

Handout 1: Student Activism in the 20th Century

“The labor and socialist movements had youth affiliates going back to the beginning of the century,” says Maurice Isserman, professor of History at Hamilton College and co-author of *America Divided: The Civil War of the 1960s*.” (TIME)

In 1903, it was 400 children who staged a three-week march from Philadelphia to Theodore Roosevelt’s summer home in New York to bring attention to the abuses of child labor. (Washington Post)

One early example of a young person organizing an act of resistance on her own took place on April 23, 1951, when 16-year-old Barbara Johns led a walkout at the all-black Robert Russa Moton High School in Virginia to protest abysmal conditions. Johns contacted the NAACP, which took her case all the way to the Supreme Court, where [it was one of the five cases](#) involved in the 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* desegregation ruling. (TIME)

In 1951, 16-year old Barbara Johns led a walkout at the all-black Robert Russa Moton High School in Virginia to protest racial injustice there. She contacted the NAACP, which sued on her behalf, and her case became one of five involved in the 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* desegregation ruling. (Yes Magazine)

There are many examples throughout the civil rights era of brave actions by high school students. While most people know the name Rosa Parks, few might know about [Claudette Colvin](#), who in 1955 was just 15 when she was arrested for refusing to give up her seat on a bus in segregated Montgomery, Alabama—nine months before Park was arrested for the same offense. (Yes Magazine)

In February 1960, four black students from North Carolina A&T State University walked into Woolworth’s in Greensboro, North Carolina, and sat down at its “whites only” lunch counter. Every day for six months black students returned to the lunch counter; over time their numbers swelled. The sit-in—central in the fight for black civil rights—soon sparked similar nonviolent protests across the South. From its inception, the 1960s civil rights movement was fueled by youth leaders and student activists. In many cases college students were the ones leading marches, voter-registration drives, and social justice actions. Yet in lesser known, equally defining moments, younger students of color were spearheading efforts to tackle inequalities and systemic factors that worked against them. (Atlantic)

Martin Luther King Jr. and his fellow activists realized another unique role that children could play in their movement. That realization gave rise to an even more famous Children’s Crusade. On May 2, 1963, more than 1,000 children in Birmingham, Ala., skipped class to demonstrate as part of the controversial protest. According to King’s colleague James Bevel, a key organizer of the campaign, part of the idea was that they knew the participants would likely be arrested, but a high-school student — unlike a worker — could spend time in jail without creating an economic problem for the community. (TIME)

This was the case in Chicago, where public schools in segregated black neighborhoods were under-resourced and overcrowded. In what's been called "one of the largest and most overlooked civil rights actions of the 1960s" 250,000 students staged a one-day boycott in October 1963. Estimates are that half of Chicago students participated in the walkout, with about 20,000 marching to the Chicago Board of Education in a mass demonstration for equitable resources for black children. (Atlantic)

In 1964 "over 450,000 black and Puerto Rican students protested de facto segregation in New York City's public schools, a decade after *Brown v. Board of Education* struck down segregated schooling." (Atlantic)

During the early 1960s, many young Indians from reservations and rural areas were now attending universities. Their consciousness had been raised by attending university Indian clubs, Regional Indian Youth Councils, the annual Workshops on American Indian Affairs and the famed 1961 American Indian Chicago Conference. Out of these came ... [the founders of the National Indian Youth Council] ... in August 1961. The organization's goal was to press for Indian self-determination, cultural preservation, Indian sovereignty, and for the government to uphold treaty rights..... They did plan on demonstrating. They got their first chance during the 1964 Washington State fish-ins, where they helped local Native Americans press for recognition of fishing rights guaranteed to them by treaty. It was here that the NIYC first used the term "Red Power." (Project Muse)

Junior high school student Mary Beth Tinker was suspended in 1965 for wearing an armband to school to protest the war in Vietnam. About four years later, in *Tinker v. Des Moines Independent Community School District*, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled 7-2 that students do not "shed their constitutional rights to freedom of speech or expression at the schoolhouse gate." (TIME)

In the late 1960s, Fred Hampton rose to prominence as the leader of the Black Panther Party in Chicago. [He joined the party as a 19-year-old high school student.] A powerful speaker and charismatic figure, Hampton racked up groundbreaking and concrete accomplishments early on. He negotiated a peace accord between the city's violent and powerful street gangs; started a program for neighborhoods to monitor police abuse; and organized community projects including five branches of the Panther's Free Breakfast for Children program, a community medical center and door-to-door health services across Chicago.

