

Other Views

Why Black lives matter

I would like to write my fellow non-Black East Oregonians as to why I feel we must engage in difficult conversations regarding race in America. No longer can small towns be tucked away, only engaging in monologue. Now is the time for dialogue.

Why can't "All Lives Matter" suffice? Simply put, because all lives will only truly matter when Black lives matter equally.

When people say Black Lives Matter, they are illuminating a painful reality that many non-Black Americans ignore. African Americans experience severe health care

disparities compared to white Americans. They experience poverty and homelessness at far greater rates than their non-Black counterparts. Our Black brothers and sisters are exponentially overrepresented in our prison system and experience racial profiling from police officers in ways that white Americans have never experienced.

If we can establish that, yes, it is true, African Americans have been historically disadvantaged and these social inequalities remain as prevalent as ever, one must come to the conclusion that white Americans have then been historically advantaged.

One analogy that is helpful understanding why "All Lives Matter" is an insufficient and reactionary response: If I were to mention that breast cancer research matters, your first reaction wouldn't be to say, "No it does not, because skin cancer also matters." Now what if breast cancer was killing exponentially more Americans while its research for a cure was woefully underfunded? Wouldn't it be important to raise a level of awareness around the crisis?

We have Breast Cancer Awareness Month because it's a public health crisis and we need to address it. We don't wear pink in October in spite of skin cancer, but because we know this is a means to bringing awareness to a cause that needs our collective support to save lives. Black Lives Matter is doing the same thing. Trying to save lives.

This brings me to protest. Protests aren't intended to make us feel comfortable, they are to shock those whom systematic ills do not impact into consciousness and action. It comes from a deep place of privilege to think there is not a crisis simply because it doesn't directly impact you personally. This is why we need protests, to call us into action.

Martin Luther King Jr. said, "Freedom is never voluntarily given by the oppressor; it must be demanded by the oppressed."

Did women just get the right to vote? Did our gay and lesbian brothers and sisters just get the right to marry? Did Black school children just get the right to learn in a classroom with white students?

No. It was demanded. Now you might say, we are fine with protest, but not violence. I have heard, "It's terrible that Black man died, but the burning, looting and destruction of property needs to stop." I would counter, "It's horrible that property is being destroyed, but the killing of unarmed Black Americans needs to stop." As white Americans, we must prioritize Black American life over property. Humans are more important than things. Period.

We as a society should not approve of riots, and therefore we must not approve of the circumstances that lend to such desperation that people feel rioting is their only voice. Collectively, we must think critically about the centuries of failed social and economic systems that have disproportionately impacted Black Americans. We must ask ourselves uncomfortable questions about our past and how the intersectionality of racial, social and economic inequalities have contributed to the situation we are in today.

Now for my white brothers and sisters who feel they are allies. One of the most important things is to understand we do not speak on behalf of the African American community. We need to listen, support and follow directions. We cannot ever understand what it feels like to be Black in America, trust them.

When we see injustice, become engaged. Subscribe to podcasts, support bail funds, read books, watch documentaries that challenge our biases. Most importantly, join local organizations and vote for politicians who are serious about ending white supremacy and fixing a system that maintains institutional racism. This includes having a serious conversation about the militarization of our police force and the amount of funding they receive.

