

2021 State of the Union Essay Contest Winning Essays



U.S. Senator Bernie Sanders

Winner

William Taggard (Brattleboro Union High School, Junior)

Democracy

Second Place

Emilia De Jounge (Burr and Burton Academy, Sophomore)

Gun Control

Third Place

Simon Rosenbaum (Vermont Commons School, Junior)

Democracy

Finalists

(in alphabetical order)

Emily Borrazzo (South Burlington High School, Sophomore)

Ling Bushey (Bellows Free Academy, Fairfax, Senior)

Fatima Khan (Essex High School, Junior)

Eh Ka Luu (Winooski High School, Senior)

Kada Orlow (Burlington High School, Freshman)

Ella Partlow (Missisquoi Valley Union High School, Junior)

Alexander Shriver (Brattleboro Union High School, Senior)

Stephie Siki (Winooski High School, Senior)

Winner
William Taggard (Brattleboro Union High School, Junior)

In the wake of the Watergate scandal of 1972, author and journalist Frank Herbert remarked that "good governance never depends upon laws, but upon the personal qualities of those who govern. The machinery of government is always subordinate to those who administer that machinery." The current administration has overseen an unprecedented undermining of trust in our government, the scale of which is scarcely rivaled in our nation's history. The subsequent damage leads us to Herbert's inevitable conclusion: "The most important element of government, therefore, is the method of choosing leaders."

Our democracy has been under unprecedented pressure in recent months, culminating in the insurrection in our nation's capital. Fortunately, democracy and the truth have prevailed. However, our current system leaves ample room for improvement: namely the electoral college. We face a fundamental problem that puts at risk one of the most essential assets of our great nation. We need to review the merits of the electoral college and determine how best to protect our democratic process. Two of the last three Presidents elected have failed to secure a majority of the popular vote, suggesting that while the Declaration of Independence states we are all created equal, our current democratic system makes some votes more impactful than others. A select number of "swing states" hold a disproportionate amount of power in determining the outcome of a race.

A short term solution to the flaws of the electoral college system is the National Popular Vote Interstate Compact (NPVIC). This is an agreement between states to award all of their electoral votes to the candidate that wins the national popular vote. To become effective, its signatories must control at least 270 electoral votes. Currently, they hold a total of 196 votes, with another 67 pending. By eliminating "swing states," the NPVIC would spread voting power equally, regardless of which state you live in. This change would force politicians to campaign not only to "swing state" voters, but to everyone.

Long term, it is in the country's best interest to consider alternate methods of voting. Our current system forces voters to pick between two popular candidates rather than support their true favorite, but this dynamic only arises from our pick one voting system. Methods such as approval or instant runoff voting can combat polarization, legitimize third parties, and eliminate spoiler candidates; forms of proportional representation can transcend gerrymandering and incentivize cooperation through coalition building. These practices allow voters to voice their conscience without worry of "wasting" their vote and fix many of the problems our current system has.

The importance of choosing good leaders has perhaps never been more apparent-divisive rhetoric dominates the political sphere, suffocating any chance at productive discourse. As President-elect Joe Biden cautioned, "the words of a president matter." We would be wise to ensure that those words come from a leader whose authority derives not from the exploitation of the electoral system, but rather from broad consensus and a commitment to the growth and prosperity of our nation.

Second Place
Emilia De Jounge (Burr and Burton Academy, Sophomore)

American Lives at Risk

Columbine, Sandy Hook, Parkland ... every parent's worst nightmare, yet what has America done to prevent another? A study by the American Journal of Medicine in 2016 found that Americans are 25 times more likely to die from gun homicide than people in other wealthy countries. Our futile attempts at gun control have seen little success, as gun violence rates are still steadily rising, increasing almost 25% from 2019 to 2020. The right to bear arms is in our Constitution, yet that does not negate the need for sound and rational policies around the sales of firearms. Currently, nearly 400 million guns are privately owned in the US, more than the country's population, with sharp increases in recent years. Gun violence needs to be recognized and addressed as a top priority public health issue.

