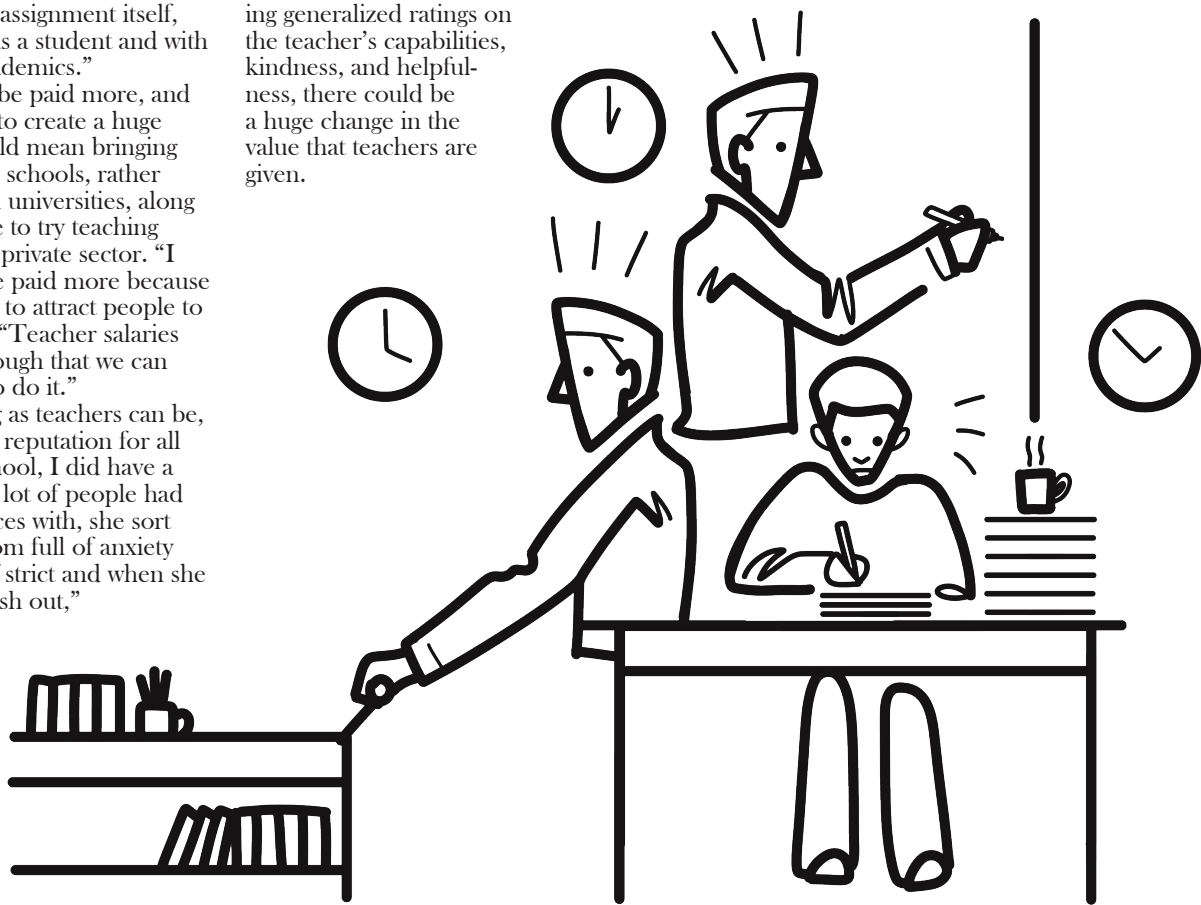
However, as amazing as teachers can be, some can provide a bad reputation for all teachers. “In middle school, I did have a really bad teacher that a lot of people had really negative experiences with, she sort of just created a classroom full of anxiety because she was kind of strict and when she got angry... she would lash out,” Hammond said.

The Montgomery County Education Association (MCEA) and MCPS have created a system that evaluates teacher performance, known as the Peer Assistance and Review Program (PAR). In this system,

teachers are reviewed by their peers, and may be given assistance based on how they perform. However, the system does not account for how teachers act when no one else is in the classroom.

The focus is just on what another adult sees is faulty, not considering the opinions of the students who are actually impacted by those teachers. Instead, when a teacher is up for review, they should be reviewed by both their students and their peers. With some type of surveying systems, including generalized ratings on the teacher’s capabilities, kindness, and helpfulness, there could be a huge change in the value that teachers are given.

In the meantime, while some unacceptable teachers continue to teach, it is up to the students to respect those who truly work to make sure that public school is the best experience possible. It is up to students to talk to department heads if they feel a teacher is subpar, and while doing that, they should also take a moment to show their appreciation for phenomenal teachers.



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