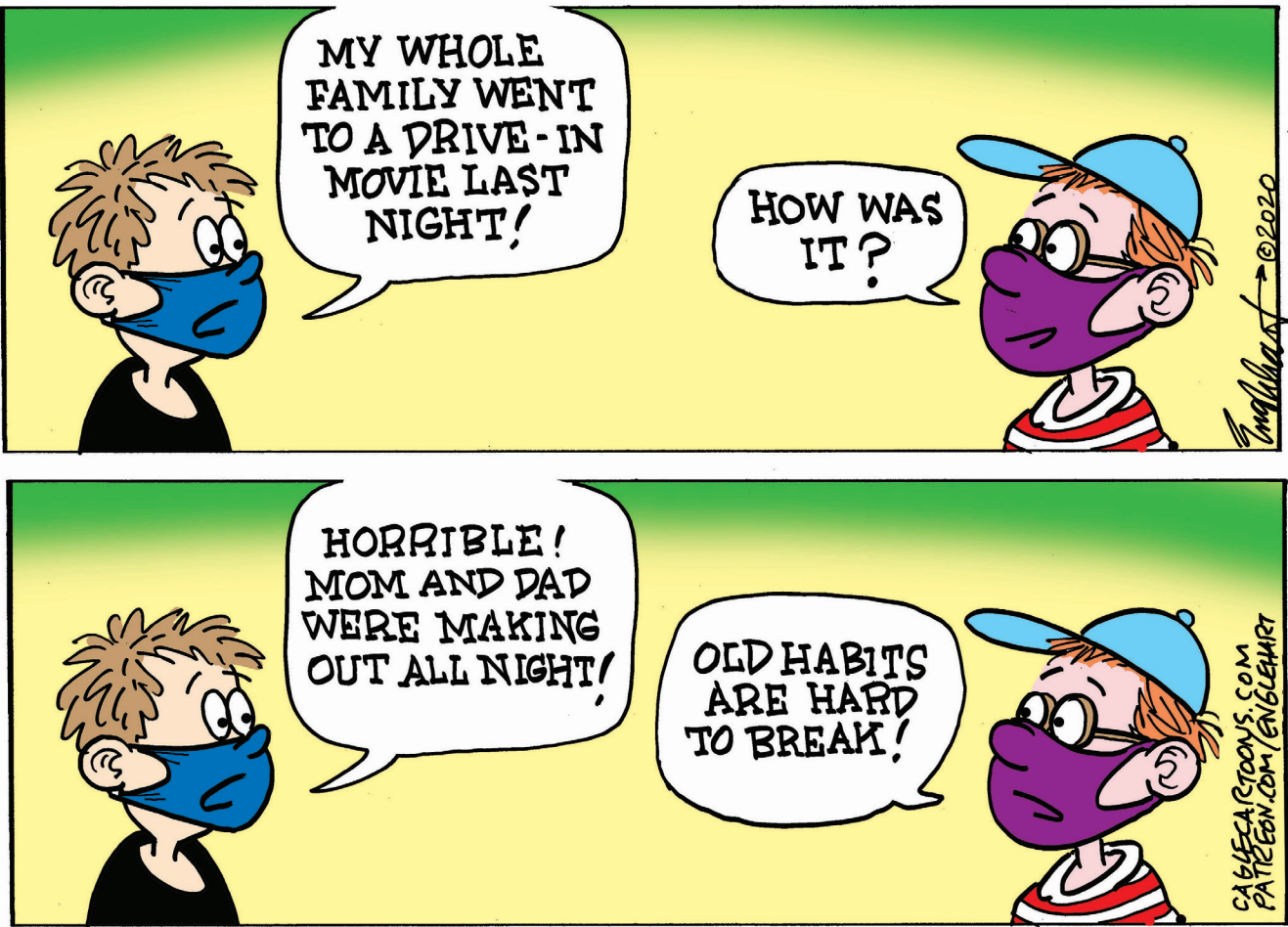
As a white American, I ask my fellow non-Black Americans to join the struggle of racial equity. Black Lives Matter.

About the Author

Mitch Thompson is from Hermiston and has previously worked as a community organizer, and now works in basketball.



MITCH THOMPSON
HERMISTON



Letters

Students should go back to school only if it's safe

I am writing in response to Carson Yancey's My Voice in the July 25 edition of The Observer newspaper ("Kids should go to school like they used to"). As a rising seventh-grader at La Grande Middle School, remote school was incredibly hard for me and many people I know. But I think it's a horrible idea to go back to school in person if it means putting people in danger.

I agree with Carson Yancey's first three points: that online school was annoying to students, that parents struggled to help kids learn and that technology issues can undermine learning. However, I find his final point — that school should open in person because kids are less susceptible to the coronavirus — flawed.

While the current scientific evidence does say the virus is less dangerous for children, in-person school would put all the adults who serve those kids at risk — some of them at considerable risk. Even if children are less likely to suffer a significant illness from the virus, they could pass it on to family members who are higher risk for significant illness. Lastly, even if children are less likely to get very sick from the virus, if even one child were to get a serious case and die, that would be too many.

So, in order to open schools in person, I believe strongly that we would need rigorous safety measures in place for everyone's safety, such as washing hands often, maintaining space between people even if it means students attending in part-time shifts, and wearing masks.

As much as I want to go back to school in person, we should only do so if it is safe for everyone.

Miri Koltuv
La Grande

Write to us

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Don't take children to protests

A protest is no place for a child. It is, purely and simply, child endangerment. Whether the subject be racial equality, homelessness, marriage, abortion, socialism, flag burning, Second Amendment rights or any other controversy, a child does not belong smack in the middle of it.

Groups of people gathering in public asseveration often induce violence. Certainly, basic facts behind an event should be explained to a child who asks. That is part of the learning process. But they cannot defend what's below the surface, and may suffer personal attacks for taking a public stance.

They need to be allowed to form their own opinions about their world, which is ever changing, through observation and their interaction with other children. Once they are adults, they will have a set of experiences to draw from, at which time they will bring the in-depth questions, if they still trust you.

Involving children in such organized events teaches children to blindly follow a cause.

Rather, teach them critical thought, to build a set of personal values, to objectively analyze their world and, eventually, to choose or lead their own causes. Uniqueness in thought is the truth of diversity. Teach them that peaceful change is made through the hard work of petitions, not lazy confrontational protests.

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