"It is much easier to be a legal gun owner in the US than it is to be a legal driver," says David Hemenway, director of Injury Control Research at Harvard. A first step to prevent gun violence is to make it more difficult to purchase a gun through safe gun-owning training programs and requiring registration of all gun purchases. According to the State Firearms Law project, just seven states require a permit to possess a gun of any kind. A 2014 study in the Journal of Urban Health found that Missouri's 2007 repeal of its permit-to-purchase handgun law was associated with a 25% increase in firearms homicide rates.

Another important step to combating gun violence is investing in research. According to a 2017 study published in the Journal of the American Medical Association, gun violence research should have received \$1.4 billion from 2004 to 2015, based on mortality rates and funding levels for other leading causes of death, but only received 1.6% of the projected amount. According to Dr. Elinore Kaufman, chief resident in surgery at New York-Presbyterian, "we know far less about gun violence as a cause of injury and death than we do about almost every medical problem." In 1996, the NRA pressured Congress to pass the Dickey Amendment mandating that no CDC funds could be spent on research that promotes gun control, which has impaired our ability to make informed legislation.

We can look to other nations to see that gun control works. Germany has been successful in upholding the rights of its citizens, yet preventing unnecessary deaths. With one of the highest weapons-per-head rates in the world, Germany maintains one of the lowest gun homicide rates in Europe: a death rate of 0.05 per 1,000 people, compared with 3.34 in the US, and the rate in Germany is decreasing. This accomplishment is due to strict gun laws which include psychiatric evaluations, random spot checks, and limits to numbers of guns per person. The US can enact its own version of these laws while upholding the rights of citizens. Gun violence is a widespread disease plaguing our country which can be prevented through more effective control policies.

Third Place
Simon Rosenbaum (Vermont Commons School, Junior)

This past year terrified me. It was not just the carnage and isolation of the pandemic. I wasn't afraid of war in Iran. I was afraid because a United States Senator said it was okay to assault peaceful protestors in front of the White House for a photo op and negate the constitutional right to assembly. I was afraid because the President of the United States is fighting to subvert the cornerstone of our democracy: our election process. I was afraid because the America I love and believe in felt like it was on the brink of collapse. The most pressing issue that we as Americans face today is the preservation of our democracy.

Before and after the November election, people on all sides of the political spectrum have carried on about policy and rhetoric, conspiracy theories and misinformation. No one seems to understand the gravity of the situation. What makes America special is our belief in a functioning democracy and an uncompromising defense of our constitutional rights. My ancestors came to America to grant that to me. Our predecessors built that for all of us. The one inheritance bestowed upon every American is the dignity of being American. This year, our democracy was pushed to the brink, our rights were subverted, and the dignity of America was cast aside. To me, this felt like the end.

Of course, it was not the end. We Americans kept fighting for a more equitable, democratic union and it looks like our democracy will survive. My concern is for next time. What happens if next time, the system is assaulted by a savvy politician, someone who understands the systems they hope to destroy? This year, we saw that people in positions of power would do anything to keep it.

To preserve the union and our nation, we must eliminate the possibility for a President to wield unitary executive authority. Diminishing the power of the Executive Branch will mitigate the damage that an unfit executive could cause. We must also depoliticize judicial appointments, and instate a nonpartisan federal oversight commission independent of the executive branch to ensure that political leaders are working for the people.

Additionally, we must rebuild our demoralized, undervalued federal public service. These patriotic, nonpartisan public servants have been caught in the crosshairs of this attempted coup, and we must put them first as we rebuild from this sabotage of the framework of our country. They are the ones who put their careers and in some cases their lives on the line to save America. Now we must repay that priceless debt. Increasing protections for whistleblowers, creating a federal public service academy similar to our military academies, and simply paying public servants more for the invaluable work they do will make great strides in strengthening the system against assault next time.

