



Photos by Raul Roa | Staff Photographer

A PROTESTER for the Black Lives Matter movement holds a sign at the event outside the Irvine Civic Center on June 13.

GENERATION NOW

High school students organized many of the recent O.C. protests, and they're drafting action plans.

BY VERA CASTANEDA

Young faces have popped out of COVID-19 lockdown to drag old institutions to an equitable age. In Orange County, teens have not only attended, but organized protests for the first time in their lives during the past three weeks.

Some will be of voting age by November, and some won't. Those unable to vote aren't too eager to put all their eggs into the electoral-vote basket anyway. Instead, they've had time to connect online, share their raw hurt and anger on megaphones, and find solutions to anti-Blackness beyond police departments.

Wismick Saint-Jean II scrolled through Twitter when he woke up on his 17th birthday and could hardly move. Although he's usually desensitized to news, he posted a Notes app screenshot expressing an overwhelming feeling that hovered during the first days of chaotic protests.

Video of George Floyd lying on the ground with a police officer's knee on his neck had been circulating online.

The Arnold O. Beckman High School student is coming of age at a time when cycles of similar videos have been documented online. Yet, after landing in news headlines and causing short-lived uproars (if there were uproars at all), he saw that these stories often subsided into quiet obscurity.

"I'm Black in case you couldn't tell ... I started the day off pretty rough because I couldn't sleep," Saint-Jean said on Instagram livestream the day after his birthday. "I went to bed that night after scrolling through Twitter for God knows how long looking at videos of protests, of police violence ... this was just too much for me to handle."

While he appreciated people leaving "Black Lives Matter" and other messages of support in comments to his post, he was also hurt by it.

He said it's performative activism — showcasing that you care rather than serving the community you are targeting. He used Blackout Tuesday, the social media initiative to post black

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HUNDREDS OF PROTESTERS listen to speakers like a 17-year-old Irvine student outside of the Irvine Civic Center on June 13.



DEMONSTRATORS SUPPORTING the Black Lives Matter movement hold signs during a protest at the Irvine Civic Center on June 13.

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Youth won't tolerate injustice, Costa Mesa's Chavez says

BY BEN BRAZIL

Councilman Manuel Chavez, the youngest person ever elected to Costa Mesa City Council, was in college when protests erupted after the police shooting of Michael Brown.

Brown's killing spurred national demonstrations, much like the death of George Floyd while police Officer Derek Chauvin knelt on his neck in Minneapolis.

Chavez said the movement against police brutality has reached a boiling point, causing political leaders all over the country to finally reckon with longstanding injustices.

"The one thing that's different is the next generation will not accept this," said Chavez, 24. "This next generation grew up watching my generation protest in Ferguson, and they are fed up with it. It's them I see pushing for reform. It's them I see going on social media. It's them planning the actual protests. We had one every day last week, a majority of them planned by high school students."

Chavez said the youth have been crucial, the architects of a movement that's made it politically acceptable to now finally address police violence against Black people. They didn't just shift the Overton window, they smashed it to pieces.

Chavez mentioned that his city's own Police Chief Bryan Glass spoke for about an hour at this week's City Council meeting, addressing the community's concerns with his department.

"It's something I hadn't seen before — political structures actually taking the time to address



Courtesy of Manuel Chavez

COSTA MESA COUNCILMAN Manuel Chavez weighs in on the Black Lives Matter movement.

concerns that weren't addressed before," Chavez said.

Chavez also feels a sense of solidarity with the youth, seeing similarities with his own struggles. Chavez's win in 2018 was historic for Costa Mesa, as he was the first Latino ever elected to the council.

Much of the movement is now centered on defunding police departments around the country. Chavez said a few have demanded at City Council meetings that Costa Mesa defund its

department. There isn't as much outcry in the city because Costa Mesa's police department has a much smaller budget, at about 30% of the city's total, than some other larger cities, Chavez said.

Many cities across the county are currently approving their budgets for the next fiscal year. Costa Mesa approved its budget this week.

"I think that in part is because for those who have had a chance to interact with our police department, the majority of those

are good experiences," Chavez said. "But I'm not saying we can't improve."

Chavez said Costa Mesa's police department is a cut above others because they engage in "community policing."

