So you want to talk about race

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How can I talk about affirmative action?

"JOMA, IT'S TIME FOR YOU TO STEP OUTSIDE NOW."

I quietly grabbed my pencil and folder and walked out the door while the rest of my first-grade class watched.

In the hallway stood a teacher's aide, next to two tiny desks. In my memory the hallway was dark and foreboding, but I think now that any empty school hallway seems dark and foreboding to a small child regardless of lighting. From a classroom a few doors away, a brown boy exited into the hallway and sat at his desk, and I took a seat in mine. The teacher's aide did not seem like a real teacher to me, she seemed like a big kid. Looking back on it, I think she was probably a college student. She was friendly and cheerful, but I resented her anyway. I didn't like being in this dark hallway, away from my class. I didn't like how much more it set me apart from my peers.

"How's your book report coming, Joma?" she asked, her smile unrecognizing of my seven-year-old anger. I quickly shook off my resentment and launched into excited ramblings about my favorite subject: books.

We had moved to this neighborhood a few months earlier. We couldn't afford our apartment in our old suburb, even without a phone or electricity after both had been shut off due to nonpayment. And even though we had to sneak into the "show" apartment down the hall at night to boil water for ramen and to shower (after a sympathetic manager had given my mom a key), I loved our neighborhood and my school. My teachers were excited

by my aptitude and love of learning and had talked with my mom about moving me ahead a grade or putting me in an advanced program.

But even my seven-year-old self could see that my mom was struggling to make ends meet. We had roommates for a while, another single mom and her two young children, and the six of us were doing okay in the three-bedroom apartment. But my mom had come home one day and caught her roommate beating her five-year-old son in the head with a plastic baseball bat, and after the dust settled and the cops had left, it was just the three of us again. And we were no longer able to get by.

When my mom became eligible for family housing near the university she was attending, she jumped at the chance, and we moved to converted army barracks in the city. I said goodbye to my friends and my teachers and started at a new school, in a new neighborhood where I definitely didn't belong. The school that I moved to was very diverse and very poor. Many of the kids in class were also kids who, like us, depended on government assistance for most of our food and the community garden for the rest. Many of the kids seemed older than me—not in physical age, but in life lived. They wandered our neighborhood with a freedom and abandon that I knew my mom would never grant me. They hung out with older siblings and told stories of fights they'd seen, and some they'd even joined in on. I had never seen a fight, except for the seconds I'd seen of my mom's interaction with her roommate months earlier before she told us to go to the neighbor's apartment and wait for her to come get us. I didn't know the jokes, the games, or the slang of these kids. I felt like I'd moved to another country, and not simply another city.

Most of the kids that I remember in my school were latchkey kids, their own responsibility while their parents worked multiple jobs just to get by. I remember the distinct difference in parental involvement in education at that school compared to my old school—in that it just didn't exist at my new school. Parents were too busy trying to put food on the table, and so all educational needs were left, by necessity not choice, to an extremely underfunded school.

My mom had more time than most parents at my school, not because she had more money, but because she was a student and her schedule allowed for an hour or two between classes to volunteer at my class when she could. My mom believed that education was our only way out of the poverty we

knew and had spent the last twelve years working toward her bachelor's degree whenever she could scrape together enough money, loans, and time to attend classes. She pestered my new teachers into doing whatever they could to nurture the talent I showed. And so, a few times a week, I was sent to the hallway to read and write with the other kid identified as "gifted." This was the best they could do.

My brother Aham, a very talented kid in his own right, did not fare so well. His emotionality and energy had been misinterpreted in the same way it is for many young black boys—as aggression and lack of intelligence. One teacher, who had given up on my brother altogether, told my mom that she thought Aham had "cotton between his ears." When the school refused to move her son to a different classroom, my mom became a regular volunteer in the class, sitting in the back of the room and staring at the teacher, to ensure that she treated my brother with at least feigned kindness.

As the years went by and we moved from neighborhood to neighborhood and school to school, as financial woes drove us out with each rent increase, my school record followed. My quiet demeanor and love of books had me singled out as "different" from the other black kids and each teacher treated me as a sort of unicorn, trying to preserve what they saw in me as "rare." For my brother, his reputation as a troubled black boy also followed him from school to school and class to class.

One day, in fifth grade, two girls I knew from my brother's class ran up to me.

"Your brother's homeless!" they shouted, giggling, before running away again.