This past year, the great American experiment almost came to an end. The most pressing issue we face now is how do we make sure this never happens again?

Finalists
(in alphabetical order)

Emily Borrazzo (South Burlington High School, Sophomore)

Supporting Our Veterans

Every day, men and women in the military risk their lives for the protection of their fellow citizens. The ideology of our nation depends on their service. Yet every day, veterans across the country face issues regarding claim approvals, mental health, and post-service employment.

The lengthy claim approval process and 36% claim granting rate is something that many veterans encounter. The issue is not the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs' generous budget, but how the money is spent, and the efficiency/availability of the benefits being offered. The VA should hire more people to process claims in order to shorten the processing time, which is currently four months or longer on average. Hiring veterans in these positions would also address unemployment issues. Additionally, more guidance should be given on how to file a claim. This includes identifying the quickest claim type and specifying what medical information should be given. Lastly, the VA only approves claims for illnesses and injuries which they deem to be a direct cause of service. Extending this to all serious illnesses and injuries throughout life, or at least partial financial and medical support, would be extremely beneficial to veterans and could even improve their mental health.

Studies have shown that veterans have a higher risk for alcohol/drug abuse, and suicide. One in five veterans suffer from mental health problems like PTSD, depression, and severe anxiety. Veterans account for 13.8% of the suicides in America, and for over a decade 17-18 veterans have died daily from suicide. We cannot take away their experiences, but offering more support in their recovery is the least we can do. Many veterans with mental health problems are not aware of their condition, or are too embarrassed to ask for help. Educating veterans (especially while serving) about signs and effects of mental health problems, and the care and treatment available to them, could save lives. Additionally, implementing a mental health scan for veterans every few years could be very effective in identifying these issues early on, and opening thousands of veterans' eyes to the care available to them. Enforcing quality-of-care standards for treatment in all mental health care facilities would also benefit the nation.

American veterans receive very effective military training and preparation, but are rarely prepared for post-service employment. Studies suggest the unemployment rate for veterans is considerably higher than their civilian counterparts. This can be attributed to the rarity of higher education and the numerous mental health issues among veterans. Increasing accessibility and lowering costs for college education would broaden the post-service career opportunities for countless veterans. Lower tuition rates for veterans could be paid for by the VA, with the extra money resulting from having to offer less veterans unemployment benefits.

Our nation cannot forget the selfless sacrifices our soldiers and military families make. Brave women and men have been taking care of this nation for almost 250 years. It's time we start taking care of them.

Ling Bushey (Bellows Free Academy, Fairfax, Senior)

The sexual health education and curriculum in America is not adequate to our current society, and should be focused on immensely to ensure better health in our youth population. Kids are not educated on the topics revolving around sexual health, and this leads to struggling mental health effects and potentially life changing decisions that teens should be informed on.

Ignorance on sexual orientation, contraceptives, and diseases leads to a dangerous society, where teens are unaware of consequences and ignorant to possible solutions of preventions. According to the USC Department of Nursing, nearly 750,000 teenagers in the United States will become pregnant this year; and half of the 20 million new cases of sexually transmitted diseases will be diagnosed in young people ages 15 to 24. Being informed about the physical, mental, and emotional changes in a teenagers' life and environment will benefit not only the person learning, but relationships surrounding them for years to come. By starting to educate kids in middle school will normalize these discussions to be had later on, and create a more open and unjudged environment. According to the United Nations, understanding one's own body is a human right, and the US needs to address a human's right to learn about their body and have legislature and youth service providers fund and educate a coherent and inclusive sexual education across the nation.

A guaranteed cohesive program or set curriculum addressing sexual health, will also allow for schools to help inform kids in the LGBTQ community, what the subject is and how to respect and support members that are a part. The importance of educating a positive outlook sexual orientation, and safe hetero and homosexual activities is crucial. Only 24 states mandate sex education, which is unacceptable. America needs to educate teens on the opposite sex's changes during puberty, and normalize these changes as they are inevitable. Mandating sexual education in schools will give students a coherent safe space to learn about these topics, which might not be offered and found from other inaccurate sources which leads to false information and misinterpretations.

