

Dear Mrs. Williams,

When I read about your life, your accomplishments took my breath away. You started the Phillis Wheatly Club; you campaigned for African American women's right to vote; you were a school principal for decades; you helped create a nursing school, a day care and kindergarten center, a clinic, and a playground for African American children. These extraordinary accomplishments would be hard enough for anyone, but you experienced immense discrimination and hardship as an African American woman while pursuing your goals. I cannot begin to imagine how hard it was to endure such exceedingly difficult hardships and still press on.

Perhaps there were times when you doubted if the work you were doing was worth it, or if things would ever change for women and African Americans. Surely there were times when it seemed like they would not. But things have changed. You lived to see the passage of the nineteenth amendment, granting women the right to vote. You also saw women start to be elected to Congress. But so much progress has been made since then that you would not recognize America today.

Racial discrimination is illegal. Our schools and hospitals and parks and other public places are integrated. Congress today has broken records for how diverse it is. Kamala Harris, our current vice president, is not just the first woman to be elected to that office, but also the first African American and South Asian. It didn't just happen, of course. Over the last hundred years, people have fought hard for the rights of women and minorities. In school, we learn about people like Martin Luther King, Rosa Parks, Malcom X, and others who led the movement for Civil Rights of African Americans in the 1950s and 60s. You don't know those names, but Americans today learn them starting in kindergarten. The America I live in today is very different from the America you lived in. We still have a long way to go in so many areas, but if you saw America today, I hope you would be proud of how far we have come.

America has progressed dramatically since you were alive. But this does not mean that there are no problems in America today. The problems America faces are great. Our technology has advanced rapidly, and to a level that you would not be able to imagine. It has given us the ability to work, socialize, learn, shop, and play without ever leaving our homes. This can be good, but it has also isolated us, and drawn us apart instead of together. People are depressed. There are high numbers of deaths of despair. Our public discourse has become increasingly extreme. We are also facing a crisis with the environment, because we have not treated the earth well. And the problems you faced in your lifetime, such as war, violence, and injustice, have not gone away. But in the midst of all these problems, I regret to say, there is apathy.

And this apathy is everywhere. It can be seen in politics, in education, and in the way people relate to each other. But perhaps most disturbing is that it is in my own generation. We complain about problems because we cannot be bothered to solve them. We cannot be bothered to make conversation, so we hide behind our technological devices instead. We cheat on assignments because we can't be bothered to do them honestly. And we say, "I don't care", because caring about things is not popular.

But change isn't made by those who do not care. Because inspirational people like you cared enough to fight for change, our country is a better place. I believe that we are farther on than we were in your lifetime. But without my generation standing up to fight for the change that we still need, we might just fall behind. We should take inspiration from the people who fought to give us the rights and freedoms we enjoy today. We should care enough to take action. My generation is the future of America. If we don't care, who will?

Amy Fannin