

CHAOS OR COMMUNITY:

**WHERE  
DO WE GO  
FROM HERE?**

TO THE BIDEN-HARRIS ADMINISTRATION



Martin Luther King Scholar Program

**Class of 2024 | January 5, 2021**

Dear President-Elect Biden & Vice-President-Elect Harris,

Congratulation on being elected to the highest office of leadership in our country. With the eyes of the nation and the world upon you both and your next steps, the first-year students of the MLK Scholar Program at Ithaca College share their individual and collective voice(s) as we transition.

In 1967, the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. grappled with the question "where do we go from here?" He released his final book that year, serving as an analysis of "phase one" of the civil rights revolution and addressed the challenges for the next stages. Later, that August, The Rev. Dr. King, Jr. delivered a keynote at the 11th Annual South Christian Leadership Conference convention where he quoted William Cullen Bryant by stating "truth, crushed to earth, will rise again."

From the cease of a year that delivered a global pandemic, ignited a global civil rights movement from the ever-burning flames of racism and police brutality, and created economic hardships to the continual struggle we now know 2021 will bring, we have prepared this document for your consideration as you move our country forward.

We hope you ready for the road ahead of our nation and the MLK Scholar Program at Ithaca College extends its gratitude and support as constituents, change agents, and thought partners for future opportunities. We invite you to consider and act in response to the question put forth by the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr, and now our class of 2024 MLK Scholars; Where do we go from here: chaos or community?

Thank you for your time in reading this document and we look forward to connecting in near future.

**-The MLK Scholar Program, Class of 2024 | Ithaca College**

# CONTENTS

Introduction.....	2
Racism, Class Inequity, & Injustices in the US.....	4
Accountability: The Key to Community.....	9
CHANGE NEEDED!.....	14
Go from Here?.....	18
Addressing the Past and Moving Forward.....	24
Media Representation.....	28
Congratulations! - Now What?.....	32
Putting Together the Puzzle Pieces of America....	36
Striving for Equity.....	41
Leading With Your Conscience.....	45
Program Overview.....	50

# "Racism, Class Inequity, and Injustices in the U.S."



THE MLK SCHOLAR PROGRAM | ITHACA COLLEGE

**HUMAN RIGHTS**

**CIVIL RIGHTS**



**ITHACA COLLEGE**

Martin Luther King  
Scholar Program



## "Racism, Class Inequity, and Injustices in the U.S."

The Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. said, "What good is having the right to sit at a lunch counter if you can't afford to buy a hamburger?" After the Civil Rights Act was passed in 1964 and the subsequent Voting Rights Act of 1965, many people were satisfied, and many people believed that the struggle for black people in the United States was coming to an end. While incredible success was achieved in the 60's, Dr. King recognized that the work had only begun. Black people may have equal rights as any other citizen in the U.S. under the law, however, it had to be put into practice.

The systemic disadvantages were already present and still are. They're a result of the countless years of discrimination and subjugation. On many social media apps I see people talking about institutionalized racism or how black Americans are born with a disadvantage in society and don't have the privileges white people do. In response to this, I see a lot of antagonism in the comment sections. If I were a senior advisor to the President, advising on the national dialogue of racism, class inequity, and injustices, I would first and foremost suggest that institutionalized racism be publicly acknowledged, and to acknowledge that other minorities are looked down upon in this country. Especially after the Trump administration's tenure in office, this needs to be addressed.

Additionally, I would encourage the dialogue about racism and inequalities in the country to occur between families and politicians. I think it's important to sit down and hear what minorities have to say and see things from their perspectives. This also includes tweaking education so that American history, especially the history of black people and other minorities [RL1] in the country isn't whitewashed and is told through the lens of subjugated groups of people as well.

Finally, I would advise that any strides made in addressing racism and inequality in the country should not be seen as a "job well done." Instead, following Dr. King's example, we continue to push further for more social change because racism, inequality, and injustices cannot be cured overnight.

Donald Trump's election in 2016 was pretty shocking. Surely a homophobic and racist president couldn't be re-elected in 2020, and sure enough, he wasn't. As a record number of voters turned out for this year's election, 74 million of them cast their ballot for Trump. I still see many Trump supporters speaking in his favor on social media. I know people from my high school who support him. Living in Ithaca is like living in a bubble. It's made me think in the past that the plague of racial discrimination in this country isn't that serious anymore. I've grown older, read more, spend more time on social media, and even just taking a drive 10 to 15 minutes out of Ithaca, I have become more aware of the realities of the country.

74 million people and more voting for Trump this year has been the biggest wake-up call. The continued support for this racist and homophobic man and the continued ignorance despite the racial tensions this year among most of his supporters proves that there's still a lot of work to be done. That is why the acknowledgment that racism is still real not only between the general public but also its presence within the fabric of this country is important. When more people recognize that it's a problem that needs to be fixed and when more people realize that minorities have the most difficult time here, more change will be able to occur.

## "Racism, Class Inequity, and Injustices in the U.S."

African Americans, Native Americans, and Latinos among other minorities all have less income, less access to education, and fewer opportunities than white people. This is not a coincidence. This isn't because white people work harder or are naturally smarter than others as many still believe. This has to do with years and years of oppression. For years, we have made marginalized folks feel like they're not as intelligent and that they don't deserve the necessities in life.

The system, since its creation, has been rigged for the interests of the wealthy and white people. The effects of centuries of oppression are very prevalent today and it's vital for people to understand that. It's the first step towards positive social change. I would advise the next white house administration and the general public to make others aware of this through different campaigns and events.

Dr. Dorothy Cotton through the Citizenship Education Program helped so many young black people during the Civil Rights Movement to make their voices heard. She helped them understand the importance of voting, why their voices matter, and helped them overcome some of the obstacles they were presented with. The youth played a huge role in the movement. They protested, participated in sit-ins, and put their bodies on the line for social change. The youth could play a huge role in spreading more awareness of the challenges minorities face today and like Dr. Dorothy Cotton, it's imperative for people through different programs to explain how disadvantages for minorities have to do with the the discrimination that's embedded in this country on a systemic level.