In 1968 "Chicano high school students in Los Angeles staged a massive walkout amid the growing 'El Movimiento' The students wanted Mexican-American history and culture to be taught in their classrooms. They also wanted the school district to address high dropout rates, overcrowding, and the "incompetent teachers and counselors who steered Latino students into auto shop instead of college-track courses," according to the *LA Times*. Thousands of students across the city participated in the walkouts. The protests lasted a week before the school board agreed to meet with students, teachers, and parents. The board conceded that changes needed to be made but insisted it lacked the funding to do so. This didn't sit well with students, and the unrest continued. "In our small part of the world, we were going to force some kind of change and some kind of equality," Kathy Ochoa, who was in 10th grade, told the *LA Times* 20 years later." (NPR)

On June 28, 1969, [Stonewall Inn] patrons clashed with police officers, ... setting off what we now know as the modern LGBT movement, including the tradition of LGBT Pride marches. Rivera was a 17-year-old Puerto Rican drag queen on the night of the riot. According to one biography, Rivera was in the crowd that gathered outside of the bar as anger in the West Village neighborhood swelled. She's cited as one of the first bystanders to throw a bottle, a big deal given the power dynamics of the situation with police. Talking about the riots years later in Carter's book, Rivera remembered, "This was started by the street queens of that era, which I was part of" After Stonewall, Rivera became an outspoken activist who rallied against racism, sexual violence and, after she began identifying as a woman, transphobia. (Mic.com)

In the late 1960s and early 1970s, high school students across America staged "blowouts" (their term for walkouts) to protest unequal conditions in their high schools. Teens not yet in college organized demonstrations opposing racial discrimination, calling for black and Chicano history to be taught in their schools, resisting the draft and demanding an end to the Vietnam War (a conflict they had seen take the lives of their older brothers). (CNN)

Along with the War in Vietnam — which led to the refrain “Old enough to fight, old enough to vote” — recognition of that generation’s high level of formal schooling and civic education was a factor that led to the movement to lower the voting age to 18. By 1970, ... Americans in the 18-to-21 age range were already participating in political activities, student-led demonstrations, voter registration drives, and political campaigns. The 26th Amendment, lowering the voting age to 18, was ratified in 1971. (TIME)

The long reach of youth movements continued into the 1980s and 1990s as American teenagers formed a core part of international struggles against racial apartheid in South Africa, promoted a resurgence of pride and interest in Africa through hip-hop culture, and became key participants in the Million Man March and its subsequent spinoff demonstrations in the United States. (CNN)

Handout 2: Youth Activism Today

More than 50 years later, movements for racial and educational justice are once again building momentum. A surge of student activism has swept across academia ... as black students and their allies forcefully call attention to racist climates on American college campuses. And even as some college-student leaders cite the Black Lives Matter social justice movement as their inspiration, what's happening in higher education is being matched by younger peers. High-school youth are flexing their collective muscles for equity: fighting budget cuts and out-of-school suspensions as they take on racial issues and academic offerings. (Atlantic)

While youth activism is now on the rise it is not without its critics, namely adults unable to view young people as equal partners in decision-making. The Harvard paper's top recommendation to support youth organizers is respect and recognition, emphasizing "young people's autonomy, opinions, desires, and actual capacity to take part in and lead" movements for equity and justice." (Atlantic)

Teenagers have taken the lead on two of the most pressing issues of the 21st century: mass incarceration and immigration. Black Lives Matter demonstrators have galvanized some of the nation's youngest activists to embrace the spirit of social justice rooted in the civil rights era. Youthful DREAMers have placed immigration at the forefront of a new civil rights movement, at times risking their own personal residency status to speak larger political and moral truths about what it means to be an American citizen in a nation whose diversity remains a source of both enormous strength and roiling contention. (CNN)

