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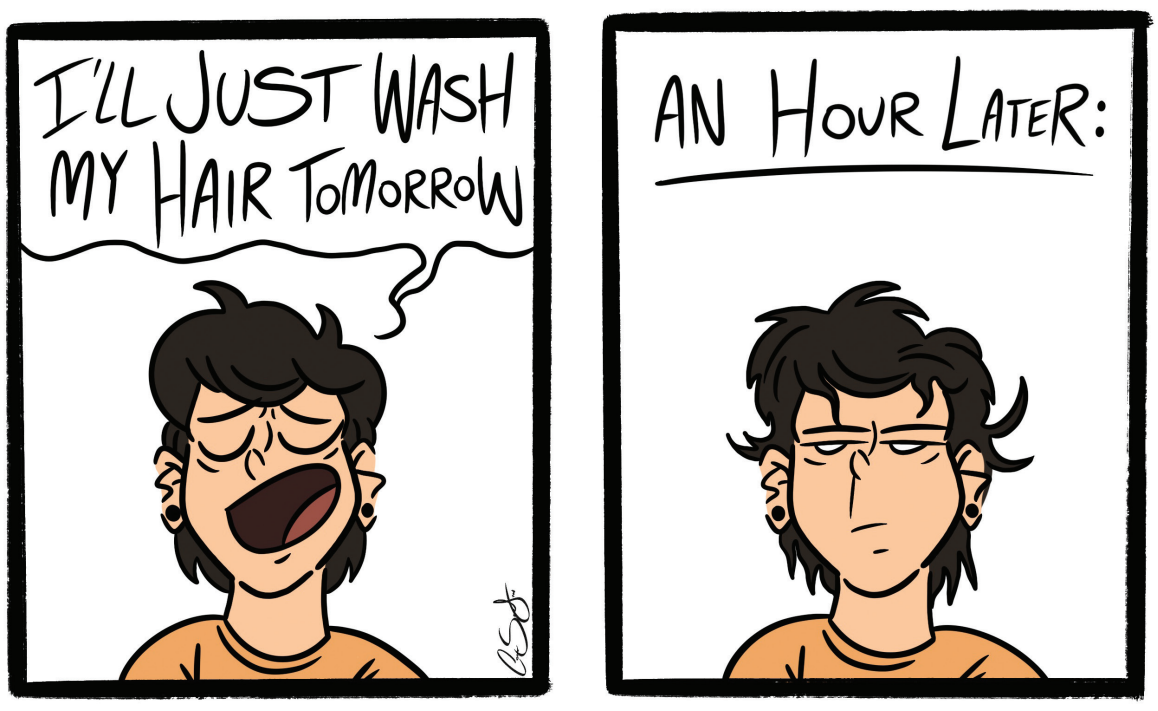
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Daily OPINION

STUDENT PROTESTS IN FRANCE: WHAT AMERICANS CAN LEARN

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"Education is a right, not a privilege."

"Too many inequalities, we're disgusted."

"Sorry to bother, it's for our future."

These are just a few of the slogans on signs held up by French students (known as lycéens) as part of the recent national protest movement shocking the French government. It's the biggest youth protest movement in decades and is in many ways like the events of May 1968 that rocked France's social landscape forever. However, there's one big difference: this time, it's high schoolers, not university students, leading the charge.

The protests began Sept. 21 at Saint-Exupéry High School in the Parisian suburb of Créteil. Teachers had been protesting a lack of resources and staff, and their pupils joined them. The strike ended when their demands were met, but the message rang true with other high schools across the country. The message spread "like wildfire", according to student leader Manès Nadel; as of Tuesday, October 6, two thousand high schools were blockaded or closed for the day. The Ministry of Education reported 250,000 demonstrators — some teachers and parents — took to the streets that day alone.

The protestors have five major demands: consistent replacements for absent teachers; improvement of school facility conditions; better organization of the school day; transparency around the national university application system, Parcoursup and a consistent open path to discussion between the government and French youth. Among these demands, extra attention is placed on teacher absences and the conditions of school facilities. Lycées in France have 250,000 more students than in 2008, yet a fewer number of teachers. In public schools, 70% of classrooms have over 30 pupils per class. On social media, videos are circulating of caved-in ceilings, broken toilets and peeling drywall; in the summer, poorly insulated schools (nearly all built before 1975) trap heat in non-air-conditioned classrooms. The issues with heat and insulation were especially apparent during this summer's deadly heatwave, where temperatures in Paris reached up to 40 degrees Celsius (104 degrees Fahrenheit) and over 8,000 people passed away due to heat-related deaths.

In short, high schoolers in France are protesting due to underfunded schools, teacher shortages and large class sizes that are an active detriment to their learning.

Sound familiar?

The very same issues French students are taking to the streets to fight against are pervasive in the American education system today.

Over 400,000 teaching positions in America are either not filled or filled by someone without the correct teaching credentials. In California, the most populous state in the US, class sizes are at an average of 27, with many high schools exceeding 30 students per class. Substitute teachers are also hard to come by. In my experience as a high schooler in Texas, we were often sent to gym class when our district could not find a sub.

