

How effective are corrective steps such as affirmative action, police reform, reparations, and replacing Confederate symbols like statues and place names?

As a young white woman growing up in a white supremacist patriarchy, I get glimpses of how the system is built both for and against me. And to me, this comes with the responsibility to use the ways I've been advantaged as a means to uplift marginalized voices. A life of privilege is meaningless if it relies on the denial of humanity in others.

My drive to fight for those around me showed up when we elected a bigot as president. I watched, nestled between my mom and sister as our nation's fate was decided. Then as our faces glowed red in the light of the screen, I faced a reckoning with devastation. Fast forward to January 21st, 2017, and I was marching. I marched for a world where my sister's body isn't controlled by men sextuple her age and where my mom doesn't fear walking home at night. My drive to fight showed up when gun laws failed to keep students safe. It was Valentine's day, 2018, when I learned of the shooting, a day meant to celebrate love, smeared with tragedy. Then, I was standing up from my desk and walking out the double doors to scream "enough is enough" for those who will never get to scream again. My drive to fight showed up when our country proved incapable of affirming that Black lives matter. I was unpacking dirty socks, buried deep in my suitcase from a trip to Minneapolis, when I learned that the city I'd found solace in days earlier just watched as George Floyd was murdered. Then, I was in the streets with Portland, glaring up at the (In)Justice Center, raising my fist into the night. Injustice will never be scarce, but neither will my passion for justice.

Following times of unrest like these, in the face of injustice plastered across headlines, society at large is forced to confront the truths so many experience from the moment they wake in the morning. There are fireworks of change, explosions of anger where people finally stand up. Streets fill with bodies and social media feeds overflow with an outcry for action. Woodrow Wilson is acknowledged for the white supremacist sympathizer president he was, the Portland Police Bureau's budget is shaved, the city makes a commitment to do better. But fireworks aren't permanent. In the end, Andre Dupree Payton, Kendra James, Quiance Hayes, Tete Gulley, and so many others have failed to receive justice. In the end, Portland is still a danger to Black lives. In the end, systemic racism persists.

As people, white in particular, discover that change isn't something that happens overnight, their advocacy often dissipates. As the socially acceptable standard of social activism returns to its plummeted state, people stop fighting. Once dismantling inequity begins to subtract from the privilege of those benefited, it becomes exceedingly less attractive.

Corrections such as affirmative action, reform, and reparations are effective to some degree, but they aren't a solution. They are steps in the right direction, largely because they call attention to

the greater issue at play. They spark conversations and begin to foster a different culture surrounding equity and inclusion. They encourage white people to question the long-held systems in place. And they certainly pave the way to abolition. But what they don't do is fix the real problem. It's impossible to rectify a broken system by mending small cracks. Eventually, the entire system needs to be rebuilt.

Police brutality, racist public officers, and the host of other ways America harms people of color are symptoms—not causes—of the white supremacy embedded in our society. The United States was built for the white cis-gendered male, and these roots penetrate deeper than most white people choose to acknowledge.

Every construct in America upholds white supremacy in some way. Capitalism is steeped in a biased Eurocentric orientation and higher education is used as a racist gatekeeper to a conventional esteem of success. Gentrification and urbanization are used as means of exclusion, and the current state of immigration policy protects the construct of whiteness. The current medical system and trust in certain voices has long been manipulated to the advantage of white people and the reciprocal detriment of BIPOC. The injustice that has been unraveling for over 500 years is exactly what America was built to do. Oppression is inherently protected and uplifted by the systems in place. Thus, it's evident that without interrupting the societal function as a whole, lasting change will never occur.

The juxtaposition of affirmative action with abolitionism is a concept I have considered thoroughly with the aspiration of moving towards a law career. When I dream of my future, I see myself fighting against systemic racism; demanding space for LGBTQ+ voices; saving the planet. I'd like to think this will be possible through the legal system. I'd like to think that as an attorney, I will be empowered to recognize the pillars in the law that uphold injustice and have the authority to knock them down. But is this truly possible? Is there any way to wholly create change from the inside out? Or is starting over our only hope?