



March 5, 2018

# Speak Out Now

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## Parkland Students – We Won't Go Back to Normal!

Students of Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida returned to school two weeks after a 19-year old former-student gunned down 17 people there. Most of the students said they were ready to return, but promised they would not let things “go back to normal.”

Over the past weeks, many of the students have spoken out about the tragedy and gone on to organize rallies and press conferences demanding change. They marched on the state capital, demanding that the Florida legislature address the problem of gun violence and were ignored. But that didn't stop them. The determination of these students has inspired thousands of young people across the country to demand the right to live in a society that can keep them safe. They say that they will not stop until real changes have been made.

These students have turned their grief into outrage and their anger into organizing. The youth of this country have grown up with an epidemic of mass shootings, with regular mass shooter drills at schools, and they are right to be sick of it. They are right to question a society where it is easier to purchase an assault rifle than it is to access mental health treatment. They are right to question a political system in which politicians regularly receive funding from weapons manufacturers and the NRA. And they are right to question the entire society when mass shooting and mass violence have become accepted as normal.

These students have grown up in a toxic society. Their schools can no longer be considered safe zones. In rough neighborhoods, where shootings are not uncommon, school used to provide a refuge of sorts. Not any more. Funding for their schools has been decimated. Art, music, other electives, and P.E. have been cut or eliminated, leaving them with the most basic classes focusing on standardized tests in overcrowded classrooms.

The future that young people have been promised looks very grim. They have been told they will likely be financially worse off than their parents, and that if they do go to college, they will be

saddled with tens of thousands of dollars in debt, with dwindling job prospects. They have been promised a world overflowing with violence and inequality, and a planet facing ecological collapse. It is not a surprise that depression and suicide rates for teenagers in the U.S. are at an all-time high.

Young people demanding change are getting a real education about how this system functions. The response from the politicians shows how this society works. Their response to this violence is to escalate it, proposing to turn schools into virtual prisons, arming teachers, with guards at every entrance. These are the same politicians who have overseen the gutting of education, of health care, of affordable housing. They are the same people who enforce the violence of poverty, the militarizing of the police, and decades of military violence against the people of the world. That is what's normal for them, and how dare they pretend to be on our side!

These students are right to see the politicians for what they are – people who only want to keep things the same. The students are right to recognize that change depends on what they do. Their anger is an expression of a growing discontent over the conditions in this society, no different than the wave of protests in response to killings by the police. We need to encourage them and stand with them wherever possible. The Parkland students have drawn a line in the sand: if we don't want to go back to normal, then we have to change what is normal!

A nation-wide protest has been called for March 24: “A March for Our Lives.” That can be a start.

### *A Speak Out Now Forum:*

#### **The Watsonville Canning Strike**

Peter Shapiro, a labor activist and author of “*Song of the Stubborn One Thousand*,” will discuss the powerful, 18-month-long strike of 1000 mostly Mexican women cannery workers in Watsonville, California in 1985.

**Saturday, March 17 - 7pm** (Doors open at 6:30)

**South Berkeley Senior Center (2939 Ellis St.)**

\$5.00 donation (no one turned away for lack of funds)