

Youth in Revolt

America's radical youth is creating a better future

By Chelsea Davis

I believe the children are our future. Teach them well and let them lead the way.

Taking Ms. Houston's words to heart, I truly believe the youth of our nation are not only the future of our country/world, but are the present- *or what the present ought to be.*

Believing in the power of our youth and the realization/deed that they will someday take-on-the-mantle of leaders and world-changers is a sentiment shared by every generation. And a sentiment every generation fights against. We know the kids will someday takeover as the leaders of the world and we're all stubborn old coots who both want our children to succeed but also don't want to give up our power and importance. This rings especially true right now.

For a good while the youth of our world have been showing depth and breadth of strength and courage that seem unfathomable to most of us. From Malala Yousafzai fighting for her right to an education to Amandla Stenberg paving the way for young, queer women of color. However, in the wake of the Marjory Stoneman Douglas shootings in Parkland, FL this past Valentine's Day, teenagers have shown much more than courage and strength. They've shown us what it means to take a stand and *fight* for themselves, their rights, and the rights of others like them. They've shown us what it means to stand up to adversity and overcome fear. They've also shown an incredible amount of intelligence, poise, and grace.

The shooting, which claimed 17 lives, severely injured many others, and left a lasting scar on the lives of all affected, has produced a number of "radical" youth, but two in particular have become the voice of this tragedy and movement. Emma Gonzalez and David Hogg have become the clear leaders of this new revolution amongst Millennials and Gen Z'ers.

Gonzalez came into the spotlight when she gave an impassioned speech, just days after the shooting, pleading with the government to make radical changes to our policies and laws involving guns. Hogg made waves at a town hall meeting, which aired on CNN, in which he took NRA Spokesperson, Dana Loesch and Florida Senator, Marco Rubio to task.

These two high school students, in addition to many others in their high school, and other teens across the nation, have shown us how much change can occur when we try. How much change and what kind of impact can happen when our youth gets involved.

For years, even in my own generation, teens and early college students weren't as involved in politics and society. We weren't actively trying to change anything. There didn't seem to be much happening that needed all of these rallies, protests and radicalism (**jsyk Radicalism isn't a bad thing. Please do not take it as such). Even with the everlong war in Iraq/Middle East and the recession, my generation (mid-to-older Millennial) grew up in a time of relative

“comfortability.” Again, the economy was in the tank, job prospects were at an all time low, but we’d still grown up in a time without war (wassup 90s), we’d still been given a great deal of hope when it came to our futures, and we still saw the world as consistently progressing- even if it remained a tad slow.

Towards the end of my college career, I began to get more involved in culture, society and politics- both global and domestic. I was learning more about the world around me; things I was never made aware of in my small midwestern county. I also began to discover more about myself, who I was and who I wanted to be. I wanted to be a person who stood up for what I believed in- whether I was personally affected or not. I also began to realize that there was a lot of strife and pain in the world, and issues that needed to be fought for, and that there were people fighting. However, I still didn’t see a large amount of my peers fighting on the front-lines, so to speak, or in the streets for these causes. Most in my generation took a different approach- infiltrate from within. Work for the government, work for non-profits. Make the world a better place by working behind the scenes. Those things are needed, yes, and good, but there are moments when we must realize that our voices need to be heard and heard loudly. There are moments where we find we need to SCREAM in order to be heard just a little bit.

I started seeing certain movements really hit the streets. Marches and many other efforts on behalf of: gay rights/marriage equality, climate change, Dakota access pipeline, Black Lives Matter, and various others. People were beginning to mobilize, but not with the veracity that we’ve seen in Post-Election-Trumpland. People of all ages and demographics began to feel their safety and that steady-road-of-progress crumble around them. Repeals happened, strange new laws were put into effect, all kinds of odd and terror-inducing things started happening (and still are). And then more shootings happened. Shooting after shooting after shooting.

The Parkland teens were the latest in the string of school mass-shootings. The latest in a string of public mass-shootings. And they were pissed. They were also at the perfect age to mobilize and vocalize; and they pounced at the opportunity. They knew their voices needed to be heard in the wake of this tragedy. They knew change needed to happen- *needs to happen*- and they have not held back.

This younger generation is also in a prime place. A world in turmoil is what they know - for better or worse. They know how to navigate these situations and they also know how to mobilize and use their voices in the public and digital spheres. It’s second nature to them.

Speaking with various educators I know, it was uplifting to hear how many of them believe so strongly in the power of our youth- even the extremely young ones. It was also disheartening to hear of the struggles these children have to go through and the fear they have in their lives, based on our current socio-political landscape.

“I think this upcoming generation will really be the ones to do it. And by ‘that’ I mean, change today’s social and political landscape for the better,” said Cleveland grade-school teacher,

Stephen Bell. "They have this unique ability to navigate the digital landscape in a way that bands them together- and that skill alone will help demolish party lines, which I believe is the only thing that will lead to actual change."

While most educators are proud of their students, there has been a lot of backlash to their voices. Grown adults chastising children for their appearance, their politics, and their grief. The NRA have even sent threatening letters to Gonzalez and Hogg, both mentioned above. And yet these kids persist.

They are now at the forefront of not only this movement but of our society and of our politics. They're changing the way we interact with our government and with each other, and are therefore challenging the way we think. The way we do things and have always done them. They're here to shake things up and they're not apologizing for it. They're not snowflakes, they were forged from fire and they're here to let everyone know. They aren't here for platitudes or to be placated. They don't have time for BS, and they're not here for your thoughts and prayers. They want all voices heard. They are inclusive and radical. They aren't asking for change, they're demanding it. And honestly we all need to be a lot more like them.