

Is Silence Violence?

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Examining a trending online statement

“Silence is violence” is a trending statement that has emerged across social media platforms in the wake of the recent “Black Lives Matter” protests. Short, catchy, and memorable thanks to its clever rhyme, the phrase has been a popular hashtag on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. The three-word sentence draws a clear line in the sand for its readers. Speak up on social media for “Black Lives Matter” (and, likely, future civil rights movements) or inadvertently side with oppressors.



A GROUP OF PROTESTORS CARRY A “SILENCE IS VIOLENCE” SIGN IN SEATTLE MARCH

Every person who has retweeted the “silence is violence” hashtag, or included it in their Instagram caption, has publicly declared that they will become a writer. Specifically, they will become a writer who is part of an ongoing conversation about meaningful,

and often polarizing, issues. The fact that they may only be a writer of short online statuses does not matter. As the “silence is violence” statement has proven, it takes only a few words to capture the attention of thousands.

What are the long term consequences of this decision to speak up publicly? A decision that’s been embraced by the majority of liberal-leaning youth?

There are a number of positive results that have been pointed out by those who agree with the sentiment behind the hashtag. Many have noted that Derek Chauvin, the officer who sat on George Floyd’s neck, was not arrested and charged until after a large amount of backlash from the public. Encouraging people to speak up for the issues they believe in has the potential to unite the masses for good.

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However, this hashtag, so black and white in nature, allows little wiggle room. Everyone who does not want to be seen as complicit in the oppression of marginalized groups is expected to suddenly become a writer. This includes minors and the uninformed.

Those who know little about a hot topic situation are still expected to immediately respond. There is little patience in our culture. Whereas people may be better prepared to write a thoughtful statement on a complex issue after researching it properly and discussing it with others, they may not be given the time to do so. If “silence is violence” is the trending hashtag for the

month, a week is considered much too long to go without a status update.

And teenagers' brains have not yet fully formed. As a society we recognize this. It's the reason that minors are not tried as adults when they commit crime and why they cannot legally consent to relationships. Yet, many in the public eye are being held on the hook for things they wrote on Twitter and Instagram at the age of fourteen. Those who belong to Generation Z are growing up in a world where they expected to create meaningful content on subjects they may not fully understand. At the same time, they are growing up in a culture where the words they write at a young age live forever. Their future social and professional lives could be potentially affected by well intentioned words that were not yet fully formed, much like their minds.

The way we, as readers, consume writing will have to change. Either we will have to be more forgiving and flexible with what we deem acceptable content, or we will have to rethink the statement "silence is violence." While there are many instances where being vocal through online writing can be beneficial, there are also times when "silence is golden."



A GRAFFITI TAG FEATURING THE POPULAR HASHTAG