While this might be a tedious and drawn out process, our legislature should mandate sexual education across the nation by making a federal law. This law would teach an all inclusive comprehensive curriculum across all states. Overall this would positively affect teens all across America and would take a step towards a brighter and better future. Along with this federal mandate we need to make teens and young adults have access to a planned parenthood or a trusted medically accurate source to trust and rely on for information. Especially during these strenuous times during this pandemic, the availability of these sources are more crucial than ever.

Fatima Khan (Essex High School, Junior)

July 17, 2014: "I Can't Breathe." These were the last words of Eric Garner. A 43-year-old father of six children. A man who was known as the "neighborhood peacemaker." Eric Garner was an unarmed black man, who was choked to death by Daniel Pantaleo, a New York City police officer, as he repeatedly pleaded for him to stop.

May 25, 2020: "I Can't Breathe." These were the last words of George Floyd. A 46-year-old father of one daughter. A man who wanted to "touch the world." George Floyd was an unarmed black man, who died when Minneapolis police officer, Derek Chauvin, pressed his knee into his neck, for 8 minutes and 46 seconds, as he repeatedly pleaded for him to stop.

The murder of Eric Garner, in 2014, ignited fierce emotions and propelled people into action, all over the country. A developing project which began as a response to the murder of Trayvon Martin, was beginning to receive national attention. It was known as Black Lives Matter. Today, BLM is one of the most influential social movements today, and among many human rights issues, it has awakened the eyes of the nation to the issue of police brutality.

Although we have come a long way in our work against police brutality since 2014, there is still plenty of work to do. Black Americans are disproportionately affected by police violence across the US. According to Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health, black Americans are 3.23 times more likely than white Americans to be killed by police. In order to truly combat this issue, there needs to be a reformation of our police departments.

To do so, the responsibilities of police officers relating to mental health, homelessness, and drug abuse, needs to be pared back. According to the US Department of Justice, there are over 10 million arrests, annually. Only a small fraction of those are violent crimes. This makes the US the world's largest jailer, housing about 25 percent of the world's prisoners. Police departments are overworked and our jails are overcrowded. Overcriminalization has led to mass incarceration in our criminal justice system. To address overcriminalization, policymakers should consider what offenses result in conviction and prison time, and reduce arrestable offenses. More resources should be put into education and training for officers, not arrests. Additionally, more mental health professionals should be deployed as first responders.

We also have to hold every police officer accountable to the law. Too many times, police officers who have broken the law, haven't faced adequate consequences for their actions, because of qualified immunity. Qualified immunity has protected police officers in cases where they have disgustingly abused their power. Victims whose constitutional rights have been violated have been denied justice. By altering this doctrine, we can ensure that nobody is above the law. Increasing the consequences of misconduct, will weed out the bad apples in our police departments.

By critically reforming our police departments, we can ensure a more equitable future for all Americans.

Eh Ka Luu (Winooski High School, Senior)

"Don't hold a guy's hand; you'll get pregnant," my mom informed me as I sat on the toilet, looking at the well wrapped square. I engraved those words in my mind. My whole 6th grade year, I avoided the hands of the opposite gender, by keeping my hands in the pocket of my hoodie due to my moms version of sex education. Yet, in seventh grade I had Health class, where curiosity got the best of me.

"Mrs- where do babies come from?" I looked up and back down, she smiled and explained everything to me, this was where things started to make sense. I realized that I've been lied to by my own mother. I had questions. "Why do some parents avoid such topic?" and "why do schools not teach proper sex education?" In this essay, I'm going to address the need for parents to educate their kids. Schools teaching students about sex and being welcoming to every gender.

