



DIFFERENT FORMS OF ACTIVISM OP-ED

When we think of activism, we often conjure up mental images of marching in the streets, holding up huge signs with catchy, political slogans, chanting and singing about our political strife. We're reminded of the backlash these marchers face – getting tear gassed by police officers, having water hoses and huge dogs attacking protesters, people getting arrested displaying their political views. Events such as the Civil Rights Movement, the Stonewall Riot, Anti-Apartheid Movements, Women's Liberation Movements, Anti-War Efforts, and the Ferguson Riot remind us of times when strong activism and advocacy were needed for liberation. We have many activists to look up to, like Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., Angela Davis, Ruby Doris Smith, Nelson Mandela, Marsha P. Johnson.. These are people who put their lives at risks to stand in the front lines of political unrest and demand freedom from the matrix of oppression that still plagues us today. They are revered for their work and lifelong commitment to liberation efforts, as they should be.

But, while we praise these activists, we often forget those who operate in underground and unconventional ways, such as through writing, painting, or even passing out flyers and sending emails. We forget that people like Langston Hughes, Jean-Michel Basquiat, and Nina Simone, were also activists. And they didn't need to march to the capital or give great, big political speeches to advocate for liberation. They spoke through their poems, their paintings, their songs.

We live in an era where all our thoughts and views are posted on social media. If we're upset that *Roe v. Wade* is now under siege under the Trump Administration, we can tweet about it or post a short video about it on Instagram. And for many, that's as far as activism goes. We're simply too busy to march for our cause. We have jobs, school, children. Lobbying to our state representatives is simply not on our schedule. We may look up to those who are taking a stand now and think "Wow. Those people are so brave." But it doesn't just take bravery to be an activist. Activism isn't just marching to protest the Dakota Access Pipeline or standing in line for three hours just to get five minutes with a representative to convince them of why they shouldn't vote for policies that make it more difficult for sex workers to make an honest living. Activism is also refusing to buy from corporation that steal work and creativity from queer, black business owners. It's donating to Bennett College so that they don't lose their accreditation as an HBCU. Activism is creating a literary journal like *Fire!!* where black writers can talk about the woes of colorism and queerphobia.

By definition, activism is the policy or action of using vigorous campaigning to bring about political or social change. To campaign is to work in an organized and active way toward a political or social goal. Any time we do that, we are doing activism. Does that necessarily mean that all our names will be in history books one day? Of course not. But that's not what activism is about. Think about it this way, did every person who work in the Civil Rights Movement get a plaque, award, or certificate? No! But there were hundreds of people who did extremely important work. For example, in order for the Montgomery Bus Boycott to work, hundreds of everyday women came home from work and made numerous phone calls to plan the boycott. They arranged methods of carpooling so that as many people as possible could participate in the boycott and still make it to work and pick their children up from school. We hardly know any these women's names, and yet they are still activists because they worked to achieve a political goal. We don't have to work in political offices or lead groups of organizers to advocate for a cause. We just have to be present and give our time and talents when we can. If we find a passion in fantasy novels, we can write great works like Toni Morrison's *Beloved* to write about the effects of slavery while still incorporating suspension of belief. If we like graphic design, we can create flyers, websites, or stickers for groups, upcoming events, or movements that are seeking to change the social climate of our societies. If we're good at economics, we can host fundraisers for local activist groups. Activism exists on a spectrum of creativity and everyone has a place.

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