

*A group of educators marched from Durham and North Raleigh to the State Capitol on June 14-15, 2016, asking to meet with governor. Fourteen members of Organize 2020 were arrested on June 15, 2016 after blocking a street when the governor chose not to meet with them. These teachers believe that our students deserve more. Here are their reflections on the 23-mile march, the rally at the legislature and Capitol, and their arrests for civil disobedience.*



**Red4EdNC**

## **We Were Arrested Together!**

**Turquoise LeJeune Parker, Durham Public Schools Teacher**  
**Donald Parker III, Chapel Hill-Carrboro City Schools Teacher**

**June 30, 2016**

WIFE: Whenever I realized the action we'd been talking about for months was going to take place on June 14th and 15th, well honestly, I was actually kind of excited. Donald and I are always sharing our big and small moments with our kids. We aren't stepping into something new. I mean, our students were guests at our wedding. So, we got up on that Tuesday morning, which was our 3-year wedding anniversary by the way, and set out to do what we always do: take care of our kids. We marched those grueling, boiling HOT and long 23 miles to the Capitol together.

HUSBAND: And man was it LONG! My feet still hurt actually but anything to support my wife and the children we teach. I was still kinda like, "DANG, why does this have to be on our anniversary though" lol. I carried that large tree branch, described by a writer as a small tree, from Durham to Raleigh not just to symbolize struggle but to show an even greater picture that if Jesus Christ can carry a cross for the sins of the world and defeat sin and death giving us access to eternal life, then I as an educator can carry some large tree branch for the burdens and struggles of our children to win over the governor, giving them access to a better, more funded education.

WIFE: It wasn't easy. At all. But WE MADE IT! We bonded with other educators those 23 miles. We grew to love, respect and appreciate so many people we'd never met before that 23-mile journey. As we turned the corner and the North Carolina Museum of History was on our right and the North Carolina Museum of Natural Science was on our left, we chanted and screamed our affirmations for the future of our public schools. After the "All In for Public Education" rally by the General Assembly, we turned around and set out to complete our mission. This time the North Carolina Museum of History was on our left, and the North Carolina Museum of Natural Science was on our right. I feel like I have walked through and protested loudly right in that same corridor a million times and boy does it get you hype. It's something about the buildings, the way sound works, being beside people fueled with passion and a strong desire to not quit until our babies get what they deserve! We took that left onto Edenton St screaming, then we took that right onto Wilmington St. shouting "We ready, we

coming” (that one gets me hype too). Ever since those days, when we drive near any part of our trek, we reminisce.

Just a few weeks before that, and a few days before that very moment, we held press conferences requesting a meeting with the governor. We are teachers after all, so we know how to meet! I was ready and prepared in my mind for what I would say in our meeting. Crystal Scales Rogers, Dawn Amy Wilson and Bryan Proffitt and I looked at each other and said, “It’s game time y’all.” When we turned onto Wilmington St., I saw the doors of the Capitol still open because it wasn’t 5 pm yet. When we turned towards that main entrance, the door was being shut. We called the Governor’s aide repeatedly, went around the Capitol, and knocked on all four doors, hoping for the best. At that last door, we decided that if our kids can’t get it...SHUT IT DOWN!

HUSBAND: To be completely honest, I sat myself down while they walked around the building knocking on the doors because my foot was killing me. Then I heard the police officers’ walkie talkies going crazy saying, “They are moving to the street.” Then I got up and started walking to the street, along with the educators who marched and people who supported educators, which totaled at least 100 people.

WIFE: After the police told everyone to move to the sidewalk, 14 of us North Carolina Public School teachers unlawfully and willfully stood in the 100 Block of E Morgan Street linked arms with signs in our hands that said: “I’D RATHER BE TEACHING” and we SHUT IT DOWN!