"Thankfully our chief, Glass, is really responsive and open and embraces that community policing model," Chavez said.

"For someone who, frankly, just wants to defund everything, I will point to our merit in our department and say, 'Look, I can

see where you are coming from, but our model works very well.' I don't think the majority of people in Costa Mesa want the police defunded entirely."

He continued: "A lot of times with these national movements, there is a push to make them national, to make it a blanket-all statement, and as the activists and youth go to their own cities, I think they are going to realize that perhaps the issues of prejudice are not as prevalent in their own department. Or perhaps they are."

Earlier this month, a protest outside South Coast Plaza in Costa Mesa resulted in a series of tense standoffs between protesters and police.

Chavez pointed out that the city had already planned to have implicit bias training for the entire staff prior to the national protests.

As the amount of protests in the county begin to taper off, youth are now faced with what to do next to provoke change.

"In a nutshell, you have to vote," Chavez said. "Get involved with the [city] budget. Because when you talk about making systemic changes, the system is the budget. At City Council, if your comments can even make 1% of a police budget go to parks or libraries, you just made a systemic difference."

Chavez said he will work with young people to help usher in reform in any way he can.

"I stand by them," Chavez said. "If they want to make changes, I will do what I can in my ability to make change."

benjamin.brazil@latimes.com
Twitter: @benbrazil

Ending racism and injustice is a bipartisan issue, Yorba Linda Councilwoman Campbell says

BY ADA TSENG

Tara Campbell and her fellow Yorba Linda council members were in the middle of their regularly scheduled meeting on June 2, when nearby, a protest for George Floyd attracted 500 people to the city's Main Street and Town Center.

They knew it was happening because the organizer, Caleigh Cobb, 21, had alerted them beforehand. They received real-time updates and worked to keep their residents informed of the situation.

The protest, like others in Yorba Linda that followed in the coming weeks, was peaceful. On June 10, there was a march that started in the city's Jessamyn West Park and attracted about 100 people.

"I'm glad folks are coming together as a community and peacefully protesting against injustice and racism and hate," Campbell said. "I'm glad that people are practicing their 1st Amendment rights to speak out about this."

A young conservative, Campbell, 26, doesn't like the implication that there are two sides to the issue.

"We should all be standing together against injustice and racism," she said.

She pointed to a resolution that the Yorba Linda council drafted, pledging their solidarity with the protesters.

She also pointed to O.C. Sheriff Don Barnes' statement on May 28 denouncing the actions of the four officers involved in the unjust killing of George Floyd, where he emphasized that what occurred in Minneapolis was "beyond the scope of any tactic we are trained to use."

In the last few weeks, Campbell said she has had many conversations with Black families and business owners in Yorba Linda, as well as other residents of color, so she can hear from them directly.

"We are a welcoming city too," she said. "These protests have brought forward a dialogue, and I am supportive of having a dialogue with one another about these issues."

Yorba Linda residents elected Campbell to the City Council when she was 23.

When she served as mayor from 2018 to 2020, she was the youngest female mayor in California.

Campbell was born and raised in Yorba Linda, played basketball at Rosa-



Courtesy of Tara Campbell

TARA CAMPBELL, 26, has been a council member in Yorba Linda since she was 23. She was glad to see peaceful protests speaking out against injustice in Yorba Linda.

ry Academy and studied at USC, originally planning to go into sports journalism. There, she got an internship at a bipartisan nonprofit in D.C. called No Labels, which aims to get Republicans and Democrats to work together.

"Believe it or not, somebody's actually trying to do that," she joked. "It was actually pretty awesome. We had about 80 members of Congress signed on when I was a part of it."

When the government shut down in 2013, she returned to her hometown and realized that similar partisan politics had resulted in eight recall votes or attempted recall petitions of Yorba Linda City Council members or Water District board members in the last 15 elections.

Frustrated with those that were representing her city, she decided to run herself.

Her day job is as chief of staff for county Supervisor Don Wagner, and she was previously communications director for county Supervisor Andrew Do.

In 2019, SafeHome.org named Yorba Linda the safest city in California.

The city, which does not have its own police department, has a contract with the O.C. Sheriff's Department. About 32% of its budget goes to the police, which is lower compared to bigger cities in Orange County.

