

Dear Mrs. Sylvanie,

I'm Iris Xue, an Asian American high school girl in a rural community where the crickets hum in the tranquil night and the automobiles glide past on a lazy day.

I live in 21st-century America, which may lead you to believe that my life could not be comparable in any measure to yours. However, my place in this world as a student of the next generation, eagerly anticipating *change*—specifically, the advancement of equal rights and opportunities for minorities like me—closely mirrors the accomplishments you strived for in the 20th century.

If you were still here with us today, I believe you'll find that we are truly farther along in our journey of promising constitutional rights and freedoms to the most inclusive community of Americans, a group that transcends differences in race, gender, sexual orientation, etc. Yet I believe our progress as a society is best reflected in the advancements we've made in the women's movement, which have essentially transformed America's societal norms for people of all genders.

One issue you dedicated your life to was equal opportunity for education for African Americans, and I am happy to report that education is more available to women and girls than ever before, extending far beyond special academies for women like the Peabody Normal School and Thomy Lafon school to integrated higher learning institutions. Ever since Title IX passed with the Education Amendments of 1972, the federal government has guaranteed the right to quality education without sex discrimination, allowing women and girls across the country to advance in all areas of study and contribute their knowledge and skills. Right now, I'm taking the highest-offered math classes at the Mississippi School for Mathematics and Science, fully accepted into an academic field where women were historically shunned. I cannot imagine my life without an avenue to higher education, especially since education is the window to empowerment and self-worth, key traits for young girls as they discover their strength to determine their own path in society.

In the realm of suffrage and politics, women gained the right to vote with the passage of the 19th Amendment on June 4, 1919, but women have established a larger stake in politics by winning seats in local, state, and federal government at increasingly high proportions. Though we still do not have a female president, women comprise 29% of House Representatives and 25% of Senators in the 2023 U.S. Congress. Whenever I see a woman elected to a position of power, I'm inspired to pursue a path of excellence and achievement for myself, regardless of society's expectations of me. This fact that women can excel in positions of power and deliver greater representation of women's issues is essential to our American democracy.

Unfortunately, as women have carved a larger sphere of influence for themselves in society, women face new issues, one of the most predominant being the denial of access to reproductive care. On June 24, 2022, the US Supreme Court overturned *Roe v. Wade*, a previous Supreme Court case that granted women the right to access abortions to terminate

their pregnancies. Though illegal abortions were carried out in your time, *Roe v. Wade* guaranteed safe, legal abortions. However, the overturning of the case has forced millions of women across America with unwanted pregnancies to suffer and face barriers to safe, affordable healthcare. Women of color, women like you and me, would face even greater obstacles due to inherent discrimination in society.

So, if women cannot be guaranteed equal rights by the federal government, what makes our modern America so different from the one that denied women the right to vote in the last century?

Though the world may seem like it has advanced into a more bottomless pit of chaos and controversy, I assure you that the fight for equal rights is still worthwhile. I believe the women's movement could never have advanced unless it expanded to encompass more issues, the issues of all women in America. These issues don't just include reproductive rights; they also cover immigration restriction, sexual harassment, and a wage gap that attempts to reinforce to women their inferior place in society.

Truly, there is always room for progress.

And in the spirit of progress, I hope the women of today can further your mission of advancement.

I hope you find us farther along in our movement than you ever expected.

After all, we face systemic issues in women's equality, yet *we are still advancing*.

Love,

Iris Xue