Youth: Our Views & Voices

Youth in 2016
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In a world filled with so much “stuff”, it can be hard to discover who you are and what you stand for. In 2016, whether talking about issues in social justice, politics or pop culture, teens say the biggest problem is their opinions aren’t valued or heard.

Here’s what teens had to say about social justice, politics and pop culture.

Social Justice

When it comes to social justice, teens say the biggest problem is not just a broken justice system, but a mindset that African American lives are valued less than others and their loss is not being addressed.

“It has come to a point where I’m not even surprised when I hear about another innocent black man shot by the police,” said Izzy Halloran, a junior at Red Bank.

Politics

Teenagers said the 2016 Presidential Election is the most interesting race they’ve ever seen.

On the Democratic side, Hillary Clinton is the Presidential nominee. If Clinton wins, she’d be the first women President in U.S. history! On the Republican side Donald Trump has been deemed the Republican nominee.

Even though Bernie Sanders is officially out of the race, he still received tons of support from young potential voters. The Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement determined Sanders acquired about 1.5 million young voters.

“Young people tend to be more liberal like Sanders. He talks about reducing loans and making college free,” said Imani Murphy, a

Pop Culture

One of the biggest influences on teenagers today is pop culture. From fame to wealth, celebrities seem to influence everything and everyone.

Celebrities like, Kim Kardashian, Taylor Swift and Beyonce are constantly in the news. Everything they do is a big deal.

“I feel Taylor constantly plays the victim. But I don’t agree with the actions taken by Kanye or Kim,” said Naomi Porter, a freshman at Montclair State University in NJ, referring to the Taylor Swift and Kanye feud over his song "Famous," in which he insulted her.

Teens said celebrities don’t always project the right image. Indeed, teens pointed out that celebrities are often known to encourage bad body image, drugs and alcohol, unhealthy relationships, and unrealistic images of perfection.

“It really depends on who and what you’re looking at,” said Murphy of Delaware Valley College.
Regional High School in Little Silver N.J. “We have become too accustomed to hearing about someone who was shot in a “misunderstanding” with the police.”
“I think what happened in Dallas and Baton Rouge is extremely sad and upsetting,” said Kate Neff, a junior at Red Bank Regional High School in Little Silver, NJ, referring to this summer’s killings of unarmed black men and subsequent killings of police officers. “This is proof that America needs to change,” she said. “The world needs less hate.”

sophomore at Delaware Valley College in Doylestown, Pa. “He has spent his life fighting for all the things that youth are fighting for as well.”

What Are We Not Asking?
From social justice to politics and pop culture, teenagers do have important and thoughtful opinions that shouldn’t be ignored. So, why aren’t the hard questions being directed to teenagers? If we have valid things to say, why are we so quickly brushed off? Does more time on this earth necessarily mean you’re wiser?