One of the common chants of the Black Lives Matter protests across the nation has been to "defund the police," which questions the proportion of taxpayer money that goes to that department.

"I don't believe 'defunding the police' addresses the issue," Campbell said. "But I want to make sure that we are absolutely always checking protocols, looking at how we train police officers and what's happening in our city. We

want to listen to our community to see how we address issues in the right way."

Part of listening to the community is engaging with youth in Yorba Linda.

In 2019, when she was mayor, Campbell started a Young Civic Leaders Academy for high school students.

It's a six-week nonpartisan program that she runs twice a year, spring and fall sessions, where she teaches students how local government works.

In their last week, the students hold a mock city council meeting where they are the members and make the decisions.

She just wrapped up the spring 2020 session, which included discussions about COVID-19 and its effects on local businesses. Now, six of her students are working as junior ambassadors for the Yorba Linda Chamber of Commerce and helping to promote the importance of shopping locally.

In fact, one of her former academy members is now her intern, who attended the 500-person Yorba Linda protest on Main Street.

"I didn't want the next generation to grow up the way I did, where people have disdain for the politicians on TV and you feel super disconnected to it," she said.

"I want to give them the tools to proactively be the change they want to see, because I'm seeing a lot of young people wanting to be involved."

For more information on the Young Civic Leaders Academy, contact Tara Campbell at tcampbell@yorbalindaca.gov or her social media handles @tarapcampbell and Facebook page. The next session will be in the fall.

ada.tseng@latimes.com
Twitter: @adatseng



JEREMY YAMAGUCHI, 31, who's been a councilman in Placentia since he was 19, rides in a classic MG car at the Placentia Heritage Day Parade with Air Force Veteran Ron Culler.

Courtesy of Jeremy Yamaguchi

After 12 years in office, Jeremy Yamaguchi still sees resistance in the GOP toward young politicians

BY ADA TSENG

When Jeremy Yamaguchi was first elected into the Placentia City Council in 2008 at age 19, he became the youngest elected official in the city, county, and possibly the state. Same for when he became mayor at age 22.

But Yamaguchi, now 31, had been accompanying his parents as they volunteered for various city commissions since he was 10. His mother was involved in the neighborhood watch and the committee that plans the annual Placentia Heritage Day Parade.

"By the age of 18, I had attended more city committee meetings than most people have attended in their lifetimes," he said.

A fourth-generation Japanese American, Yamaguchi said previous generations of his family relocated from Los Angeles to O.C. for opportunities in businesses and the aerospace industry.

His grandfather grew up in Los Angeles' Terminal Island community before being sent to the Manzanar internment camp in the 1940s in reaction to the attack on Pearl Harbor. He graduated high school in the camp and later joined the 442nd Infantry Regiment, composed almost entirely of second-generation Japanese Americans who volunteered to fight during World War II.

Yamaguchi is also the third generation of his family to work at Disneyland. His grandfather had an industrial-installation company that set up refineries, steam boilers and submarines at Disneyland, and he'd pay his middle-school grandson to work in the Anaheim warehouse.

Yamaguchi's dad, a retired sergeant of the Placentia Police Department, worked in food service at Disneyland, while his

mom worked at the Main Street souvenir shops.

Placentia City Council members get paid \$150 a month, so as his day job, Yamaguchi owns a sound production company that does live events for Disneyland, including its Christmas parade, marathon and recently the grand opening event for Star Wars Land.

Though during the pandemic, he's pivoted to helping churches and other companies set up to livestream their services.

Yamaguchi started his company, Eagle Multimedia, in his senior year at El Dorado High School, right after he got his Eagle Scout award.

It was the Eagle Scouts that gave him the confidence to run for office — where he received the highest total vote count — before he had even completed his degree in political science at Cal State Fullerton.

In high school, he was a representative for the Southern California division of the Boy Scouts, which spanned from Bakersfield to San Diego, and he was on the board of directors for the Boy Scouts of America Orange County Council. Trained in executive-style leadership, he was comfortable running business meetings and reporting up to the state and national levels.

When he first joined the council, Placentia had lost millions of dollars on a failed railroad project, which resulted in indictments against former city officials charged with violating conflict-of-interest laws and put the city on the brink of bankruptcy.