I had no idea what they were talking about, but I quickly forgot the exchange altogether.

A few days later, we were heading to assembly in the school gymnasium when my class line crossed paths with Aham's class line.

"Hi!" Aham eagerly shouted at me and I raised my hand and waved.

"Homeless! Homeless!" a few kids shouted at him and my brother's face clouded in shame. He blinked back tears. Before I could say anything, they had passed me by.

After a few days, I was able to get a girl in Aham's class to explain what was happening. Their teacher had set up a unique system of reward and punishment in the classroom. She had printed out fake money for the class

and gave them each a few dollars to start. If you were attentive in class, you were given money. If you turned your homework in, you got money, and so on. And if you spoke out of turn, you lost money. If you forgot your homework, you lost money. If your desk was messy, you lost money. If, at the end of the week, you had leftover money, you could use it to buy treats or stickers or other small gifts. But there was a catch.

You had to pay rent first. On your desk.

My brother had already been singled out as a difficult kid, and the teacher was taking money from him before he could make it. And his upset over losing money would cause him to act out and lose more. So while every Friday students would eagerly line up to pick out their piece of candy, my brother would sit.

On the floor. Because he was homeless. He couldn't afford rent on his desk.

The days spread to weeks and the weeks spread to months and my brother became known as "the homeless kid." It was a taunt that followed him everywhere, eating into his soul. I do not think that his teacher knew that we had, in fact, been actually homeless at times. But how she could miss the impact that this new homelessness was having upon a little boy, I'll never know. By the end of the year, my energetic, sensitive brother became permanently sad and anxious. He didn't make a single friend for years.

My brother and I went on our separate paths through the rest of our school years. I went on to take early college courses. Aham dropped out of high school, his daily panic attacks making social interaction impossible, and we could not afford to get him help. The only thing that kept my brother alive was music. And after he dropped out of high school and the prejudgment of teachers was gone, Aham was easily able to pass his test for his GED. And he then successfully interviewed for and received a scholarship to music school. Without music, he would have been lost.

I got married at twenty and had my firstborn son, Malcolm, shortly after. But the marriage was unhealthy and at times abusive, and I had to get out. By the time I was twenty-two, I was a single parent. I had never forgotten my mom's dedication to education. After a few years of struggling in entry-level customer service work, knowing that I only had one option to escape the poverty that she'd had to raise us in, I moved my son and me ninety

miles away, and went to college.

I had no family money to help pay for college, but the early nurturing of my teachers had left me with a strong enough academic record for admission, and outside of a few grants, I was able to pay for the bulk of my tuition in loans that I was not sure that I'd ever be able to pay back.

Over the next few years I fought my way to a degree, enduring many a sleepless night as I balanced school, work, and being the sole caretaker of a young boy. I remember feeling so tired, and so alone. I remember looking at my student loan balance with dread, and looking with jealousy and resentment at my classmates whose parents had at least been able to offer some help. I remember wishing that I, too, could crash for a few days after finals week, instead of waking up the next morning to take my son to the bus. I was always the only black person in my classes, and my entire time in the university I only encountered one black professor. I was constantly translating my opinions to a class that did not understand the political viewpoints of a black woman who had lived a life they would never know. I remember having no friends. I also remember knowing that I couldn't fuck up. Not once. I couldn't change my major, couldn't fail a class. But I loved school, and despite the challenges, I flourished in college in my own solitary way, just as I had in elementary school. And in 2007 I received my bachelor's degree, the day after my son graduated from kindergarten.

After graduation, I was engaged to be married and pregnant with my second child. I quickly found work, from a college referral program, with a telecom company. The work had less than nothing to do with my degree in political science, but it was a job, and because I had a degree—any degree—and because the college referral program set me up with phone interviews where nobody could see my black skin and pregnant belly, I was able to ask for a living wage.

I was, at twenty-five, still the same child who had been told every day that she was different and special. Knowing that, I dove into my new career with gusto. I volunteered for special projects, worked unpaid overtime to learn new skills, found new ways to save the company money. I applied for a promotion and interviewed well. A manager came by my desk one day, "Congratulations," he said, "They announced it in the manager's meeting today. You're moving on to better things." I was ecstatic, this was my first promotion. Word quickly spread as another manager stopped by my desk to

loudly congratulate me, and while some people were happy for me, others were not.