COVID-19 and the introduction of AI to the educational landscape have made teachers' jobs that much harder. Among eight graders, 70% read below their grade level — the lowest number in history. These numbers continue to climb more sharply each year after COVID; students are, on average, over half a year behind their pre-COVID predecessors. Even in these changing landscapes, teachers are getting no extra help. One in five teachers in the US struggle financially and one in three have an extra job outside of education. If school districts and administration want improved literacy and graduation rates, they need to support the teachers who lead students to these outcomes.

The American education system chews us up and spits us out. As it stands, nobody can help each other; we are stuck in an endless cycle of apathy and cruelty from students and teachers alike. The protests in France should show Americans that it is possible to unite — students and teachers, adults and children — and demand change from our education system. By continuing to take a "school sucks" attitude, America is resigning itself to underpaid teachers, neglected students and an illiterate, undereducated populace.

Students, do not be afraid to bother. It's for your future.



High school students protest at Saint-Exupéry High School in the Parisian suburb of Créteil, France on Sept. 21, 2026. Teachers and their pupils had been protesting a lack of resources and school staff.

PHOTO COURTESY @NYTIMES ON INSTAGRAM

GIRL, UNINTERRUPTED: YOU ARE NOT JANE DOE

Content Warning: *The following article contains discussions of sexism, sexual assault, sexual violence against women and rape. Student survivors of sexual assault can receive crisis counseling and a free sexual assault forensics exam through Student Health and Wellness. SHaW's 24/7 Advice Nurse can be reached at 860-486-4700.*

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When I say "you are not Jane Doe," I don't mean it in a legal sense. Legally, of course, we are all "Jane Doe" — it's the generic name for women who are either unrecognizable or intentionally anonymous. The latter is the case for the victim of a gang rape, and the people I have an issue with are those exploiting her trauma.

On Sept. 14, a former Cornell student filed a lawsuit "alleging that she was gang raped after being coerced into consuming drugs by several men at the Chi Phi fraternity house at Cornell in 2024," according to The Cornell Daily Sun. The plaintiff identified only as Jane Doe.

After The Cornell Daily Sun broke the news of the lawsuit, news organizations from The New York Times to our own Daily Campus reported and commented on the case. By now, you likely know the details. Not only am I utterly enraged at the situation and Cornell University's inadequate punishments of the alleged rapists, I'm enraged at the response after the case began trending on social media.

First are the true crime influencers summing up the case. While social media allowed this case to reach wider audiences, it's time to back off. True crime is a generally exploitative industry capitalizing on and desensitizing us to horrific violence and trauma. This situation does not need to be told and retold by people with tiny microphones who only care about follower engagement. You don't need to proclaim "new developments" in the case to followers as if the sequel to a popular movie franchise has just released.

Aside from summaries, a common outcome of this case is a specific type of video that begins with the statement "I am Jane Doe". Please note that none of my criticism is directed at anyone using the phrase in reference to their own experiences with sexual harassment and assault, inspired by Jane Doe's case to come forward. The issue is the trend of people clickbaiting their audiences into thinking they're the plaintiff from the Cornell case, before admitting that they were deliberately misleading viewers to "protect" the real Jane Doe, should her identity leak.

I understand the sentiment of people wanting to flood the internet in the event that Jane Doe gets doxxed and offer her some protection. However, claiming someone else's trauma as your own is not helpful; it's incredibly insensitive. At the end of the day, these people are seeing gang-rape as an opportunity for self-promotion.

The final nail in the coffin is the cute graphics. Regardless of intentions, putting the words "I am Jane Doe" in pastel text over a deer-print pattern isn't doing anything to help anyone. You can't even say it's spreading awareness to the case, because you aren't providing any facts or directing people to resources. You just have a cute little graphic that won't mess with your aesthetic. People say that a picture is worth one thousand words, but this is not the time for that. Aestheticizing tragedy removes the rage we should be feeling.

Living with the physical and mental repercussions of sexual assault are painful enough. The entire internet talking about your trauma must be anything but conducive to healing. The attention being brought to Jane Doe's case has some benefits: The case has been reopened, she has a path to justice and other survivors have been inspired to share their stories. Regardless, Jane Doe intentionally remained anonymous. I can't help but wonder how she feels about so many people talking about a horrific experience she went through, especially given that she did not want to tie her name to the situation in the first place. It's difficult to cope with sexual assault, and it's even more difficult to be suddenly thrust into the spotlight as a figurehead for so many people who have gone through similar experiences, especially after wishing to remain anonymous. In speaking about this case, we must remember that this is not just a story; it's the experience of a real person with feelings. The lack of a name and face attached to this situation does not make the plaintiff any less human.

If you want to demonstrate care, you could be doing so many better things than reposting graphics or summing up the case for the millionth time. Add your own words and perspectives to the conversation. Donate to women's safety charities. Go out and protest.

A genuine, heartfelt statement of support will mean infinitely more than taking time to repost an image reducing tragedy to an aesthetic. This isn't just an excuse for us to come together and sing kumbaya and Radio-Rebel our way into protecting our fellow women. The fact of the matter is that a woman was drugged and gang-raped. We should be empathetic towards her and other survivors of sexual assault. We should also be enraged.



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