HUSBAND: At that time, I didn’t really know what was going on when I walked up, but all I saw was my wife in the middle of the street locking arms with other educators. I later found out that the teachers standing in the street already planned to do so. I wasn’t in those plans, but playing basketball, participating in band, and being in two fraternities taught me brotherhood and teamwork. I couldn’t let down NOW my teammates and brothers and sisters I walked with for 23 miles from Durham to Raleigh for our children, stand in the street without me. As a husband, there was also no way I was letting my wife get arrested without me either, while I sat on the sidelines, clapping, pulling out my phone to record and wave her on. Man, “I’m bout that action, boss.” Marshawn Lynch style. We doin’ this together.

WIFE: Locking arms in the middle of a very busy street and refusing to move wasn’t an easy move we made. It was scary actually, very scary until the interaction with the officer began; then it felt like we were definitely doing the right thing. When the police arrested Donald, that scared me because they put real handcuffs on him. They sat him in the police van alone. I had never imagined I would see my husband being taken away from me in handcuffs.

HUSBAND: They arrested me first. “You do know you are now under arrest?” said the officer in a very Southern voice. I slowly raised my head and with my shades on, stared into his eyes. Behind those shades were eyes of a black man whose heart was torn between two dissonant choices: one, calmly supporting his wife, educators locking arms, and the children of NC suffering at the hands of poor government; and two, rising up against the cops as a black man whose eyes are gouged and ears are punctured with hate from stories of innocent blacks’ interactions with law enforcement like Walter Scott, Sandra Bland, Tamir Rice, Eric Garner, and many more.

I hadn’t answered his question after about seven seconds of a silent stare, so he asked, “Are you going to resist arrest?” I responded “Yes,” but it was to his first question, and Alexa said,

“He means yes to your first question.” Once I answered that, I was not resisting arrest. I gave him my bookbag and he grabbed my right arm to put behind my back. Let me just say that as peaceful protesters with a crowd of people watching, the force he used to put my arms behind my back wasn’t aggressive, but it was still painful. I could only imagine the force and effort he would have used for someone not as peaceful or if alone with just officers. What made me feel isolated, segregated and discriminated against was that out of 14 teachers, the one black male teacher was the only person they used real cuffs on to arrest. Everyone else had zip cuffs. Man, those things were tight. I hated the metal sound they made and I felt for the first time in my life that I had no freedom. While walking to the police van, I had to remind myself that I wasn’t a criminal and that we just did something honorable. The policemen were not aggressive with us at all, so I walked with my head high with no shame. It’s crazy that as a black man, I go my entire life making sure I stay out of trouble that would involve the police and the one time I’m arrested, it displays one of the highest forms of altruism.

WIFE: In that moment, I began to squeeze Bryan and Leah’s hands even harder. It hurt me in a place I don’t know how to explain. Then everyone started screaming “We love you Donald! We see you Donald!” I could barely make those words out, but I thank God for hearing those words. As the police began picking the rest of us up, I cried even more. I cried because I heard Sendolo on the bullhorn saying one of Assata Shakur’s famous quotes:

*“It is our duty to fight for our freedom.  
It is our duty to win.  
We must love each other and support each other.  
We have nothing to lose but our chains.”*

HUSBAND: It was hard for me as a black man and a husband to be in handcuffs and see another man, a white male police officer, grab my wife. I hated it. Putting those zip cuffs on her, standing her up, etc. It pissed me off really. And this isn’t hate for another race or anything, it’s hate for corruption and for many years policemen have systematically exhibited corrupt ways towards blacks. That viewpoint doesn’t change because the cause is for our students; it’s just placed to the rear and came to the forefront as I sat detained in that police van hearing the crowd chant, “We Love You Turq.”

WIFE: But I couldn’t hear them saying “We Love you Turq.” It was like the world turned off for a few seconds. I could only hear the officer. I do, however, distinctly remember hearing Matt Hickson’s voice saying, “The Professors love you and are proud of you for this.” That made me smile and feel like this was right. Although extremely frightened about the care of my husband because of the horrible history of our men and women of color in police custody, I was so extremely proud of him. I was so happy to be taking such huge steps for our kids together. Weird, but I fell more in love with him that day. The police didn’t know we were husband and wife, but we got placed right beside each other in the police van, only separated by the plexiglass. I will never ever get the picture out of my mind looking at my husband through that glass in that police van. All for our students, our babies. They deserve more.