The next day I was pulled into my manager's office. He looked pained.

"There's been some rumor that you've gotten the promotion you applied for. I apologize for any mention of that getting to you, because unfortunately it's not true. I don't know how this misinformation got to you, but I'm sorry."

"I was told by two separate managers that they'd been told by you," I said, tears welling up in my eyes.

"That's simply not true," replied my manager and reiterated, "I'm sorry. You're talented and your time will come."

I had been lied to. Something had happened to my promotion, but there was nothing I could do. I was crushed for a few days, but I recovered and kept working. A few months later, another opening came up in the department I had interviewed for earlier. I interviewed and was formally offered the position.

When I arrived at the new department, I was told by a teammate that they'd all expected me sooner, but when word of my first supposed promotion got out, a white woman who had also applied complained and said that because I hadn't been at the company as long as she had, it was obvious that I had been promoted because I was black. She had threatened to sue, so the promotion went to her instead.

That insinuation that I'd been promoted because of my skin color stuck, even though I was one of only about five people of color in my entire department. I had the highest stats, stayed late almost every night even though I had two kids at home, and took on any extra projects available to me. And yet, the grumbling and rumors persisted: I didn't deserve any of my accolades or promotions. Along with the resentment of my race, there was the sexual harassment that came from being a woman in a primarily male department. I'd be asked to split a lunch only to find out that I'd somehow agreed to a date. Unwanted gifts were left on my desk. Suggestive "jokes" were made about my body. I remember one senior engineer leaning over my desk to tell me how many women he'd slept with over the years, then he paused and looked at my pregnant belly and asked, "So, are you going to deliver vaginally?"

Even with the unpleasant environment, I still did better than other

people of color in the department. My teammate Terrence, who had trained me when I was first promoted onto the team, had been with the company about three years longer than I had. He was a hard-working black man, with a wife and three kids at home. One day I showed up to work and his usually cheerful demeanor was gone. In fact, he looked like he was going to have to cry. During break, I asked him what was wrong.

"Between you and me, I think I'm going to have to quit," he said.

He explained that he had been offered another job at a rival company. He didn't want to leave, but his family really needed the increase in pay that had been offered. He had told our manager about his predicament, and our manager and director had agreed to match the hourly wage that the competitor had offered. Terrence turned down the job with the competitor, happy to stay at the company that he'd been with for years.

But that morning, our director and manager had sat him down and said that they were not, in fact, able to give him the raise they had promised. They said that because he didn't have a college degree, Terrence was not eligible for that pay level, and it had not been approved by senior management. He was offered an increase of $1 an hour instead of the $5 an hour promised in the offer he'd just declined.

When Terrence told me how much he was currently making and what was offered, I was aghast. Even with the raise, it was less than I had made on my first day of work at the company, and even further behind what other team members made, all except for a Latinx mother of five, who we discovered was making even less than Terrence—barely over minimum wage for the complex technical work we did.

I left that company shortly after. I could not work at a place that I didn't trust, a place where employees of color felt exploited and unappreciated, and I was lucky to have options with other companies. On my last day, I sat with an HR manager for my exit interview. One of the first questions she asked me was, "Do you think you deserved your promotions?" After I left that interview, a manager from a neighboring team came up to me and asked, plainly and without shame, "Are you leaving because of all of the times that I sexually harassed you?"

My next job was at a much more progressive company, but still, my identity as a black woman was always an issue. In five years, I only worked for one manager of color. When I was promoted out of that team, the first

thing my new white boss did was ask if my hair was real. While my work was respected, socially I struggled. The "bright" and "energetic" reputation that I had always had was soon augmented with "loud" and "opinionated." One teammate came up to me and said, "I'm surprised how much I like you, I'd heard you were a really strong woman."

I wasn't the only black person who had somehow been labeled overly aggressive at the office, as was hinted at the few times when I was alone with the handful of other black people in my division. The company started an annual employee satisfaction survey and every year senior management would gather us all together and go over the results. The surveys were a big deal, with reminders going out daily until there was as close to a 100 percent completion rate as possible. A few of the questions had to do with the company's diversity efforts. Something like, do people of color feel like they have equal opportunity with their peers? The survey results read a pretty resounding "no."