I think Sexual education should be taught at a very early age. Most kids start to get sexually actively around middle school. In my research on "Sex Positive Families", I found that most parents think that if they talk to their kids about such a topic, their kids will wanna do it. However, this proves to be incorrect as most of the time, kids will consider the options and pause on their sexual activity. Parents need to start normalizing sex and understand that its an act that will be committed, one day. If youth are given the accurate information they will better protect themselves. In my research kids who understand the consequences of being sexually active. Better protect themselves by using birth control methods and using condoms so they don't contract sexually transmitted infections (STI).

In a quiet room filled with my fellow seniors, I broke the silence with a question. "Where did you guys learn about sex?" It was revealed that most had obtained the information by either using sources like google or from their peers, but we have school to teach us right? In high school, it is expected that you learn about these topics but in this generation, kids are starting to explore at a much younger age, the earliest being the start of middle school.

Not all states are required to teach sex education in a structure way. Some states, such as Alabama and Arizona, don't even teach the subject at all. They preach abstinence to their students and tell them to wait till marriage to have intercourses. Schools should teach safe sex and ways on how to prevent STIs. Schools should talk about different types of birth control that are available. It's also important to include information for students with different sexuality. In a video by Above the Noise, "Sex education in America: The good, The bad , and The ugly", high school students shared their thoughts on the current Sex Education. One student talked about how it doesn't include people in the LGBTQIA+ community. School needs to provide to students that have different sexuality, they shoud teach sex between non heterosexual people as well. It's very important to help kids understand safety no matter their sexual orientation.

The topic of sex should be normalized and talked more about to people at a very young age. To help kids understand the changes in their body and explore their sexuality. Parents should have conversations about sex and the human body to their kids. School should include people with different sexuality. If we do these things, teenager would have the knowledge and ability to protect themselves and weigh their options when it come to safe sex.

Kada Orlow (Burlington High School, Freshman)

My sister and I were very little when my mom became our only parent. She was all by herself, with no “safety net”, as she calls it. We were left with nothing but each other. She struggled with lack of money, food scarcity, and sometimes there were issues with places to live. As I grew older, I began to see the struggles that not only my mom, but many other families face when trying to raise a family and dig themselves out of a hole. I’ve listened to my mom explain to me many times, how impossible it is for one person to raise a family, to have to be in two places at once, while trying to get us off to daycare or school, and to try and hold down a regular job (no longer a career as she may have had long before), and to just keep going no matter what, because you can’t stop. Stopping or resting is never an option. Some of the issues that my mom recently was asked to speak about at a press conference have to do with exactly that. My mom spoke for, and represented those people, that typically are not heard; the single parents and the sole parents. She offered solutions that would help make things easier, better for others, if only they could be put into practice everyone would benefit. Now, it is my turn to speak up for an issue I believe needs to be addressed in our society.

The system itself for single mothers is like quicksand, it doesn't matter how hard you try, you just get exhausted. You will never get out of it, but you just keep pushing. My mom resigned her promotion and went back to working part-time so that she and her family could survive. This shows that parents are forced to practically choose between providing for their children, and being with them. With no other options, parents are prevented from raising their children, just so they don't lose the benefits for their kids. Even when single parents work, the wages are not enough to support a family. Working full-time for \$10 an hour is only about \$19,000 a year. This fact explains many single parents' realities that are never ending. Minimum wage jobs do not pay enough to support a family. However, single parents can prevail. My mom shared that “The single moms I know are some of the most mentally-strong people I've ever met, and no matter what, they prevail.” This piece of evidence shows that there is no option to give up, you have to keep pushing no matter what the circumstance is. In the end, there really is no way of getting out of this everlasting loophole, unless you are thrown a lifeline.