Twelve years later, Yamaguchi feels the five council members work well together and have the best interests of the city at hand.

Earlier this month, as protests against the death of George Floyd in Minne-

apolis spread to Orange County, Yamaguchi was frustrated by what he called the disproportionate attention the media paid to the rioting and looting.

"That's disheartening and frustrating to me, not only because of the victims of that who have to go back and pick up the pieces of their business on top of dealing with COVID-19 but also because the attention isn't going to the protesters being peaceful and exercising their 1st Amendment rights," Yamaguchi said.

He said that at the June 6 protest in Placentia, the police didn't need to intervene. If anything, he saw demonstrators self-policing themselves, when anyone got too rowdy, and the police officers helping the marchers walk into roadways safely.

"If somebody says there isn't room for improvement, they're being naive," Yamaguchi said. "At the very least, all elected officials and representatives of the government should take this moment in time to take pause and reflect on where we've come, where we are now and how can we make it even better? The cities that are open-minded are the ones showing the best leadership."

Placentia's police budget is about 35% of the city's total, and Yamaguchi said that their officers are among the lower-compensated in the county.

Yet, despite having three gangs in Little Placentia, he said crime rates are low, which he attributes to their community policing, nonprofit groups and community centers that provide after school programs.

For those protesting, many of them youth interested in advocating for political change, Yamaguchi recommends nailing down

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COMMENTARY | ROXANNE VARZI

A MASK IN THE O.C. HAS BECOME AS HEATED AS THE VEIL IN IRAN

Walking down the sidewalk of my quiet university neighborhood in Irvine, a neighbor suddenly walks toward me.

I grab at the sides of the face mask dangling around my neck and pull it up as quickly as I can.

The tiny movement triggers a visceral reminder of hiking in Iran with my veil loosely wound around my neck and then pulling it up quickly to cover my hair the minute another hiker comes into view.

In both instances, there is a sense of urgency and danger. In Iran, the danger is that the friendly-looking hiker could be undercover morals police.

As I walk along an O.C. sidewalk during a pandemic, the danger is catching or spreading the novel coronavirus.

But here, I've had unmasked people either laugh at me — or worse, walk right up to me, getting in my face as an act of anti-mask aggression. All I can think about is just how much this present moment in the United States has in common with Iran.

As a young female anthropologist doing research in Iran, I had a lot of questions about what was curtailing my personal freedom, versus what was simply the visual force of political power.

Seeing is believing. Symbols, especially clothing, easily become hallmarks of a political stance, because they are so easily embodied by the citizens.



ROXANNE VARZI, right, hiking in Iran in the early 2000s. There, she often wore her veil around her neck, just as she now often wears her mask around her neck in public in O.C. in case she has to pull it up to cover her face at a moment's notice.

We see this now in the faces of protesters who use their masks to say what they want to scream — safely and responsibly. And herein lies the power of a piece of cloth; whether it's a mask or a hijab, it's how and where you wear it — and why.

Unveiling in Iran is considered anti-government, whereas in California, not

wearing a mask can be considered anti-governor and pro-Trump (who has himself refused to wear a face mask in public).

It's become such a heated topic in Orange County that the health commissioner Dr. Nichole Quick, having endured threats and backlash to her mask ordinance, an attempt to protect people, recently resigned from her job.

Last week, Orange County rescinded the mandatory mask mandate, though masks are still strongly recommended, and local groups continue to clash over the mask requirements.

On Thursday, Gov. Newsom issued a mandatory mask order, requiring all Californians to wear masks in public or in high-risk settings.

As I write about the commonalities of material culture, it's hard not to comment on the culture of violence by the state against citizens in both places.

Is police brutality in the United States any different from any other violent regime?

A mask means I can walk

where I want to and know that I have a protective barrier if I suddenly come upon a friend I want to talk to, or a crowd of often-unmasked, fearless teens whizzing by on bikes.

I also have a barrier between an older person who is at risk of serious complications or a bully who brazenly gets in my face to make a statement.

But it also sends a signal to all the frontline workers that I support them and their right not to get sick saving us.

And masks allow people to rally and chant more safely.

At the end of the day, the mask doesn't represent a lack of choice, but a good one. It's been recommended by public health experts for personal safety and not for political or religious reasons.