In our meeting to discuss the survey, all the other questions had been delved into with talk of how the company was working to either address lagging performance, or further encourage strong performance. But not when this question showed up on the projector. The director presenting the results paused after reading the question and said, "I'm pretty sure that people just didn't understand the question." She then shrugged and added, "I'm sure that next year's results would show that." She continued on to the next slide.

I heard a black man next to me grumble, "I sure understood the question."

As I fought for promotions, I quickly found myself alone: the only black woman in my division. I was lonely and disheartened, but I kept working hard to try to make enough money to take care of my family.

I started writing to escape that loneliness, to reach a community outside of my office. And I was lucky to discover that the little girl who had loved words was still inside me. I was a good writer. I was also lucky that I started writing at a time when society was starting to pay more attention to issues of race. Whereas, in the office, my thoughts on race and society in America would have made me a pariah, they were welcomed in the online publishing world. Social media had broken down traditional publishing barriers as readers clamored for authentic voices on important social issues. Suddenly,

publishers usually helmed by white men, used to publishing mostly white men, were scouring the Internet for voices of black people, brown people, women, and queer folk. But I quickly discovered that while the publishing opportunity had increased in recent years, the ability to make any money at it had decreased. And while bylines diversified, the publishers did not. So while a writer of color may be asked to write 700 words about Beyoncé for a nominal commission, the staff writing and editing jobs—with their regular salaries and health benefits—stayed with white men.

As I juggled my day job in a hostile environment with the writing that I loved, I wondered if I'd ever be able to write full time. As I watched many female writers of color leave the field after years of not being able to earn a living wage while receiving countless hateful comments by white people threatened by their words, I doubted that dream would ever come true.

You can imagine my shock when I was offered a part-time staff writing job at a new publisher. I had written some pieces for the founders of the publication for other magazines in the past, and they valued my work and wanted my voice. They had enough funding for one year, and would give me enough salary to just barely cover my mortgage, plus health benefits. I jumped at the chance, and quit my day job. And ever since then I've been hustling every day, working for primarily white editors at various publishers whenever something "black" happens in the media that they want my take on, scrambling to get enough freelance work to pay my bills every month. It has been tough, but I've made it work so far. I still don't know where I'll be a year from now, if I'll be able to still call myself a writer. And still every day, I know that I'm one of the lucky ones.

I have found myself now, at thirty-six, with a writing career. For some, who know my history, I'm seen as someone who beat the odds and fought against adversity and won. "You must be so proud," they say.

And I am proud, but mostly, I'm angry. I'm angry, because when I look around, I'm still alone. I'm still the only black woman in the room. And when I look at what I've fought so hard to accomplish next to those who will never know that struggle I wonder, "How many were left behind?" I think about my first-grade class and wonder how many black and brown kids weren't identified as "talented" because their parents were too busy trying to pay bills to pester the school the way my mom did. Surely there were more than two, me and the brown boy who sat next to me in the hall

each day. I think about my brother and wonder how many black boys were similarly labeled as "trouble" and were unable to claw out of the dark abyss that my brother had spent so many years in. I think about the boys and girls playing at recess who were dragged to the principal's office because their dark skin made their play look like fight. I think about my friend who became disillusioned with a budding teaching career, when she worked at the alternative school and found that it was almost entirely populated with black and brown kids who had been sent away from the general school population for minor infractions. From there would only be expulsions or juvenile detention.

I think about every black and brown person, every queer person, every disabled person, who could be in the room with me, but isn't, and I'm not proud. I'm heartbroken. We should not have a society where the value of marginalized people is determined by how well they can scale often impossible obstacles that others will never know. I have been exceptional, and I shouldn't have to be exceptional to be just barely getting by. But we live in a society where if you are a person of color, a disabled person, a single mother, or an LGBT person you have to be exceptional. And if you are exceptional by the standards put forth by white supremacist patriarchy, and you are lucky, you will most likely just barely get by. There's nothing inspirational about that.

"AFFIRMATIVE ACTION" IS A TERM THROWN AROUND wildly in conversations about race—usually by those who are firmly on the "there is no racism/there is only reverse-racism/affirmative action is racist against white people" crowd. When not used as an argument, it's used as an insult: "Oh yeah, you're just an affirmative action hire." But for all the talk—for all those who tear it down and all those who try to defend it—not many people fully understand affirmative action.

I mean, we sort of get the concept. Affirmative action is supposed to combat bias in work and education by mandating a certain amount of hires and admissions from minority groups. It is supposed to force a more level playing field. But it's in our ignorance of the details that we lose the entire plot.