Technology provides many of the answers to these problems. The solutions are there, they would benefit not only single parents, but eventually in the long run, it would benefit everyone. An online database and one-stop shop: housing, services, food, healthcare. Just one simple example of a solution that can be extremely beneficial because it can be used for different things and in different ways. All the government assistance programs being in one, easy to access place would make it simpler for single parents to get the support they need, and that tax dollars are paying for. Technology could help in other ways as well. Imagine you are a single mom, there is no one else at home to leave your other child(ren) with, while you rush the sick one to the emergency room. --If you could use an app like pingmd.com app, all you would have to do is "ping" your doctor directly, share photos, and list out the symptoms. This would save time before scheduling an appointment and visiting a doctor (time the parents are usually at work), and take some of the expenses out of visiting a doctor. There are new solutions being made everyday in order to make life for single parent's easier, this being one of them. Parent's that don't have enough time in the day to record everything that their child is doing, ex: soccer games, presentations, first day of school experiences, etc. This is now being solved with a page called Kidlee. This is another example that will help not only single parents right now, but even parents that just don't have time for it.

These solutions are only the beginning, if only they were acted upon, single parents could get the assistance they need.

Ella Partlow (Missisquoi Valley Union High School, Junior)

At such a significant time in their lives for personal development, teenagers are one of the most vulnerable age groups when it comes to mental health. According to the National Institute of Medicine, twenty-five percent of Americans experience at least one depressive episode prior to adulthood. More concerning, however, is that the World Health Organization found that many such conditions are ignored; an estimated fifteen percent of teenagers' mental health conditions go "underdiagnosed and undertreated". This elucidates that adolescent mental health is not often made a priority. The mental health of American teenagers needs to be taken more seriously.

When teenage mental health is neglected, it becomes an even more pressing issue. Reflecting the detrimental effects of a poor mental health care system, the rates of self harm and suicide in America have increased in recent years. The General Hospital of Psychiatry says that in the past two decades emergency room visits in America for self inflicted harm in all age groups have increased; albeit, these visits were most common among ages fifteen to nineteen. Additionally, data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention explains that there was a thirty percent increase in suicides from years 2000 to 2016. This illuminates that ignoring the mental health of America's youth puts their safety and lives in jeopardy.

In order to solve this problem, it is vital that funding for mental health education programs and support services are increased. The Journal of Adolescent Health identifies "insurance restrictions, poor funding, and low priorities for resources" as the "key obstacles" preventing teenagers from seeking necessary help. A widespread lack of education regarding mental health also contributes to this problem, says The American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychology. A step towards prioritizing teenage mental health, increased funding and education would result in teenagers feeling supported and having better access to mental health services.

Furthermore, better funding and education will allow for the improvement of on campus mental health service. First, it is necessary that the presence of these services on school campuses are increased. In a report from the National Research Council and Institute of Medicine, adolescents were more likely to receive mental health services when on site services were easily available. Second, diversity, identified by the report as a key component to effective on campus mental health services, should be considered; a more diverse group of health care professionals leads to lower dropout rates in mental health programs, and misdiagnosis of mental illness decreased when there were fewer cultural differences between provider and patient. Ameliorating on campus services by increasing and diversifying them will encourage teenagers to seek help and normalize doing so, creating an atmosphere where youth can comfortably discuss their mental health without fear of being treated as insignificant.

Moreover, improving the funding, education, and available services surrounding teen mental health will allow us to make this issue a larger priority in America. In doing this, we take care of our youth and improve their quality of life.

Alexander Shriver (Brattleboro Union High School, Senior)

On November 8th, 2016, the American people exercised their most basic democratic freedom and decided to elect Hillary Clinton as their President. According to CNN Politics, Clinton won the majority of the 138 million votes cast. If U.S. democracy stayed true to its ideal of equality, Clinton would have been elected. Instead, the 2.9 million votes which gave Clinton the edge meant nothing--those voices unheard and disrespected. Donald Trump was placed in office.

Writing the Constitution, the founding fathers struggled to find a fair way to elect a President and ultimately created the Electoral College. Instead of relying on a popular vote, this system, along with the infamous Three-fifths Compromise, was built to appease the opposition of southern slaveholders worried the more populous North would control the country and outlaw slavery. Since its inception, it has contradicted the peoples' decision in five elections, including 2016.