In 2016 "in Kentucky, [Andrew] Brennen spearheaded an effort to restore millions of dollars in state lottery funds that had been intended by law to help needy high school students pay for college but were instead diverted elsewhere. Mobilizing on social media and under #PowerballPromise, students got lawmakers to restore \$40 million for need-based financial aid. "We had students from every corner of Kentucky come to the Rotunda to share stories about what it meant to be a low-income student trying to navigate the post-secondary transition process," said Brennen, who as a high school junior formed the Prichard Committee's Student Voice Team that headed the movement. (Yes Magazine)

More recently, one of the largest Native resistance efforts in modern U.S. history, the uprising at Standing Rock had its beginnings in actions by an indigenous youth group called the One Mind Youth Movement. [In 2016] students set up a "prayer camp" on the edge of the Standing Rock reservation and organized a 2,000-mile relay-style run to Washington, D.C., to bring those concerns to federal officials and draw national attention to the issue. (Yes Magazine)

Upholding this critical value of student voice, a coalition of Asian and Pacific Islander students in Portland, Oregon, earned accolades from school-board members for their preparation and powerful anecdotes in a campaign to add ethnic-studies classes to the city's public schools. The group is working with district leaders to bring Asian, black, Latino, Pacific Islander, Arab, Native, and Queer-Trans-People-of-Color studies to all of Portland's high schools within the next four years. (Atlantic)

Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Fla., ... survivors announced that they're planning a "March for Our Lives" for March 24 in Washington, D.C., to pressure members of Congress to pass stronger gun-control legislation. Meanwhile, dozens of D.C.-area students have already staged a "die-in" outside of the White House — and more are in the works — and national school walkout days are

planned for March and April. Their goal, as expressed in the name of their movement, is that such a thing should “Never Again” happen. With the U.S. national voting age at 18, such actions are one of the few ways available for most high-school students to make their voices heard at the national political level. As Amy Campbell-Oates, a 16-year-old who organized a protest at South Broward High School near Parkland, told the *New York Times*, “Some of us can’t vote yet but we want to get to the people that can.”

At the root of student organizing is the demand for fair and equal treatment, says Jose Sanchez, the safe schools coordinator for Voices of Youth in Chicago Education [VOYCE], an alliance of mostly high-school students of color. For years Chicago has had gaping racial disparities in suspension rates for black and white children, and a new study from University of Chicago finds the most frequently suspended students are concentrated in schools serving the most vulnerable student populations. Examining this data, VOYCE set out to address the impact of out-of-school suspensions and expulsions on their peers and schools. Illinois Senate Bill 100 was created in 2012 by VOYCE activists who traveled regularly to the state capitol in Springfield to lobby and educate lawmakers. “When we were advocating for [SB 100] we sometimes weren’t taken seriously and faced adultism,” says Sanchez, adding that VOYCE students overcame the challenges by sharing their personal stories, combined with data and research aimed at eliminating the school-to-prison pipeline and “structural racism in our education system.” In August the VOYCE-drafted bill was signed by Republican Governor Bruce Rauner, ending a bipartisan, hard-fought effort. Starting in the 2016 school year, districts throughout Illinois will be required to eliminate zero-tolerance punishment, minimize out-of-school suspensions and expulsions, and adopt other discipline-related policies. (Atlantic)

“The student-voice movement is mobilizing around the sense that students are ignored as active agents of their own destiny,” says Brennen, adding that student input is “largely relegated to the margin when it comes to conversations about education policy creation, feedback, and reform.” Andrew “Brennen, the Student Voice leader, reiterates the critical role that youth serve in bridging education policy and practice ... “Organizations working to improve education that aren’t including student voice are doing it wrong ... [We’re] not presuming to be policy experts, but we are experts on how many policies play out at the classroom level. We’re a reality check.” (Atlantic)