First introduced by President Kennedy and expanded by President

Johnson in the ’60s, affirmative action sought to help reverse extreme racial gaps in federal employment and higher education. The intention was to get federal employers to proactively fight racial discrimination in their hiring practices and to increase the African American undergraduate population above its then dismal 5 percent. Shortly after its introduction, affirmative action was expanded to all women.

Affirmative action took many forms throughout the US. At colleges and universities, it often took the form of increased recruitment efforts, extra consideration given to race and gender in the selection process, academic support programs, and increased financial aid. In federal employment, it often took similar forms—increased recruitment efforts, extra consideration given to race and gender, and diversity goals. There were no “quotas,” and any attempts at such were struck down by the Supreme Court. Employers and educators could set forth goals to increase diversity, provided there were enough qualified people of color or women to make such goals reasonable. These were never huge percentages and were most often below a representational percentage. For example: when the Supreme Court upheld a 10 percent set-aside of contract funds for minority businesses in 1980, that percentage was far below representative of the 17 percent minority population at the time.[1] Affirmative action’s goal was to force educators and federal employers to get creative and proactive in their efforts to combat the effects that hundreds of years of racial and gender discrimination had had on the diversity of their workplaces and universities.

By the time Reagan rolled into office, affirmative action was on the decline as many conservatives declared it no longer necessary. Bit by bit, piece by piece, affirmative action has been chipped away at over the last thirty years, leaving a program that can hardly be called affirmative.

But remnants of affirmative action, especially in our colleges and universities, are still the target of many who believe that affirmative action is unjust. And as affirmative action practices are rolled back in higher education institutions across the country, the enrollment and graduation rates of people of color in many of those institutions are plummeting. Affirmative action is a crucial tool if we want to mitigate some of the effects of systemic racism and misogyny in our society. It should not be rolled back; in fact, I argue that it should be expanded to other groups that

suffer from systemic oppression as well. Why? Because it works. No, it doesn't work wonders, but affirmative action can do some good for those who need it, and it can do some good for a society that wants to value equality and diversity.

Believe it or not, conversations around affirmative action can be easier than other conversations around race. Why? Because the majority of the costs and benefits of affirmative action are easily supported by data, and the arguments against it are easily countered. Let's take a look at some of the arguments against affirmative action, and some of the ways in which we can use those arguments to further understanding of why affirmative action is still very necessary.

Argument 1: We don't need affirmative action because society isn't as racist or sexist as it used to be. While racism and sexism can be hard to quantify and compare (we can't exactly call people up and say "how racist are you today"), we can easily see the effects of systemic racism and sexism and oppression in our society today—particularly in our employment and education sectors. Studies have shown that if you have a "black-sounding" name, you are four times less likely to be called for a job interview. White women still make only 82 cents for every white man's dollar, black women only earn 65 cents for every white man's dollar, and Hispanic women earn even less at 58 cents for every white man's dollar. The wage gap between white and black men has not budged since Reagan's cuts to affirmative action began in the '80s, with black men making 73 cents for every white man's dollar, and the wage gap between white and Hispanic men has actually grown since 1980, going from 71 cents down to 69 cents for every dollar made by a white man.[2]

In education, students of color are disadvantaged their entire school career. Black and Hispanic students are far more likely to be suspended from school, starting as early as preschool. An average of 16 percent of black students and 7 percent of Hispanic students are suspended each year, compared to only 5 percent of white students. And while the rate of suspension for white students has remained steady for over thirty years, the rate of suspension for black students has almost tripled.[3] How does this happen? There are a lot of factors, but a Yale study shows that preschool

teachers are more likely to look for problem behavior in black children, expect it in black children, and empathize less with children of a different race than their own.[4] Another study of secondary school teachers found that teachers were more likely to call parents of children of color to report problem behavior than they were to call parents of white children, and they were less likely to call parents of children of color to report positive accomplishments than they were to call white parents.[5] When you add this bias to the fact that children of color are more susceptible to food insecurity; are more likely to have to work after school; are less likely to have financial resources to supply regular Internet, study guides, and tutoring; and are more likely to attend underfunded schools—children of color get to their college applications at a stark disadvantage. And this shows in the numbers. Currently, black and Hispanic students are underrepresented in the vast majority of colleges and universities, by 20 percent. A study by the University of Washington shows that enrollment of minority students drops 23 percent when schools enact an affirmative action ban.[6] Only two colleges in the US with affirmative action bans have representational enrollment of black students, and only one has representational enrollment of Hispanic students.[7]

