

# 6 Ways to Advocate for Racial Justice from Home

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On August 27, 1963, I was a sheltered, white, college student driving with my parents to Washington, D.C. to join the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom. Deciding to go wasn't easy. Letters to my then-boyfriend (we later married) remind me how we worried about possible violence and wondered whether we'd be welcomed. After considerable back and forth, we decided to meet in D.C. and march together, joined by my parents.

Like us, they had never done something like this before — but they believed in what we'd be marching for, and also that I needed a chaperone.

## **What Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr. Said**

In my mind's eye, I can still picture where we stood: under a tree on a corner of the reflecting pool with a perfect view of the stage. I can still hear Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s voice and feel the tears streaming down my face as his words made me see a reality outside my own life experience and inspired me with hope.

*"I have a dream that one day this nation will rise up and live out the true meaning of its creed: 'We hold these truths to be self-evident: that all men are created equal.'.... I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin, but by the content of their character."*

And I can still remember feeling surrounded by tens of thousands of hopeful, welcoming, peaceful people whose skin color was different than mine but who shared a vision for what America needed to become. Marching that day set my husband and me on a path to stand up for social justice throughout our lifetimes.

Now, at 75 and sheltered again — this time because of COVID-19 — I'm struggling to figure out how to get off the sidelines and [stand up against racial injustice](#). I'm thinking about how I can join with younger generations, as my parents joined with me, and be

an effective ally in this fight.

Like so many others, I'm taking time to learn about the history of race in America, history that neither my children nor I were ever taught in school.

But I also feel compelled to take action. As I've learned over the course of my life, there are a lot of ways to advocate for a better world. Here are six of them that I — we — can do even while [sheltering at home](#):

### **1. Advocate for Voting Rights**

This is perhaps the most important step you can take now to advance justice. Go to the site of the nonprofit, nonpartisan [Voter Participation Center](#) to make sure you're registered.

If you can, under your state's law, go ahead and request a mail-in ballot; that's the safest and easiest way to vote in 2020.

To encourage other eligible Americans to vote on Election Day, check out the resources at another nonprofit, nonpartisan site: [When We All Vote](#). The [Women's March Foundation](#) makes it easy for you to write personal notes to voters — a proven way to increase turnout. And to ensure that our elections in 2020 are free, fair, safe and secure, join with the League of Women Voters and others in urging Congress to approve needed funding to [help states protect the right to vote](#).

### **2. Advocate for Criminal Justice Reform**

Learn about the idea behind the rally cry to [defund the police](#) on the [M4BL site](#) (that stands for Movement for Black Lives).

Find out what is happening where you live. Does your police department train officers to de-escalate? Ban chokeholds? Make complaints against officers public?

Press local and state leaders to make needed change, using advice from Black Lives Matter on the M4BL site. With [help from the ACLU](#), urge Congress to end police militarization and over-policing in our communities.

### **3. Advocate for Expanding Opportunities for All Ages to Serve**

National service programs like AmeriCorps and Senior Corps bring people together across racial, economic and generational divides to solve pressing social problems.

The bipartisan [CORPS Act](#) that Congress is considering would increase the number of AmeriCorps positions and develop Senior Corps teleworking technology. Learn more about this bill from the nonprofit, nonpartisan America's Service Commissions. Then, call to urge your Senators and Representative to support it; you can find their phone

numbers at the [Contacting Congress site](#).

#### **4. Advocate for a Truth and Reconciliation Commission**

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission would be similar to the one created in South Africa after the end of apartheid. It would acknowledge the pain and impact of four centuries of structural, anti-Black racism in America and propose concrete policies and reforms to address it.

You can join national service nonprofit City Year's founder Alan Khazei and Harvard professor Cornell William Brooks to call on elected officials to [support the bill from Rep. Barbara Lee](#) (D-Calif.) to establish the commission.

#### **5. Advocate for a Strong Start in Life for All Children**

By nearly every measure across all states, children living in poverty and children of color face more obstacles to success, including low birth weight, unstable housing and limited access to quality early learning experiences.

Moreover, major disparities begin before birth, especially for Black children, driven by systemic racism and social injustice.

The nonprofit organization Zero to Three offers [tools for taking action to improve outcomes for babies and families](#) — from “sending an email to your policymakers to writing your local paper, to taking a deep dive into planning state policy solutions.”

#### **6. Advocate for Black-owned Businesses**

You can do this by using your spending power to support change and encouraging others to do the same.

Shop at Black-owned businesses and bookstores. Join the campaign to get major retailers to [pledge 15% of their shelf space to Black-owned businesses](#).

And donate to programs that advance racial justice and equality, including the Equal Justice Initiative, Black Lives Matter and Showing Up for Racial Justice.

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