Many individuals and families are uncomfortable with the topic of race. Whether it's because they just don't like to talk about it or think about it, they're afraid of voicing their opinion on it or they know it's going to cause a huge fight or tension between family members and/or friends. Nobody likes tension between family or friends or anyone for that matter but sometimes it's worth it.

It's not just important to have conversations about racism, inequality, and injustices because it can help to spread more awareness about it, but also because it's important for people to be thinking about it. Having conversations helps one to stay informed on the race issues prevalent in society and helps one to understand it better. Politicians need to be constantly talking about these issues as well because they're the people who can lead campaigns for change.

The general public looks to politicians to continually improve the country and politicians have the power to influence the public. Facilitating educated conversations about race, injustices, and inequality after acknowledging that they are sizeable problems in the country is another significant step towards social equality. Listening to the voices of minorities is also beneficial. Minorities are the victims of the social inequality and injustices present in this country and their stories, perspectives, and experiences need to be told and heard. A greater effort must be made to listen and try empathizing with them. More books, articles, songs, and other forms of communication and storytelling by minorities should be heard and discussed.

## "Racism, Class Inequity, and Injustices in the U.S."

I would further advise the White House administration that the education system needs to be altered, especially in high schools. In my high school, we were taught about Native Americans being killed and forced off their land, we were taught about slavery, segregation, and The Civil Rights Movement. We were taught about Nativism, the internment camps, and the Chinese Exclusion Act. However, these topics weren't discussed in depth. I went to school in a liberal town in New York state. Many schools in many other towns across America aren't even required to teach the atrocities committed by this country. In many schools, these topics are skimmed through. In many schools, it's taught that the south fought the Civil War for states' rights rather than to keep slavery alive.

These practices in high schools are unacceptable. The truth about the treatment of minorities in this country needs to be told and not skimmed through but explained. The achievement of minorities in this country needs to be explained and explained with full context. History textbooks and classes are whitewashed. Many people see Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. as a martyr, that he died so black people could be equal in society. However what they don't emphasize is that his assassination was cold, calculated, and planned. The government was against him.

After the Civil Rights act was passed Klan members and American Nazis made themselves more visible. White people who supported him before 1964 stopped because they believed that the Civil Rights and Voting Rights acts were enough. I would advise the next White House administration to right these wrongs within the country's education system.

Acknowledgment of institutional racism, dialogue between people, listening to the experiences and perspectives of minorities, and tweaking the education system are all important steps towards racial equality and limiting racial injustices. If I were the advisor, one last thing I would emphasize is that we continue to push further even after positive changes. I would emphasize that this will take a long time.

After the Civil Rights Act was passed, many people thought that the problem was solved. Dr. King pushed further and lost support. When Barack Obama became the first black person to be elected as president, people thought that racism was solved. That couldn't be further from the truth. While the first black person to become president was a monumental achievement in this country, it didn't mean racism was solved. White nationalist and supremacist voices erupted. The Tea Party protested against Obama, feared that he was Muslim, and clearly weren't in favor of a black man in the White House.

Institutional racism is still very real today. I believe the most important thing for people to realize is any strides made towards racial equality and any monumental victories don't automatically solve everything. It's vital to continue to make even more strides and push for further reform. Racism has been embedded in this country for centuries. Centuries of subjugation of minorities cannot be solved easily and quickly. Patience is required and being proactive is necessary.

## "Racism, Class Inequity, and Injustices in the U.S."

If I were to advise the next White House administration on the national dialogue of racism, class inequity, and injustices I would emphasize a few things that I find of paramount importance. Not every single individual in the United States is going to acknowledge that institutional racism exists in this country. But making an effort to spread its awareness as much as possible is the first step. Furthermore, I would encourage conversations about race, racial inequality, and racial injustices among individuals, groups of friends, and families. What's important regarding these conversations is also listening to the voices of minorities through different mediums. The voices of minorities have to be prominent and outspoken in the education system.

Finally, any progress seen in terms of racial equality in the future must not be treated as final solutions to racism. Progress needs to be fought for continually and patiently. The inequalities in this country won't be solved overnight. The institutions of the U.S. have catered to the interests of white people for centuries and have disregarded and ignored minorities. This has long-lasting effects that are prevalent today and it's important that these problems are consistently addressed.

-Farid Ahmad '24, MLK Scholar



"Accountability: The Key to Community."



THE MLK SCHOLAR PROGRAM | ITHACA COLLEGE

**HUMAN RIGHTS**



**ITHACA COLLEGE**

Martin Luther King  
Scholar Program

THE MLK SCHOLAR PROGRAM | ITHACA COLLEGE

**CIVIL RIGHTS**



## "Accountability: The Key to Community"

The first story starts with, a middle-class suburban family home, a kitchen, a mom, and a crash! One tiny glass bowl has slipped out of my mom's hand, the glass shards had flown everywhere in the kitchen. I came in, assessed the situation, and started damage control with a broom and a bag. My mom furiously stayed in place and ranted about how someone had previously misused the bowl and made the lid expand and not work properly, that she took the bowl by the lid and the glass fell. She was furious and reprimanded everyone around on how we were the ones that had made this mess by not using the bowl correctly. The same tale of blame was retold to everyone that called her phone that day.

Another story; starts with, a small child, a big black sharpie, and a vase that was dying to be painted. I was the little cunning kid with an illegal sharpie that was debating whether to make a marking on the vase. I said to myself, "if you make the initials of your sister, they won't know it was you." As a curious little girl, I had had enough reprimands and groundings to know I did not want more, yet I did want to draw on the vase. If I made it so others could take the blame from me, I would not be grounded and I still could draw the vase, it was the perfect plan! According to plan I drew my sister's initials, nevertheless, I still got caught because the handwriting found was clearly mine plus my sister was an angel beside the little devil that I was. I did get the punishment for writing the vase, but I did not understand why, I had planted all the evidence to make the blame fall on others.