It's more than a symbol. Bound by politics and danger — and what we anthropologists call a social contract — what we wear is not immaterial.

Sometimes it's more than a political statement, it's a matter of life and death.

ROXANNE VARZI is the author of the award-winning "Last Scene Underground: An Ethnographic Novel of Iran (Stanford)." An artist, filmmaker, playwright and UC Irvine professor of anthropology, she held the first Fulbright to Iran since the revolution and was the youngest distinguished senior Iranian visiting fellow at St. Antony's College, Oxford University.

Protest Aid provides supplies and guidance to young organizers

BY BEN BRAZIL

Hector Zaldivar started the group Protest Aid to provide supplies and guidance to young protest organizers learning how to hold effective demonstrations.

The 18-year-old noticed that many of the organizers taking part in the national movement to eradicate racist police brutality were youth who had never taken part in protests before. He hopes that his group can help guide young organizers in their move to spur positive change in the country's law enforcement system.

"It gives me hope that eventually, it might not be tomorrow, next month, or a year, but eventually, yes we can change things,"



Kevin Chang | Staff Photographer

HECTOR ZALDIVAR, 18, of Cerritos, founded Protest Aid, a group that counsels young protesters on how to hold effective demonstrations and provides them with needed supplies.

Zaldivar said.

Zaldivar started Protest Aid about two weeks ago after attending his first march in Los Angeles,

The protest made an impression on him, so he bought tables, created a website and started showing up to protests all over Orange County. The group has about 60 volunteers now.

Nicole Nguyen of MEEP Shows, a group of teenagers who organized the Garden Grove Black Lives Matter protest earlier this month, said Protest Aid helped them with their march, which drew between 3,000 to 4,000 people.

Protest Aid is currently based in Orange County, though it plans to expand to neighboring counties, Zaldivar said.

Zaldivar has recruited five team leaders in the county. Most are experienced protesters in their

mid-20s.

The team leaders serve as mentors, providing advice and direction to young organizers on how to lead a protest without it getting out of hand.

"They just gathered people, and now there's 1,000 people at a park and they don't know how to manage everybody or peacekeep," Zaldivar said of some of the novice organizers who need help.

Zaldivar said his group helps bring organizers together, so instead of several smaller protests, organizers work together on bigger, more impactful protests.

The group also provides tables and supplies, including water, Tylenol, gauze and eye rinse.

The protests in Orange

County have been peaceful, but Zaldivar said the medical supplies are there in case there's violence.

"We haven't used these too often, but things like Tylenol are a big help for the elderly," Zaldivar said.

Zaldivar, who graduated from Cerritos' Gahr High School in 2019, said he's been able to focus on the protests because his job as a census worker was canceled due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Volunteering is also in Zaldivar's nature — he grew up working in food banks and helping with environmental cleanups.

"It's powerful to see people coming together for this," Zaldivar said.

benjamin.brazil@latimes.com
Twitter: @benbrazil

Tens of thousands sign petition to keep Disneyland closed until pandemic is under control

BY BEN BRAZIL

Tens of thousands have signed an online petition urging Disney executives to keep the Disneyland Resort closed until the COVID-19 pandemic is under control.

As of Friday afternoon, more than 23,000 people had signed the *Change.org* petition, which was started by an anonymous user called, "We Are Anonymous," after Disney announced this week that it would start a phased reopening of the resort in July.

"...Many people have lost loved ones due to this pandemic and by reopening the parks they are endangering cast members and guests to be exposed to COVID-19," the petition says.

"There are more cases now than when the parks closed on March 13th, 2020. Health Officials have stated that the 2nd wave of COVID-19 will be worse. So reopening before the 2nd wave even hits us is irresponsible and greedy.

"I understand everyone is rejoicing for the reopening of the parks but not during a pandemic where people are dying, now is not the time ... The solution would be to reschedule Disneyland to reopen the parks at a later date when cases of COVID-19 drop and Health

Officials state it is safer for everyone but to still practice social distancing."

The Downtown Disney shopping district is expected to reopen July 9, while Disneyland and California Adventure are expected to open July 17. Disney's Grand Californian Hotel & Spa and Disney's Paradise Pier Hotel will reopen on July 23, pending government approval. The Disneyland Hotel will open later.