HUSBAND: I’ll never forget that either. The heat, the confinement, and seeing her without the freedom to touch was rough. Those real cuffs hurt too, man.

WIFE: What we did that day was for the children. What about the children? What about the babies? They were who I thought about the whole time. Who we all thought about. Who we all did this for. These children have dreams, emotions, needs and they are all being choked right

now by poor elected leaders. We walked in that street, formed that line, locked hands, and eventually sat down locking arms because our kids cannot take it anymore. It's easy to ignore this ridiculous and embarrassing situation happening in our state because it's "grown ups" making the decisions, but really, the kids are at the center. If we reminisce for any quick moment, we didn't get where we are as a country (even though we have so very far to go), by just standing on the sidelines and doing nothing about the basic needs and rights of our babies. We got where we are by brave men and women holding hands, singing, chanting, row by row, of what they believe to be a possibility for our country and for our future. And look, we're living in some of what they fought for. Their circumstances were not as gentle as ours. The police officers that dealt with us on June 15th, 2016, were kind and respectful. The police during demonstrations some time ago were disrespectful, disgraceful, and degrading to say the least. But those demonstrators didn't care. They realized that drastic situations call for drastic demonstrations. I've been in the classroom for going on six years, and in that short time, I have seen some things. No one can make me believe that what the 14 of us did that day was wrong. Nope, not at all. I'll tell you what's wrong:

-What's wrong is teachers having to set Go Fund Me after Donors Choose after Go Fund Me after Donors Choose just to get full sets of books, supplies, and classroom and school necessities.

-What's wrong is the achievement school district bill.

-What's wrong is the attempt to silence educators.

-What's wrong is elected officials taking personal deals to benefit themselves and throwing our kids under the bus.

-What's wrong is our kids not having enough!

On June 15th, 2016 I was ready for something beyond emails and sitting passively, I was over it. I am beyond tired of hearing the negative rhetoric around my school and schools like mine all across this great state and nation. The rhetoric says we are failing. NO! These elected officials are failing our public schools. My beloved school is NOT an F school. Mrs. Parker's Professors' classroom, as well as the many beautiful habitats of learning like mine, ARE NOT FAILING! We are doing the best we can for our babies with what we have. They deserve more. Remember when you were a child? Remember how much ambition, drive, excitement you had? Remember that someone invested in you? Someone told you you could be anything you wanted to be? If not for those who loved us and who cared enough to show us, where would we be today? How can we just leave our kids out to dry like this? Nope, I won't do it.

HUSBAND: Can you imagine for a second how frustrating it would be to not have a textbook to take home or the ones you take home are 10 years old or older, ripped, missing pages and are falling apart? Now, in a different context, imagine how frustrating it would be to use a computer from 10 years ago or a phone from 10 years ago? Not the easiest task. Dr. William P. Foster, the late great band director of the Florida A&M University, once said, "Why should we provide second class resources for students and expect first class results?"

My eyes in my mugshot are saying, "I can't believe all of this has happened to educators who just want to do their job efficiently for our children and we are punished if we fail to do so." Don't you think if things were the way Pat McCrory and his team are trying to make them out to be, teachers wouldn't have to lock arms in the street protesting? And what's most ironic, as someone said in the detention center, is that the people who are about following rules are the ones breaking them, not even for themselves but for students. Marching and protesting for the love of my wife and the many students in North Carolina was an honor and a privilege. Leading by

example is something I would gladly do again because I can. As Jesse Williams said at the B.E.T. Awards, "A system built to divide, impoverish, and destroy us cannot stand if we do." Stand for something or you'll float with or fall for anything. Stand for our children. Students deserve more.

#studentsdeservemore

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The public outpouring of love and support has been overwhelming. Our stories are being shared thousands and thousands of times over. People we don't know are donating to <http://www.organize2020.com/donate/>. People are joining us. Please share. Please join. Please donate. Please tell Governor Pat McCrory: [#StudentsDeserveMore](#).