Last story; starts with, a middle-class suburban family home, a kitchen, me, and a crash! One of the glass bowls from my mom's collection had slipped from my hand, the glass shards spread out all around the kitchen. I sighed, as my mom and sister came to figure out what had happened, they looked between me and the broken glass. Then they went around and started damage control as I stayed put in place. My mom asked what had happened, and I answered that the bowl had slipped from my hand as I was taking a cup from the cupboard, I had no excuses, no workarounds, no one to blame but me. I was disappointed in myself; I knew I had to make up for the loss. I asked my mom if she wanted me to replace the bowl, she said that I should not worry but I had to make sure it did not happen again. And so, I promised and have not broken another bowl until now.

My name is Fabiola A. Alvarado Berríos, a seventeen-year-old first-year student at Ithaca College in Ithaca, New York. I was born in Puerto Rico and raised in Las Piedras. I am currently studying Theater Design and Technology at IC, the best theater school in the US currently as described by Niche.com. I belong to an amazing program in the university called Martin Luther King Scholars, where they prepare academically talented, historically under-represented undergraduate students of color for the development of knowledge, skills, and ethical values. The program achieves this by engaging students in meaningful learning opportunities that foster social justice service, leadership development, and global citizenship. I was selected as a person of color to learn and explore the legacy of Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King and use his strides and changes in social justice as a base for social work now and for my professional career.

## "Accountability: The Key to Community"

As a first-year MLK Scholar, I had to write this letter as a final reflection of what I learned in the required first-year course in which we defined terms and studied the history of the US Civil Rights Movement. The prompt to base this reflection on was, "Where do we go from here: chaos or community?" I shared with you some stories, from which I will impart in you some knowledge that I got from this course, and the tool that I believe will help us move forward in community and organize this chaos we are emerging from.

Now you may think, "why am I reading three stories about a bowl and a vase, and why should I care, aren't we talking about the Civil Rights and Martin Luther King?" I say these three stories are important, they have an underlying theme, something that is the essence of what I learned throughout my time in this course. These stories deal with accountability, the many ways that we consciously choose whether to practice it or not, this is the underlying thread that I have seen throughout my studies in the US Civil Rights movement that is still being ignored to this day.

At the beginning of this course, I was ignorant and extremely biased. My understanding of race, gender, MLK, and the US Civil Rights movement was minimal and biased by all sorts of media. Race was just something used to classify people by appearance, gender was the same thing as sex, MLK was faultless, and the Civil Rights Movement went perfectly from the start. That was what I was taught and that was how I understood these terms as I have the privilege of colorism and living in an environment where the amber color of my skin passes me off as white. I did not have to struggle with race and racism in my everyday life, in fact, the first time I started noticing and questioning the problem of race was when I experienced it in the US. I am not saying my country is far from being racist, there are a lot of culturally ingrained customs and notions that shame blackness. They are extremely subtle, and in the form of colorism, they did not affect me in my everyday life, so I became unaware of them.

The contrast is that when I was in the USA what I experienced was not subtle in any way. Whenever I spoke Spanish, I would get accosting stares from passerby's; when I spoke perfect English but couldn't remember terms, I would get demeaning stares and smirks from the people I was interacting with; when I entered stores with my family, security guards would follow us closely or send us stares at any chance they could. It was something I noticed and was something that made me uncomfortable and scared. When I entered the MLK scholars' space, I was sure what I had experienced compared to the experiences of my classmates and that I could relate to their struggles. I was not holding myself accountable for my privileges as a light-skinned, straight-haired, middle-class Latinx woman that wasn't raised in the US, and I overshadowed some of the voices that really needed to be heard.

Throughout the semester I have been learning, the terms, events, people, and reasons that created the chain of events that led to the US Civil Rights movements happening. Through learning this I have unlearned toxic terms and notions that made me believe I was a victim, they prevented me from holding myself accountable in my privileges and made me overlook the struggles that my classmates were facing. By really understanding race, racism, and intersectionality, plus watching their applications and connotations in real life through the civil rights movement. I started to practice being personally accountable for the racist, homophobic, and elitist notions that were taught to me by my environment.

## "Accountability: The Key to Community"

Progress and community moving forward can be boiled down to one action: accountability. How people, institutions, and organizations take it, choose not to, avoid it, practice it, or demand it make history. America is not willing to be held accountable for the damage it has caused to its minorities and the world, that was what studying the US Civil Rights movement in depth taught me.

Since the Declaration of Independence, the United States of America has been carrying paradoxes, contradictions, promises, and wounds, that like King expressed in his many speeches, have not been followed through and have not been healed. To this day, the solutions to the problems that King was advocating for have not been discovered. Of course, these are not problems that can be solved completely in 52 years, but we have seen the evidence as shown by the previous administration, that the progress that has been made is not healing or resolving promises, but simply putting band-aids and hoping that the problems go away.

Like the story of my mom, each administration does not wish to take accountability for what is going wrong in their time, they blame previous administrations. Obviously, it was not my mom's fault that someone had used the bowl wrong beforehand, but she was the one who took the last strand and broke it. Just like it was not completely the previous administration's fault that the extremists of this nation came out when the president got elected, the election was the last strand. Why were these extremists there in the first place?

Well, it can be traced back to accountability. Like my mom, people from previous generations were not taught to practice personal accountability, they were taught responsibility, the blame game; if I was not the one who used this wrongly why should I take the blame if I broke it? That same personal philosophy transcends into bigger organizations and becomes an integral part of them. After all, organizations are made of people, they are organisms that reflect the society that people inhabit. For example, the civil rights movement was misogynist and homophobic, we cannot blame it as it reflected the era, the people that were part of it and the social institutions that fostered it. We cannot play the blame game, but we can hold it, and previous generations that created and upheld these controversial philosophies accountable, by honest, vulnerable education of history and the integration of accountability as an integral value in our society.