Argument 2: If an employer is racist or sexist, you can just sue them. Here's the thing, an employer can make up just about any excuse for why they did not hire someone, did not promote someone, or fired someone. Unless you can prove malice, unless there is a paper trail of racism or sexism, it is incredibly hard to get a judge to find in your favor. In "no fault" states, an employer can fire an employee for just about any reason and it is the responsibility of the employee to prove discrimination. Furthermore, when most employers demand confidentiality about salary, it's hard for employees to even know that they are being discriminated against in their wages. But when we see far fewer women and people of color being interviewed, hired, and promoted in certain fields, we know that there is a problem that needs to be addressed.

Argument 3: Affirmative action teaches people of color and women that they don't have to work as hard as white men. Sigh. Here's the

basic truth: the vast majority of affirmative action goals aim for a representative number of people of color and women. This means that if there are 10 percent black people in the area, the ultimate goal (not quota) would be around 10 percent black employees or students. The goal is simply equal opportunity for female applicants and applicants of color. Why would a representational number of people of color be so much less competitive than a representational number of white people? Is it really only direct competition with white men that motivates women and people of color to work hard?

Argument 4: Affirmative action is unfair to white men because it causes them to lose opportunities to less qualified women and people of color. As with argument 3, remember that these are representational goals, of which we are falling far short. When you say that a representational number of women or people of color cuts out more deserving white men, you are saying that women and people of color deserve to be less represented in our schools and our companies and that white men are deserving of an over-representational majority of these spots. We see the disparities in jobs and education among race and gender lines. Either you believe these disparities exist because you believe that people of color and women are less intelligent, less hard working, and less talented than white men, or you believe that there are systemic issues keeping women and people of color from being hired into jobs, promoted, paid a fair wage, and accepted into college.

Argument 5: Affirmative action doesn't work. This is not true. While affirmative action may not have been the racial panacea that some had originally hoped, it has been one of the most successful programs for helping combat the end-effects of racial discrimination in education and employment that we've tried. Multiple studies have shown that affirmative action programs increased the percentage of people of color in jobs in the public sector and drastically increased the number of people of color in colleges and universities. And while the arguments around affirmative action often come down to race, white women have been by far the biggest recipients of the benefits of affirmative action.

Yes, affirmative action, when fully implemented, can make a measurably positive impact on the socioeconomic outlook for women and people of color who are in the position to benefit from it. Is it the final answer we've been waiting for to end racial oppression? Absolutely not. In truth, even if implemented across the public and private sectors, even if vigorously enforced, affirmative action will never be more than a Band-Aid on a festering sore as long as it's still just trying to correct the end effects of systemic racism. If there is some critique of affirmative action that I'm inclined to agree with it is those posed by academics like Michelle Alexander in *The New Jim Crow*. The argument against affirmative action that holds the most water for me is that when affirmative action is viewed as "enough" it can be detrimental to the fight for racial justice. We must never forget that without systemic change and without efforts to battle the myriad of ways in which systemic racism impacts people of color of all classes, backgrounds, and abilities, our efforts at ending systemic racial oppression will fail. We must refuse to be placated by measures that only serve a select few—and affirmative action does only serve a select few. We must never forget that people of color who will never want to go to college, who will never be able to go to college, who cannot work, who choose not to work, who choose to work in the public sector—they all deserve to be treated as human beings free from racial bigotry and persecution. We must remember that there are other, huge crises affecting communities of color that also need to be addressed with urgency (like the mass incarceration of black and Hispanic men in America). But the work to truly end systemic racism, while crucial, is a long and hard road. And while we are fighting that battle, many people of color are being crushed by a racist educational and employment system and their children are inheriting that same disadvantage as they try to enter into higher education and the workforce. Affirmative action can help with that. Even if we were to flip a switch today and end all racism and racial oppression, millions of people of color would still be disadvantaged by racial oppression of yesterday, and that would need to be addressed with policies like affirmative action that seek to replace opportunities previously denied unless we feel like leaving an entire generation in the dust and hope that their children will be able to rise from those ashes.

We have to fight for our future, we have to work for change, but we also

need to help people now.