

## WHAT IT'S LIKE BEING A HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT IN 2020

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When first considering this question, I could not help but think of the many events that occurred this year, which have felt overwhelming. From the social distancing, the canceled classes, mandatory curfews, and lack of resources, I chose to focus on an aspect that fully represented the unity of people and their reactions to unexpected events. A part of this time in history that I personally feel will be remembered and studied in future classes is the strength and persistence of the Black Lives Matter movement. Even during a time of separation, such as COVID-19, people of all ages and races came together and fought for justice. I believe this reveals the willpower of people as they were pushed over the edge to make an inevitable change and realized that they could no longer be bystanders to this oppression. The unity people found in the movement, while they were surrounded by the idea of distance, showed a determination that students everywhere can feel inspired by.

A demand for change around the world drove people to organize and find unique ways to participate in the Black Lives Matter movement through online connections. Through social media platforms, people worked to educate others on the issues at hand, posting daily facts, links to petitions and donation sites, and tips for protestors to protect themselves. Many even included raw and live video footage of protest sites for people to see for themselves what it was like. This flooding of social media made it an assurance that lots of people would see the movement's progression as the stay at home order meant the increase of internet usage. Creating an encouraging and educational environment, people could now see multiple angles of the Black Lives Matter movement, form their own opinions, and have the ability to choose how they wanted to help. Students, who are often overlooked due to their age, stood with others. Using the many resources that the internet offers, the xenophobic behavior of many was exposed and wrongdoers had to take responsibility for their actions. As activism grew, students everywhere witnessed its power, being able to partake in this period of reform, which has become a significant turning point of society.

The power of the Black Lives Matter movement could be felt everywhere as not even the threatening loom of COVID-19 dulled the voice of protestors. People took to the streets with their masks, determined for changes to happen now. Aware of the dangers of having big social gatherings and being exposed to many people, protestors went regardless, believing in the movement and the fact that this could not be held off any longer. No matter the age, background, race, gender, sexual orientation, people understood the history behind the movement and the importance of ending this long-standing fight for equality. Finding connection and partnership in each other, the Black Lives Matter movement's strength trumped that of any pandemic. Starting a chain reaction from the U.S. to the rest of the world, people inspired each other to act for a common goal. Resulting in police department reforms, the removal of statues, and the recognition of the maltreatment of people of color, these protests are serving as a catalyst for more meaningful change. Although the protests, with high quantities of people, might have seemed like something that would contribute to COVID-19 surges, they surprisingly did not. As a student, being surrounded by a passion for justice has felt transformational and inspirational. I feel lucky to see first-hand how people everywhere are uniting and recognizing the importance of a long overdue change regardless of the situation.

Of the many events that have occurred in this half a year, I know that the Black Lives Matter movement and the unification of people will be something that I, as a student, will remember. Almost as if out of a movie, the constant stream of surprises throughout 2020 has felt overwhelming. With all of this, strength and encouragement for reform have emerged, stirring hope for a positive change. The social distancing that had become the only thing on people's minds has transformed into unity for a common cause. Not limited to the U.S., the fight and demand for change has reached people around the world, including remote places in Asia, Europe, Africa, and Latin America. The internet was used to its fullest extent to aid in the linking of supporters and educating of people on the discrimination of people of color. In addition, its many forms enabled everyone to contribute to the movement. Experiencing this period of social activism during a global pandemic has revealed the willpower that people have when fighting for a significant cause. For me, it has been an honor to experience this atmosphere of influence for change and, if there is something to take out of this year, it is the unification of people despite external challenges.

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