This is not so far from what we are seeing right now, accountability is being practiced and understood. There has been a shift in thinking, a generational shift since millennials to the present, in which accountability started replacing responsibility. It has been slow to stick and inconsistent but like the story of me with the sharpie, parents are expecting children to be accountable for their actions, companies are expecting employees to be accountable for their actions, governments are expected to be held accountable for their actions. This is hard as we are still in a world that has social institutions that place blame and responsibility as the model for people to follow.

## "Accountability: The Key to Community"

We already started, social institutions are shifting their ideals and standards, people are taking personal accountability in their lives. But to continue we must integrate older generations. We must make inclusive models where individuals learn personal accountability, which will empower them to practice social accountability, which in turn will improve government accountability. These models must start with addressing inequality, injustice, and racism on a personal level for these wounds to heal in the hearts of Americans. From healed citizens, we can start healing the communities, and from the institutions that perpetuate and uphold wounds. Like King said in his address, "Remaining Awake Through a Great Revolution": "Something positive must be done. Everyone must share in the guilt as individuals and as institutions. The government must certainly share the guilt; individuals must share the guilt; even the church must share the guilt."

We must take this journey of accountability together as a society to continue as a community because chaos threatens if we fail.

-Fabiola A Alvarado Berríos '24, MLK Scholar

"CHANGE NEEDED!"



THE MLK SCHOLAR PROGRAM | ITHACA COLLEGE

**HUMAN RIGHTS**



**ITHACA COLLEGE**

Martin Luther King  
Scholar Program

**CIVIL RIGHTS**

THE MLK SCHOLAR PROGRAM | ITHACA COLLEGE



## "CHANGE NEEDED!"

Dear President Biden,

Taking this class on the United States Civil Rights Movement has proven to be very informative because I was able to learn more in-depth about factors that led up to this movement, people in the "background," and the tactics used. The women like Jo Ann Robinson and Coretta Scott King, who were part of this movement and who made me realize that women are the backbone of many movements. Learning about this was also very important because I did not have the proper foundation from my high school since we did not go into a profound understanding of this movement. The Civil Rights Movement paved the way for future movements and conversations within the black community that engage non-black people.

This movement brought the United States to where it is today, for example, the Black Lives Matter movement that is using similar tactics that Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. used. Even after the Civil Rights Movement, we, people of color, are still experiencing the exact same things they experienced, specifically with police brutality and the faults of the criminal justice system. On the contrary, I do believe that change can be brought with new tactics like reformatory justice, defunding the police and reallocating funds, and limiting the charge on minor offenses.

The Civil Rights Movement brought about some temporary change for black people in America, but it did not solve all their problems. Racial disparities and discrimination exist at every stage of the United States criminal justice system, from policing to trial to sentencing. The criminal justice system has always disproportionately, and negatively impacted people of color based on the sole fact that America was brought up on the principle of one race being superior to the other. This concept and mindset has been around for centuries and have been passed down from generation to generation and unfortunately still exist today.

In my class, there was a discussion on a particular person who is not well known from the Civil Rights Movement, Jo Ann Robinson. With her story, I learned that while she was fighting for change, she was subjected to having police officers breaking her window and pouring acid on her car. Police officers have always used excessive force and it is still very prominent in recent times, which is very disappointing. In the modern-day, we see police brutality more through excessive force when arresting or stopping individuals of color. This is why a call for change is needed. There has not been much change since the Civil Rights Era, and it has only gotten worse with the different tactics and new rules. There are many different cases that depict the flaws of the justice system some of the most famous ones are the Central Park Five, Breonna Taylor, George Floyd, and Rodney King. Each one of their stories individually impacts the black community while also encouraging them to lose their faith in the system and in police officers. What worries me the most is the time frame between each of these events and it goes to show that we are still in the same situation that we were back in the 90s and that we still have yet to make a change for the betterment to protect our black and brown community. While it is very disappointing that it still exists in today, I believe that we can bring change to this system.

## "CHANGE NEEDED!"

Tactics used during the Civil Rights Era are still used today include the acts of nonviolence. During the Civil Rights Era, people including Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. refrained from using physical force or any tactic involving fighting during his activism for change. Everything was done in a way that did not call for violence, but at each point, they were met with violence. This is a common thread in modern-day because at any point that people of color gather together to protest a specific injustice they are met with violence from the people that are supposed to protect them, police officers. All his actions that Martin Luther King Jr. took specifically his marches, boycott, or being a voice for the people as a whole, allowed us to have the courage to change the present moment. So, I, alongside the supporters of the Black Lives Matter movement, ask you, Mr. President, to reform the system. Considering the fact that we do not need more people of color dying each and every day at the hands of police officers or of the court system, who also plays an important role in failing to protect the black community.

In my opinion, the next steps toward reforming the criminal justice would be listening to the concerns of the black community. The black community has used the term Black Lives Matter throughout their protesting, music, and any social media influence. They use this to speak directly on the issues they are facing whether it's through the aspect of police brutality or the aspect of never getting justice for criminal acts against them. It is important to listen to them because they are the ones facing these injustices and understand the emotion and negative connotation behind it, and it is also important to not only be an ally to the community but also be a voice for them. After every event that has taken place that has ended up with the wrongful incarceration or the death of a black person, I believe this calls for defunding the police. The problem with the justice system begins with police officers and their use of excessive force or coercion when interrogating or arresting an individual. The term defund the police supports the idea that governors will lower the budget given to law enforcement agencies and will reallocate the funds towards housing, education, employment, mental health care, and youth services. Certain communities need more resources instead of over-policing in their neighborhoods because on certain occasions, especially in low-income POC communities, a stronger police presence creates a sense of fear in the community. On some occasions, there are negative interactions between the police officers and the community because the police officers are not connecting with those people, and because the police officers do not understand the community. Also, I would encourage looking at the media and using the media as a gateway for connections because this is where the biggest engagement with the younger generation, who is the future, exist. The media has become a powerful outlet for a lot of concerns from the black community and has also become an outlet for getting others to advocate for them through signing petitions or making a specific post and letting the news become widespread.

