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6th Grade

“Fighting for Rights 101: The Loud, The Quiet, and Everything In Between”

A person raised in smoke never questions the smell of the ashes around them.

A person denied equality long enough might forget it was even promised. I'm growing up in a time when many national issues are happening, compounded by major global issues, when traditional journalism can't be trusted and every issue is polarizing, creating an Us vs. Them mentality.

While the trailblazers of the Civil Rights Movement are from generations ago, it feels like we're still experiencing some of the same issues again on an even more nuanced level.

The two main problems of our generation contradict each other: while some rights seem to be loudly removed, others are quietly removed through hushed legislation.

Our generation has lived through major global events; it can be hard to be concerned amid the constant barrage of information, especially when sometimes what we could do to impact change is out of our grasp. The obvious answer is that we speak up, but stakes feel higher than ever, since even speaking up can feel divisive.

In the past, being loud and taking a stand was effective: it got points across and swayed influence. But now, it's much more complicated. You don't know whether to be quiet and manage your beliefs exclusively with those who agree with you or risk sacrificing important relationships in your life because of opposing beliefs.

There are many ways to advocate and protest for a cause, but I have concluded that reinforcing your own cause is more effective than trying to tear others down. Some members of my extended family have convictions my parents oppose. Once, my father tried to confront one of them and we are now *no longer invited* to their get-togethers. I gathered from this that you can either debate with others' opposing beliefs or learn to work with them. You might not be able to change someone's beliefs, but you can spread and strengthen your own.

I myself have been fortunate to have not been directly mistreated or treated wrongfully because of someone's beliefs, however, I have observed it directly. With the recent local ICE raids, other schools began dropping out of our soccer season because of the fear of ICE taking students or their families, denying any available rights to them. It was unnerving, because of *course* we would want to protest loudly, but we also feared that this would make us susceptible to threats.

If I've learned anything from the young trailblazers of the Civil Rights Movement, it's that nonviolent resistance can lead the way toward equality. For example, Oretha Castle

Haley—a prominent member of CORE (Congress Of Racial Equality)—fought for rights through nonviolent protests, sit-ins, and songs to sing. People slowly but surely fought and won their rights. It didn't happen through big intemperate acts, so our best bet for the future is to follow that example.

My generation has lived (and seen) a lot of things in our short lives that have taught us a lot about the world and how to harness our voices to reach the biggest audience. We have a lot of knowledge on how the world works from a younger point of view. Watching how moral and immoral people work, predicting what might happen next and how to combat it using street-smart tactics, and even social media, is a path to people can use to help speak out.

Kids today are taking advantage of it. Students are walking out of schools and protesting about major issues to make change. Teens are leading youth-led organizations to fight and express long-term advocacy for a cause. They're posting educational content and persuading others to join campaigns and engage within their communities to help take care of problems.

Our generation may be the most prepared to tackle problems head-on as we age into adulthood, with the same vigor and energy that trailblazers had to have in the past.

Essentially, we have all the tools needed if we just put our minds to it.

As the philosopher (*not really*) Mick Jagger once said, "You can't always get what you want, but if you try sometimes, you might find, you get what you need." And for all the people born in the smoke, they find once they step outside that the sky was meant to be blue. Once we—everyone—find permanent ways to protect our civil rights, we will realize that we shouldn't have had to in the first place.