When reached for comment about the petition over the phone, a Disney spokesperson pointed to a May 5 blog post by Disney Parks Chief Medical Officer Pam Hymel.

"In the meantime, our focus remains on the health and safety of the entire Disney community — including the well-being of the Cast Members who are caring for and securing our parks and resorts during the closure," Hymel said in the post. "We have already implemented a number of enhanced health and safety measures, such as increasing the frequency of cleaning and disinfection in work areas, adjusting practices to promote physical distancing, and providing Cast with access to necessary PPE, including face coverings. We continue to learn from these experiences and will carry these lessons into reopening and

"I don't think Disneyland reopening is an absolute catastrophe, but it's all in the execution. It won't be, verbatim, the Disneyland we knew last summer."

— **Andrew Noymer**
UC Irvine associate professor of Population Health and Disease Prevention Public Health

beyond."

Comments on the petition page referenced that it was too soon to open the park as the number of COVID-19 cases continue to climb in the county.

On Thursday, Orange County health officials reported 260 new coronavirus infections, the third-most new cases on any day in the county since the pandemic began. The three largest single-day increases have all occurred within the past week.

The cumulative case count as of Thursday was 7,987, with 3,726 of those



Kent Nishimura | Los Angeles Times

PEOPLE WALK TOWARD the entrance of Disneyland Park on March 13 in Anaheim.

individuals already recovered.

"It is much too early to open up a theme park," Christine Chung said. "Let's remember that a theme park is not essential! Disney prides itself on putting safety as a priority, yet here they are gambling not just their employees' and Cast Members' lives, but Guests' lives as well. Coronavirus cases are still on the rise and there hasn't been sufficient testing done. If Orange County residents are threatening and terrorizing health officials over a face mask, then they sure as hell aren't ready to go to a theme park with a face mask."

"We're still canceling graduation ceremonies and can't go to concerts but

we're supposed to be safer at a resort full of people from around the country (and around the world)?" Johnathan Mendoza said. "Would rather wait for a safe and proper reopening than a half-assed experience with no entertainment."

According to a Disneyland official, there will be mandatory face coverings for cast members and guests, a reduction of theme park capacity and all guests will undergo temperature screenings prior to entering Downtown Disney or a theme park. Cast members will be required to have daily health screenings and temperature checks.

Andrew Noymer, a UC Irvine associate professor of

Population Health and Disease Prevention Public Health, said Disneyland can reduce the risk of spreading the virus with these measures.

"I don't think Disneyland reopening is an absolute catastrophe, but it's all in the execution," Noymer said. "It won't be, verbatim, the Disneyland we knew last summer."

There are still risks even with these health and safety measures in place.

"Even assuming everyone masks, how do you eat cotton candy or a snow cone through a mask?" Noymer said. "There will be some unmasking, at least partly."

benjamin.brazil@latimes.com
Twitter: @benbrazil



Raul Roa | Staff Photographer

DEMONSTRATORS AT the Irvine protest June 13 urged people to sign a petition to vote Mayor Christina Shea out after she faced criticism for comments made about Black Lives Matter protests.

NOW

Continued from page R1

squares and go silent in solidarity with the Black Lives Matter movement, as an example.

He started the hashtag *#moneywhereyourmouthis*, encouraging his Instagram followers to donate at least \$10 to organizations supporting protesters, take a screenshot and tag people to participate.

Using his birthday cash, Saint-Jean started the campaign off by donating \$100 to the Atlanta Solidarity Fund, which helps bail out activists who are arrested during demonstrations.

Talia, a Beckman High School student who only gave her first name, didn't have money but still wanted to do something.

"I remember asking him, 'Do you have any suggestions? Because I don't have a job. I can't donate. Is it crazy to have a protest of our own?'" recalled the 15-year-old, who is white.

It took about a week to organize. They invited speakers from various schools across O.C., created Instagram posters and bought a megaphone.

Hundreds sat on the lawn of Irvine Civic Center on June 13 to listen to the lineup of speakers as cars honked in support, including a Weedmaps delivery van whose passenger held up a "Black Lives Matter" cardboard sign as it drove by protesters.

At Huntington Beach High School, 18-year-old Kara Tran-Wright, president of the school's Black Student Union, hosted a virtual meeting inviting students from other clubs to listen to students speak about the history of police brutality and how it connects to current events.