As an entirety, reforms are needed within law enforcement agencies and also within the court system. If the government, local and federal, were to take a practical approach in reforming the system by adding either restorative justice policies or limiting the number of police officers in communities of color, there would be a decrease in crime. Another aspect that would help in reforming this system is changing the policy surrounding minor offenses because these also disproportionately affect be black and brown communities and lead them to constantly enter the justice system.



## "CHANGE NEEDED!"

I. Adapting new measures for police officers like mental health officers in the station to confront the issues with people suffer from various types of mental health issues. This would further limit the number of deaths because of misunderstandings, for example, Elijah McClain. Anyone who already was in the criminal justice system also has a lot of struggles in adapting to life outside of prison. Therefore, using the restorative justice path, we would also have a decrease in the number of prisoners who re-enter the system.

Seeing the problems within the criminal justice, first-hand has made me want to be a voice for change within the system because the lack of empathy from judges and police officers and seeing the same people go into the system again is disappointing. As an aspiring lawyer, I want to be the change did I so greatly desire for these young men and women, but I do not think that I need to be a lawyer to do this. It can start now with your administration, Mr. President. Honestly, this system is not going to be fixed in a short period of time so it will be better to get started immediately. I will continue to say that change and reform is needed within the criminal justice system. I will encourage you Mr. President to listen to the voices coming from the black community directly speaking out against these injustices coming from the criminal justice system.

As our elected official, I ask you to be someone that that is an advocate for change.

-Adriana Ramirez '24, MLK Scholar

"..Go from Here?"



THE MLK SCHOLAR PROGRAM | ITHACA COLLEGE

**HUMAN RIGHTS**



**ITHACA COLLEGE**

Martin Luther King  
Scholar Program

THE MLK SCHOLAR PROGRAM | ITHACA COLLEGE

**CIVIL RIGHTS**



## "...Go from Here?"

Dear President Joseph Biden,

The year 2020 is definitely one to go down in the books. During this year we faced not only the COVID 19 pandemic but also the pandemic of racism. We see that in these so-called "United" States of America, racism is still very alive and present in society today. All throughout American history Black people in this country have been oppressed discriminated against and mistreated simply because of the color of their skin. During the Civil Rights Movement, Dr. King and many others fought for our civil rights and fair treatment. For years people of color have been treated as second-class citizens. Being Black in America is not an easy thing to do. No matter what we do or how we do it, it seems as though Black people are always seen as a threat, even if we are simply just sleeping. The killings of Ahmad Aubery, George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and the many other Black lives were taken during 2020, led to an uprising in protests.

Reflecting on racism, inequity, and injustices in America has made me think about Dr. Martin Luther King's question, "Where do we go from here?" I understand you as the president can't change the justice system by yourself, however, there should be steps taken to make the justice system more just. The change that I want to see is in the acknowledgment of Black history and other histories that are not taught in schools, offer better education and more extracurricular activities in school and programs, and have more diversity in all fields. I truly believe that a key factor when discussing racism, class inequity, and injustices is a need for equity. In Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s last book, "Where Do We Go From Here; Chaos or Community" he discusses a lot about human rights. One of the ideas that I reflected on being that he saw that before we could even have civil rights, we must first have human rights. A common example given is how "they fought to integrate the lunch counters and realized folks didn't have a decent wage to buy a burger." Dr. King realized before they can simply sit at a counter they must first have a decent paying job to even afford that food. But how were Black people supposed to get a job if nobody wanted to hire them, because they were Black, although they had all the qualifications? In order to get civil rights, one must have human rights which is why I think MLK pivoted to that area of focus. This just goes to show that Black people weren't treated as if they deserved their human rights.

Something that I often think about that greatly bothers me is how animals are treated better and sometimes have more rights than Black people. I have seen people go out of their way to fight for, defend, and care for an animal's life much more than a human being's life. Some will protest and suggest that their pet should have the same rights as them, yet those same people can't simply say, Black Lives Matter. They refuse to participate in a cause to make sure Black people can freely live, without being targeted because of the color of our skin, but are quick to say that their pet deserves "human" rights. As a person of color, it leads me to believe that they see their pets' lives hold more worth than a fellow human being, therefore I am unimportant to them.

Something that could be done about this is to offer more support and aid to the people in our own country. Something that America is also known to do in the past is reach out to foreign countries and help them before helping the people at home.

## "...Go from Here?"

One of the ideas that MLK brought up in his many speeches was the Vietnam war and how Black people were sent to fight. In his speech titled Beyond Vietnam, he says "We were taking the black young men who had been crippled by our society and sending them eight thousand miles away to guarantee liberties in Southeast Asia which they had not found in southwest Georgia and East

Harlem"(King, Martin Luther, Jr. 1967). Black people in America were used for America's own benefit and I believe we are still being used for America's own benefit today. I feel this way because Black people have contributed a lot to this country both in the past and in the present, but credit isn't given where it is due. Although things like that might not be seen as a big deal to some, it is, because it leads to other issues such as racism, class inequity, and injustices.

There are people in this country that need help, they have no food, no clean water, no roof over their head, nobody to actually care and love for them. Although there are all of these things happening and negatively affecting people's lives I personally feel there still seems to be more concern for a dog's well being, or any animal's life, which is held at a much higher concern than Black lives. Breonna Taylor is an example of how Black people are treated in this country. Taylor was sleeping in her bed and was shot multiple times and killed for doing absolutely nothing. Furthermore, the individual police were looking to arrest was already taken into custody. Hearing this story definitely hit close to home for me because Breonna Taylor could have been me, what makes it even worse is that she never received justice. None of the officers were charged for Taylor's death. This greatly bothered me because her life was taken and the only thing the justice system saw as wrong was that her white, living, neighbor was endangered. It just goes to show how Black people are treated in America and leaves me to think will I be next? It makes me believe that even in 2020 there is still more of a need to protect white lives and that they are more precious than Black lives when that is not true.

