

Annica Hoover
The Willow School, New Orleans, LA
8th Grade

A topic like “the most important issues of your generation” is such a complex, difficult, and extremely broad thing to break down. There's almost too much to cover. But I think I know where to start. It may seem cliché or repetitive, but: hate. From racism to ignorance, it comes in so many shapes and forms. I would say that hate in of itself is where a vast majority of our problems as a society stem from. Not to mention the severe lack of empathy amongst my generation. It's almost laughable. Out-of-touch comments like, “It doesn't affect me, so why should I care?” baffle me; because, frankly, how could you not care? It is hard to make people who say things like that realize the privilege that they simply get to enjoy, meanwhile others have to fight for it. I will forever be an empathizer because I know that it is a privilege to even be at liberty to talk about these issues, and use my voice to do so, when many others can't.

I would say that other major issues also include how much my generation relies and depends on AI, and the chokehold it has on them. It's tiring to be around people who constantly have to use a robot for things that they could easily do themselves. The fact that it's begun taking more value over human creativity and innovation is scary. AI is ever-advancing, and it would be harmful to let it take any more control over our lives than it already has. It may not seem like a big deal to use AI for homework—maybe a couple math problems you don't understand, but then it becomes a repetitive cycle: you can't do your work without it. Your brain becomes fried and you start forgetting things from class that you'd otherwise know if you'd been keeping up with the homework yourself instead of continuously using AI to do it for you. I'm not completely against AI, I just think that it should be used as a tool rather than a fix for everything.

I personally have never taken direct action to support a cause for equal rights; if you mean doing things like protesting and donating, which are not necessarily realistic for me to accomplish as a minor. However, I can use my voice in other ways. People always ask me, “Why are you always talking about politics?” And frankly, I never know how to respond. As people get older, and they keep repeating the same things like, “I don't do politics,” they become a bigger part of the problem. I will always tell people that not being involved in or talking about issues has less to do with being a minor, and everything to do with standing up for what's right. You can't just avoid the “conflict” forever, because in the end, how can we truly move past them if there are still people that are willing to stay silent? That are unknowingly pandering towards the status quo? Simply educating people and being educated yourself is enough to make a difference if you continue to do so.

I'm so enthusiastic about battling inequality and fighting for what's right because, as an African American, I have experienced inequality firsthand. I'm talking about encounters with people who will look at you funny when you talk about how Black people are systemically oppressed, or who will blatantly say “that never happened” when you talk

about your experience: people who are so “comfortable” around you that they think it’s ok to start dropping slurs that they are not at liberty to say. Experiences like these have molded the person I am today: from my beliefs to the ways I fight for them. I think that the best way to advocate for better treatment is to take it on ourselves: to demand it. We need to start calling out, correcting, and educating people. The system will never change from soft-launching our hatred for inequality.

I would define freedom as everyone being free: not just the people that society deems “acceptable” to be. People claim that America is supposedly the “land of the free,” and while we do enjoy that privilege to a certain extent, when you really do a deep dive into it, many people are actually still oppressed, ostracized, and not as free as we like to think. I think that we are more free today than during the Civil Rights Movement: but we must keep fighting just the same.