Teachers and community members were also welcomed to join.

"We needed a space to talk about what's going on and how we feel about it, especially as an upcoming generation," said Tran-Wright, who is Black and Chinese.

The next day, another student suggested they should continue to have meetings and organize a protest. A group of five students from multiple clubs collaborated, with the help of O.C. Human Relations, to hold the demonstration at Worthy Park on June 5, their last day of school.

"Our parents were wary about us going to a big protest at the pier because you see a lot of white supremacists there," said Tran-Wright. "It's unsafe."

Although she helped organize it, she didn't attend the protest because she has an immunocompromised family member and decided not to risk it.

Lauren Harvey, an 18-year-old student in Model United Nations and the young Democrats club, said "having a student-led protest was really important to us, because we really wanted to show that our high school, in particular, was behind the movement."

The protest was organized for Huntington Beach High School students only.

Harvey, who is white, attended the demonstration and estimates that a little more than 100 students and a few teachers showed up.

GROWING UP BLACK IN O.C.

"In general, seeing faces that look like you is a rare occurrence growing up Black in Orange County," Saint-Jean said.

He's entering his senior year in a few months, and so far he's never had a Black elementary, middle or high school teacher.

According to the California Department of Education, Beckman High School has two Black teachers, and Tustin Unified School District has 12 Black teachers.

He recalls being singled out for his race in games of tag, dealing with racist jokes, people touching his hair and being perceived as more violent during elementary school.

"The experience can be very upsetting and can make you feel like you have to be a smaller person," Saint-Jean said.

"That's another big part of why I'm [organizing]. I could have done this a long time ago, but so much of it was uncertainty about being too loud about our issues, too aggressive.

"I and a lot of other Black people don't care anymore. I simply do not have time or the energy to coddle the feelings of people around me while people are dying in the street."

At Huntington Beach High School, Tran-Wright hears "a lot of hate speech, a lot of the n-word being thrown around. You see kids with Confederate flags, students who behave similarly to white supremacists. You feel very unsafe walking on the street. You're not necessarily welcomed."

In a CDE report for the 2018-19 school year, Huntington Beach High School did not employ any Black teachers and only employed three throughout the city's public school district.

"I don't think I ever truly realized how bad it was in Huntington Beach until fairly recently when all the stuff about the Newport Harbor High School students [surrounding a table with Solo cups in the shape of a swastika] became a big deal," Harvey said.

The latest U.S. Census Bureau information reveals O.C.'s Black population remains at 2.1%.

Saint-Jean's mom, who initially immigrated from Haiti to Florida, remembers being pulled over a few months after moving to Irvine about 10 years ago.

She was driving a Mercedes-Benz 350 and, without asking for her name and driver's license, was accused of stealing the car. She recalled the police officer telling her that she needed to go back to where she came from — Los Angeles.

For the Saturday Irvine protest, his mom took the day off work to attend. She works two jobs as a nurse. His dad, who was politically active in Florida, and older sister, a UC Irvine student, also came to support him.

"Nothing has changed," Saint-Jean's dad said. "These kids are complaining about the same things. You mean to tell me they cannot find a Black person who is qualified to teach high school?"

WHAT'S NEXT?

The protests are stretching past Juneteenth, a holiday celebrating the end of

slavery in 1865. Teens are looking for ways to make the momentum of the demonstrations last.

Tran-Wright said the Huntington Beach group is in the middle of planning another event.

Saint-Jean has set his sights on creating a multi-school movement encouraging O.C. youth to educate themselves and others on Black history.

Behind-the-scenes, he reached out to students in Black Student Unions from multiple schools, including Orange County School of the Arts, Santa Ana High School, Northwood High School and University High School.

The students are collaborating on creating an action plan to present to the O.C. Board of Education. They are demanding diversity in teacher staffing and curriculum, transferring of funding for on-campus police to mental health resources and a better anti-discrimination policy with clear disciplinary action procedures.

At the same time, the Irvine protest speakers urged people to sign a petition to vote Mayor Christina Shea out after she faced criticism for comments made about Black Lives Matter protests.

Patriotic banners hang high on light poles near the Irvine Civic Center. They read "Land of the Free" and "Liberty and Justice," and below, the names of Black lives cut short at the hands of police are scrawled on the concrete in chalk. And they're already fading.