Black people's lives matter but it isn't shown in daily life or through the systems put in place in society. In this case, my advice to you as the president would be to look further into the case and see why none of the officers were held accountable for their actions. Make sure that these individuals are made responsible for the actions they committed. Once again, I am aware of the check and balances in the government but as the President, you could address the nation about what happened, provide support to the family and find a way to make sure something like this doesn't happen again. You can do this by providing better training for the police and making sure they are recertified, this is important so that the officers are always sharp and precise in how they handle a situation. What happened to Breonna Taylor was highly unacceptable and should never happen. I have always been taught that children are like sponges, they absorb everything.

Therefore I think it is extremely important to teach them what is right. Sometimes people teach their children or allow their children to have racist thoughts and actions. Since their mother and father passed these ideas to them, they will not see anything wrong with this issue. Because the parents are somebody that the children trust it enables the cycle to continue. One of the sayings that I grew up on was "Treat others the way you want to be treated."

## "...Go from Here?"

Although this saying might seem obvious it is often looked over and frequently violated. I think it's quite simple, for example, if I am simply standing at the bus stop, I wouldn't want anyone to yell racist slurs at me therefore I wouldn't do that to anyone else. I have always known that this country has a racist history and it really bothered me watching innocent Black people constantly being killed because of the color of our skin. This summer I was one of the many individuals that protested and painted Black Lives Matter all over the five boroughs in New York City. It was so important that I did this because I so often feel that Black people's voices aren't heard. Even when we are screaming at the top of our lungs it doesn't mean anything to certain folks, but with protesting during a pandemic and putting my health at risk and even my life during the painting murals, I found it very necessary because people need to know about the countless injustices that go on in America. Participating in the events draws people's attention and it makes them look. They can't ignore us anymore it's time for a change.

When it comes to the countless injustices that happen in this country I would suggest that you show us that you hear us and are making a difference. It is easy to say anything, but it's important that you take action in fixing these injustices. One of the ways to do that is to require special training to police officers in how they approach situations like this one. Also include more diversity in the police force, and in some way try to make it so that people of color have more trust in the police since our history with the police has been brutal and unfair.

Throughout this class, I have done a lot of self-evaluation, leading me to realize that the foundation is very important. In schools a lot of the time or at least in my personal experience I focused very little on the Civil Rights Movement. It's important that school children in the United States are taught about the people and events that took place during this movement. Since Black history is so often overlooked or seen as irrelevant, it's put as an elective. It is not included in the requirements for students. One of the many reasons this is wrong is because this gives students a perfect opportunity to think that Black history is not important and it won't affect them. This is extremely misconstrued because the Civil Rights Movement affected all of us and is still very important today because without it there would have been very little to no progress. Furthermore, when this subject matter is othered or not heavily focused on it's an issue because I feel that causes only people of color to care about the material because they feel obligated to know the information, and everyone else isn't really moved or affected.

Learning about these types of events are important for everyone because it helps us not to repeat history and to improve in the future. When it comes to class inequity there is no one way to solve this problem, just like there is no single way to solve racism but every step in the right direction matters. I think that once again going back to the building blocks and discussing this country's

true history is important. Oftentimes I find that when talking about America's history, individuals tend to leave out what the colonizers did to the Indigenous people on this land and the African people which they enslaved to build on it, to candidly make the colonizers and this country wealthy.

## "...Go from Here?"

With MLK being the leader of the movement he frequently brought up Slavery in this country and how slavery affected Black people during the Civil Rights movement. I believe it still affects people of color today. One of the many damages that it implemented was it caused for there to be a financial gap between Black and whites. In "Remaining Awake Through a Great Revolution." Dr. King writes about how people say "Negroes...must lift themselves by their own bootstraps. It's all right to tell a man to lift himself by his own bootstraps, but it is a cruel jest to say to a bootless man that he ought to lift himself by his own bootstraps" (King, Martin Luther, Jr. 1968). This notion always resonated with me because there was so much truth in what he said.

Within the Black communities especially there is a lot of class inequity even today. When advising on class inequity I think an important thing to take into play is equity. Equity is much different from equality because with equity people have been marginalized or have experienced some type of oppression in the past and are therefore given a fair chance. One of the ways to provide more equity when involving the matter of class inequity is providing better education for children, specifically students of color in low-income communities.

Next I would say open the horizons and introduce the students that face class inequities to programs that will help them achieve success and also introduce them to extracurricular activities outside of just sports. With these things taken into consideration, there would be more diversity in all types of fields. Positions would not be geared to only well off people, but would also be accessible to people of lower socioeconomic status. With these things taken into account, I believe it would help in closing the gap and leading to more progress. Injustices in this country have greatly impacted people of color and it feels like they are still endlessly happening. Previously I mentioned some recent people that have been killed at the hands of police and white supremacists. This has been the story that Black people have had to endure since we were enslaved and brought to this country.

Even looking back to Dr. King and his assassination, the killings, beatings, and threats that occurred all throughout the Civil rights movement to people with names known and unknown, have had to experience and see countless injustices take place. When answering the question where do we go from here I want to reemphasize the ideas of racism and class inequity. Once both of those issues are dealt with then people wouldn't mistreat and oppress someone simply because they look different or treat them differently because they come from a different place/ have a different socioeconomic status.

People would also know how to interact and understand individuals because they have experience around them. As a result of dealing with those issues, people would have respect for one another. You as commander-in-chief could provide programs where there is diversity. These actions would result in fewer injustices. For example, if a white person sees a Black person they won't see them as a threat just because they look different, or maybe talk differently than them. That white individual would have been in a space with Black people and would therefore understand that individual better and know that just because he might wear a hoodie doesn't mean he is going to rob you.

## "...Go from Here?"

. Instead, he might think nothing of it and go on with his day just as if one of his white peers was wearing a hoodie. Additionally, with diversified spaces people would learn about movements such as the Civil Rights Movement, Black Lives Matter Movement, and others. This would once again lead to fewer injustices because then white people wouldn't go around killing people for speaking up for justice and teaching others the truth.

