



Go Big Read

UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON COMMON BOOK PROGRAM

Suggested Discussion Questions for Dave Cullen's *Parkland*

Who do you think is the intended audience of *Parkland*, and why? How do you think the book would be different if it had been written by the students themselves, rather than a third party?

The conversation around media coverage of mass shootings starts with Columbine in 1999. By the Pulse Nightclub shooting in 2016, mass shootings had become common enough to take up much less media space. Media outlets would bring gun control issues into public discourse for 2 percent of their news stories for about 2 days (121). Despite this fact, media coverage of Parkland held steady at 2 percent for 2 months, with a peak at 4 percent 2 days after the shooting (121). How did March for Our Lives (MFOL) maintain media attention on gun control issues? How did social media interact with media coverage? What changed in media coverage throughout the immediate aftermath of the shooting, March for our Lives, School Walkouts, and #RoadtoChange Tour?

Within weeks of the shooting, plans for what would become the March for Our Lives began in earnest after smaller planned memorials and school walkouts proved to be well attended and impactful. How did the activists build upon the momentum created in these events to turn the March for Our Lives event into a movement? Why did they choose the events they did to make their statement? Why was this the first such organization to develop after a school shooting in the United States, despite the fact that school shootings are tragically common?

The students of Parkland used social media extensively to spread their message, from the first time Cameron used #neveragain (42) through regularly posting tweets that drew millions of impressions (176). What made their use of social media so successful, and what were the drawbacks? How did the newfound celebrity status of some of the students strengthen and/or complicate their social media strategies? How has social media changed activism?

Throughout the book, Cullen explores the different ways that Parkland students responded to the trauma they experienced. How did their responses vary? Cullen also discusses the “weird hierarchy of victimhood” (92) among both students and parents; why do you think this happens?

Though Parkland focuses primarily on the activism of students, Cullen also draws attention to adult activism targeted towards gun safety. How do the adult approaches to activism in the book differ from the way that the Parkland students approach activism? How did the parents support their children’s activism?

In the aftermath of Parkland, the MFOL students sought stronger gun reform legislation. At the same time, the National Rifle Association (NRA) was influencing legislation to weaken gun laws. Should any lobbying groups have the power to influence legislation to this extent? To what extent does money play into what actually gets legislated?

After the shooting, President Trump suggested arming teachers. The NRA supported Trump, but teachers pushed back, arguing that arming teachers was asking them to potentially kill their own students. How did school safety fit into the MFOL's gun reform agenda? Why didn't their agenda focus more on school safety?

In the Prologue, Cullen notes that "the Parkland kids talk passionately about mental health when asked, but it is not their cause" (11) despite the Parkland shooter's documented mental health issues. What role should mental health screening play in the process of purchasing guns and assault weapons? Why did the organizers choose to focus their efforts on gun legislation instead of mental health? How was their own mental health impacted as survivors?

The MFOL movement brought students together both in their activism and in their shared experiences with trauma. In healing from this trauma, some students found solace in their activism, which, as Dr. Alyse Ley says, serves as a way for students to regain some form of control over their lives and futures (213). Cullen mentions that activism can also function as a method of avoidance from dealing with fears (93). How did activism contribute to the students' collective healing or avoidance?

In the Epilogue, Alfonso reflects on his physical state after months of focusing on MFOL, saying "I had gained weight, I didn't shave for a while or cut my hair, I was wearing the same clothes... I was slipping in my grades, I had less energy, I slept in way more, working at the office more than doing homework, I looked like a shell of my former self" (304) Alfonso's experience is one of many, as the student activists found themselves overworked from devoting so much time to MFOL while still trying to maintain their grades and extracurricular activities. What internal and external factors made it so hard for many of the students to find balance? How did burnout affect MFOL as an organization? What needed to change to keep the organization moving forward with their mission?

The MFOL activists recognized that they were receiving heightened national attention largely because they were "privileged white kids" (101). How did they use their privilege to support their activism? How did meeting the Peace Warriors impact the MFOL organizers and the scope of the movement?

Tyah-Amoy Roberts, a Marjorie Stoneman Douglass (MSD) student, confronted David Hogg on Twitter for his comments about media "not giving black students a voice," saying, "This is not the first time you have called out racial disparity, but you have yet to take tangible action to change it with your classmates" (244). Roberts later held a press conference with other Black MSD

students to confront their lack of representation in the media and the movement. How did this series of events within the course of a week change MFOL? How did MFOL organizers respond to Roberts' criticism?

Despite many being too young to vote, MFOL organizers made voter registration a priority at every event bearing their name. Just days before their national march, MFOL organizers attended a two-day seminar to learn about "young Americans' attitudes towards politics" (186). Why did they take the time to attend this seminar, and what did they learn about the motivations of young voters? Why were the organizers focused on young voters?

With the 2018 elections approaching in a matter of months, MFOL decided to remain bipartisan and focus solely on gun reform and young voter turnout. Why did they choose to be bipartisan, and what barriers did they face as they worked to remain that way? How did the election shape the MFOL movement? What lasting impacts did the results of the election have on the movement and on individual members of MFOL?