Out of three columns of names, Akai Gurley, Alton Sterling, Walter Scott, Eric Garner and Philando Castile are still readable, but Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Arbery and Tony McDade are no longer visible on the street.

Their names leave a legacy on the young minds of a generation so hungry for change. But it doesn't come without risks.

The youth-led nonprofit MEEP Shows, or "More Empowering Events Please," hosted one of the first protests in Orange County in Santa Ana and held a second in Garden Grove attracting thousands.

Since then, MEEP's Nicole Nguyen, who recently graduated from Garden Grove High School, was verbally harassed at work for helping organize the protests.

Nguyen said the man who approached her at work knew her full name, expressed hate messages and argued "All Lives Matter."

He left on his own, leaving her shocked and panicked. Her coworker reported it to the company's Human Resources, and now she wears a fake name tag and works with the company's security posted nearby.

"There's still a lot of untouched racism in Orange County despite how diverse it is," Nguyen said. "I feel like as a person of color, I and other teenagers should be standing in solidarity with Black lives. There are so many social issues to take into account."

vera.castenada@latimes.com
Twitter: @vera_fyd

YAMAGUCHI

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a unified message and drafting an action plan.

"Anyone can point out a problem," he said. "But it's the doers and thinkers that can come up with solutions and present them in a way that can work for public agencies."

For young Placentia locals, he recommends applying for the city's Recycle Teen Team, an annual program he participated in back in the mid 2000s when it first started.

The members advocate for environmental sustainability in the community, attend commission and committee meetings and learn about how City Hall works.

While his own journey in politics has been relatively smooth, he acknowledges that age discrimination is an issue in government.

"Republicans probably won't like me saying this, but the Republicans eat their own, especially in O.C.," Yamaguchi said. "And it's unfortunate that they don't have a more inclusive environment."

"I've been on the receiving end of that energy coming from the Republican Party both at state level and county level, and until they wake up and realize that, they're going to continue to see their numbers dwindle



Glenn Koenig | Los Angeles Times

IN 2008, Jeremy Yamaguchi, 19 at the time, greets attendees at a Placentia Chamber of Commerce event, after being elected to the Placentia City Council.

and their support stagnate."

He points to how difficult it is to get an endorsement as a Republican if you've ever voted for a tax increase or if you've ever taken money from unions. Yamaguchi himself recently voted for a tax increase in Placentia because he felt the city wasn't getting its fair share of revenue coming from online sales.

"In that process, they're in essence fighting conservatives and moderates from getting into office," he said.

He feels that his experience speaks for itself. At this point, he is the most tenured council member in Placentia.

And because Placentia recently voted to change their elections to voting by

district, the term limits have been reset. This means that while he would have been capped at three consecutive terms of office it's now possible for Yamaguchi to serve for another 12 years representing a specific district of Placentia.

Earlier in his political career, others encouraged him to run for higher office, and he even interned at a state senator's office.

But after much soul searching, and especially now that he has a 2-year-old daughter at home, he wants to stay in local politics.

"It's not everybody's cup of tea," Yamaguchi said. "It's definitely a labor of love."

ada.tseng@latimes.com
Twitter: @adatseng

TimesOC

A Times Community News publication serving Orange County

CONTACT US

Ada Tseng
Entertainment Editor
(714) 966-4635
ada.tseng@latimes.com

Raymond Arroyo
Advertising Director
(714) 966-4608
ray.arroyo@latimes.com

Online
timesoc.com
Social Media
@timesocofficial

Address

10540 Talbert Ave.,
Suite 300 West,
Fountain Valley, CA 92708

Business Office

(714) 966-4600

Newsroom

(714) 966-4699

Email

dailypilot@latimes.com

TCN Classifieds

800-234-4444

TCN Legal Phone

888-881-6181


TCN Legal Email

LALegal@tribune.com




COMPANY INFO

TimesOC is published Sundays by Times Community News, a division of the Los Angeles Times. Subscriptions are available only by subscribing to The Times, Orange County.

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1111 BAKER STREET UNIT B, COSTA MESA, CA 92626
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vera.castenada@latimes.com
Twitter: @vera_fyd



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