I think another helpful suggestion is to open spaces and provide a place where people can talk about the injustices they have experienced and where you can listen and find ways in which you as the president can fix them. Some questions to think about when doing that is: what can I do to help people in this situation? If I was in their shoes what would I want to happen? Has something like this happened in the past? How was it addressed? Was it helpful? If not, in what way can I address this problem better and make sure this injustice doesn't happen again? These actions would result in fewer injustices because you are listening to others' thoughts and will take into consideration and act on what they are saying.

Where do we go from here? There is no one-dimensional shortcut to this question. If it were to be put in one word it would be "up."

From this point, all we can do is move up in the world and progress. The key is to not go backward but instead to learn from mistakes made in the past. Racism, class inequity, and injustices all have negatively affected this country and a focus on learning Black history in schools, providing programs and diversity in many spaces, and simply showing respect toward each other will definitely take us a long way.

As an MLK scholar and a future physical therapist, I too plan to be a part of the solution. I will continue to learn about Black history, share with others, protest, and address these issues as much I can to make a difference. Although there have been some ways in which racism, class inequity, and injustices have been touched on, I don't believe it is enough. As a nation, we need to continue moving forward and put our words into action.

-Amirah Torrence '24, MLK Scholar

"...Addressing the Past and Moving Forward"



THE MLK SCHOLAR PROGRAM | ITHACA COLLEGE

**HUMAN RIGHTS**



**ITHACA COLLEGE**

Martin Luther King  
Scholar Program

THE MLK SCHOLAR PROGRAM | ITHACA COLLEGE

**CIVIL RIGHTS**





## "...Addressing the Past and Moving Forward"

During the civil rights movement, there were protests in the streets, black people being killed by police, global rallying in support, and the strengthening of white supremacist organizations, to terrorize and suppress the Black community. The year 2020 seems to be nostalgic of those times. The parallels of then and now are striking. People are tired on both ends of society, but one end of the spectrum is much more justified than the other. We've seen just how far people will go to maintain the existing power structures. Not only have individuals maintained white supremacy, but the very entities that are supposed to protect us have anti-blackness in their cores and origins.

The US government is one of the most powerful entities when it comes to both maintaining and checking White supremacy. Sadly, we often fail to acknowledge how much the federal government has looked the other way at anti-Blackness and even gone as far as to set up roadblocks for Black people. To acknowledge the amount of pain and trauma-induced, and move forward as a country, there will have to be a massive overhaul of the social culture within the US, along with in public education, and in government policies.

In order for the US to make major cultural shifts, there needs to be more diversity in media and less hyperpatriotism encouraged by politicians. The lack of diversity in media causes major rifts between viewers. News stations often attempt to accommodate for the belief systems of their viewers and function more as businesses than simply reporters of events. This leads to bias in the news because these companies want to prioritize a certain viewer. News shouldn't be reported based on party affiliation. Diversity in news means giving many source support and a platform, not just the ones that speak favorably of a certain party or will be taken well by viewers.

There are a lot of Americans that are highly uninformed and don't realize how much bias is in the reporting they read. This isn't new, even MLK himself suffered through news slander from reporters that didn't understand the civil rights movement. It's a major disservice to social movements and groups to have a singular "neutral" white middle to upper-class voice speak on behalf of them. It's also frustrating as a Black person to see movements like BLM be misreported or receive little televised coverage. I believe that the way to resolve this is by supporting more nonprofit news organizations and organizations that specialize in reporting on particular social issues. The media needs more inclusion when it comes to stories and storytellers. The government definitely can not address the press, but I do believe there should be more government funding and support towards smaller nonprofit news agencies. The US has subsidized journalism before. The alternative way to approach this would be to fund community journalists that don't possess adequate resources to report on issues within their communities.

On a different note, another cultural shift that can be pushed by this administration would be to work towards glorifying this country's history less. The US has been a world power for quite some time, but politicians often fail to acknowledge this country's origins and the suffering that happened for this power to exist. Politicians often want to make everyone feel good and welcomed so they can secure votes in the future. The over glorification of our "collective" future mostly targeted towards white Americans is misleading.

## "...Addressing the Past and Moving Forward"

. I believe that the lack of acknowledgment towards BIPOC who were forced to suffer for this country is disgraceful. This lack of acknowledgment contributes to our historical erasure. This is visible in the fact that we merely have one holiday (that most employers don't give a day off for) to acknowledge Black suffering. Both MLK Day and Indigenous People's Day should be celebrated to the same extent as Independence Day, instead of being an afterthought, they should be days of acknowledgment. The federal government should acknowledge the harm it's caused. Racism continues to be an issue in this country because many people have had the privilege to avoid conversations about race and privilege. Putting BIPOC's history on the equivalent level of acknowledgment as this country's origins will encourage people to pay attention. In order to move forward from Jim Crow and all the negative policies directed towards Black people that followed, there has to be advocating for major policy changes.

These policy changes should be done by getting rid of the 13th amendment, getting rid of for-profit prisons, and releasing all people with drug charges. The 13th amendment should have never been enacted to begin with. It's an inhumane policy that disproportionately affects Black people. As someone from Louisiana, also known as the world's prison capital, I've seen the effects of over-policing and the prison system on this state. Police budgets are excessively high, and the funding for education is unusually low, particularly in Southern states with large Black populations. States have specific rights, but too often has the national government given states free rein to abuse their power over BIPOC. In addition, it's highly unethical for companies to be in partnership with prisons; it's a blatant conflict of interest. For-profit prisons should not exist. These prisons affect the incarceration rate and lead to people being jailed long term for petty drug crimes.

These prisons create an endless cycle for crime-ridden neighborhoods because the institutions often favor punishment over rehabilitation for short-term sentences. It's also scary and sickening to think that these institutions profit off of poor Black labor. It parallels pre-civil war slavery. Prison workers are often paid less and put under harsher conditions. There is even a prison rodeo in Louisiana where inmates face harsh injuries and little pay for the entertainment of audiences. Angola prison makes an enormous profit at the expense of prisoners being trampled by bulls. Though there is progress toward closing race disparities in incarceration, there need to be even more crucial steps taken. As the decriminalization of weed and other recreational drugs continues to occur across the US prisoners with drug-related charges should be freed. It's defective to have people sitting in prisons for years for minimal charges while others make millions off of dispensaries. These are just the beginning of changes that need to be made to our criminal justice system; this would be the start of a new and just system.