As horrible as its origins are, some argue that the Electoral College still protects the interests of smaller states where people might not otherwise be heard. They argue the antiquated system forces candidates to campaign in less populous areas, protecting their importance. However, the Electoral College does not fulfill this purpose. Consider the areas Donald Trump visited in his 2020 campaign: he never traveled to states like Vermont, Wyoming, North Dakota, Rhode Island, or Montana. This is the kind of disproportionate attention the Electoral College is supposed to prevent, but because of their low vote count and poll's suggesting a large polarization towards one candidate, these states were not prioritized.

330 million people live in the U.S., almost none of whom have had any sort of interaction with a presidential candidate. Most citizens learn about presidential campaigns through the media, online campaigning, and events like nationally televised debates. Therefore, even if the Electoral College did force equal attention to every state, it makes no difference because of the manner in which citizens make their voting decisions. In the Electoral College, some votes count for more than others. Each state has two voting delegates from the Senate and at least one member in the House of Representatives regardless of their population, automatically giving smaller states more voting power. According to the University of North Carolina, a vote in Alaska is about 2.42 times more valuable than the average vote, while a Californian vote is only 87% as valuable as the average. Furthermore, in states where the vast majority of people vote the same way, each individual vote is less important than in a more politically diverse state. Because its original purpose of protecting small states is unnecessary, the Electoral College only serves to devalue some votes.

The best solution to promote a more pure democracy is to amend the Constitution to replace the Electoral College with a popular vote. The only factor in determining the President would be the will of the people. There are many ways the American democracy needs to improve, so let's start with its most fundamental institution.

Stephie Siki (Winooski High School, Senior)

Antiracism

"To be black and conscious of antiblack racism is to stare into the mirror of your own extinctions" by Ibram X. Kendi. The assassination of George Floyd showed me that my life could also be taken away at the knees of a police officer. As a black woman, it felt as if I had a danger in my chest, that I couldn't pull out, I could only watch it bleed for nine and a half minutes. Despite the horrendous police brutality, I believe that our generation has the power to remove racist thoughts, beliefs, and actions in this world. The only way to remove racism is to become an antiracist.

My definition of antiracist is someone that actively chooses to be against racism. It takes learning about structural racism and one's own implicit bias and privilege. According to PNAS, Between the ages of 25 and 29, black men are killed by police at a rate between 2.8 and 4.1 per 100,000. Stephon Clark, a young man that was standing in his grandmother's yard, holding a mobile phone. The police shot him 20 times, they assumed Clark was holding a weapon because his skin is seen as a weapon. This type of scenario is not the first nor is it the last unless we change it as a country. Based on the National Equity Project, Structural racialization refers to institutional practices and structural arrangements that lead to racialized inequities Equity is when every individual or group of people receives the right amount of support based on their needs. We need to work on providing racial equity in our country.

Since the minority communities have been built to be inferior to be majority communities, it is hard to survive in a crisis. We have to understand the 400 years of nightmares black people have lived through because it impacts our lives. Based on The Washington Post, black Americans were 37% more likely to die from Covid19 than whites. As a black woman, this statistic scares me because it is implying that my race will be the reason I am more likely to die from Covid19 and not my health. As a member of The Winooski Students for Anti Racism, we are demanding that SRO officers be removed from our school because of the institutional racism the police system was built on. Two thousand twenty was the last march to demand BLACK LIVES MATTER, my life matters.

We have to mandate Culture and Community class for middle and high school. That class will focus on teaching students about race, racism, identity, equity, biases, privilege, and slavery. We need social workers accompanying police officers to a situation believed to be racially motivated. We also need to support antiracist organizations in the U.S.A. Encourage states to at least have one organization that prioritizes antiracism. In order to save the world from this racist pandemic, we have focused on targeting racism.