Throughout my years of schooling, I noticed that public education often doesn't fully acknowledge the history of its BIPOC students. A change in how the civil rights movement is taught and more investment into HBCUs will aid our community and this nation as a whole move forward. From a young age, I knew that the public education I received didn't fully address the civil rights movement nor did it give me an understanding of racial inequality. Through taking a course about the civil rights movement, I realized that I was taught even less than I'd initially thought. The omission of Black history from state curriculums is an erasure. The civil rights movement should be emphasized by the national curriculum. It shouldn't just be thrown in with other categories.

## "...Addressing the Past and Moving Forward"

In addition to teaching more about the civil rights movement and Black history as a whole, Black students should have more access to HBCUs. HBCUs have long been underfunded. This leaves these universities unable to provide sufficient aid for incoming students and sustain scholarships for their current students. HBCUs often create the next leaders of the communities, and who better to educate Black students than the Black leaders and academics themselves? They also give Black students the mental peace of not having to deal with prejudice from professors and mentors. HBCUs have such meaning to the community as a whole, and they give people access to culture that they may not have had access to growing up. More funding for these opportunities will give more students from a wider range of financial backgrounds the opportunity to attend. Our vice president likely wouldn't be who she is today without her education at Howard. It would be sad to see the next potential changemaker be limited because of finances.

We need to remember that this country was racist before Trump and that's not going away without radical change. The confidence and reassurance of certain individuals in this country may die down with this election, but it doesn't address a deeper and historic problem. Putting Black and Brown faces in the cabinet is only a temporary and symbolic fix, rather than a long-term solution. We saw how short term these fixes are with the election of Trump directly after Obama's presidency.

The future of this country lies in directly addressing the culture and deeply rooted prejudices in American psyches, as a result of centuries of privilege and oppression.

-Angela Russell '24, MLK Scholar

# "Media Representation"



THE MLK SCHOLAR PROGRAM | ITHACA COLLEGE

**HUMAN RIGHTS**



**ITHACA COLLEGE**

Martin Luther King  
Scholar Program

THE MLK SCHOLAR PROGRAM | ITHACA COLLEGE

**CIVIL RIGHTS**



## "Media Representation"

John Lewis began his civil rights activism in the 1960s and died this year in 2020 still fighting for the same social injustices. When he died, the first thing I thought about was how little this country has progressed in terms of racial inequality and social injustices. It's truly disheartening to think that the same news headlines my black grandparents read and feared for their safety when they were young adults are the same news headlines that continue to be published and frighten me as a young black woman today.

The black struggle in the States continues to reign, however, thanks to social media, more people around the world are getting educated on the daily social injustices that black people face, and it is allowing the black struggle in America to demand to be seen. It is demanding people's attention because technology has made it possible for social injustices, such as the murder of George Floyd and Ahmaud Arbery to be seen, heard, and felt. Injustices and racial inequalities that people of color face every day are being forced to the forefront of the nation and there is no way to turn away from it. This newfound passion for the black community and people of color that has sparked throughout the nation has been a great transition in our country to start the conversation of social change; Realistically, racism will never cease to exist because racist values will continue to be taught for generations.

So where do we go from here as a nation? We start at the root of the problem and that is media representation. We as a country can diminish racism and social injustices in America through media representation. Black representation is everything because it allows people from all walks of life to grow normalized with the idea that all people are equal and deserve a chance at success. And, to normalize representation, everything begins with the media because the images shown on television and social media all take part in shaping the minds of every individual. For example, this country was built on racism and one of the ways that racism was encouraged was through the media. *The Birth of a Nation* (1915) was America's first feature-length motion picture that featured the Ku Klux Klan as a courageous and fearless force necessary to preserve American values and a white supremacist social order. The media was extremely influential because some people still believe in these values, and this is a prime example of how it was used as a weapon against African Americans.

To begin with, representation can be applied to various areas of our lives, and one of the most important forms of representation that affects everyone is the media. Media representation is especially crucial for children because it is important for them to see themselves represented so they can understand that they should not be ashamed of their culture or feel inferior. White children tend to grow up never having to feel ashamed of themselves or their backgrounds because they grew up in an America that idolizes white culture, while black children or children of color rarely see themselves represented in the media. However, if they are, they are depicted in a negative light. Black people in the news tend to usually be described as thugs and criminals and they play the same roles in fictional movies and television. The media has forced the idea into Americans that dark skin should be feared.

Black people face issues in life other than their blackness, however, those other issues are rarely depicted in the media.

## "Media Representation"

Media representation also plays an important role in shaping beauty standards. In my civil rights class, we discussed the ideal "white is right" and how it has led to internalized white supremacy. "Acceptable" black people showcased in media are typically mixed-race or display lighter skin because they possess more Eurocentric features. Not only does this confirm the stereotype that lighter skin is better, but it also continues to enforce internal racism and colorism within the black community. In my Civil Rights class at Ithaca College, we discussed black beauty and how for black people to be accepted in society throughout the years they had to assimilate to white culture. For example, during the sixties, numerous black artists weren't allowed to be on the cover of their own music records so white people would cover their music for the records to be sold.

Exceptions to this rule were music groups such as The Temptations and The Supremes who were successful as black artists because they wore white hairstyles, lighter makeup, and sported big smiles on their faces. The lack of blacks and minorities represented in the media subliminally trains people to believe that people of color are inferior and do not deserve success. Children of color can be especially affected by this because they will grow up believing that they are less than because they do not see themselves depicted as the main character in the media.

An example of how positive representation can benefit a group of people is how during the 60s the black power movement became very popular and a major figure of that movement was Angela Davis and her afro. She served as an example in the media of how it was okay to let your hair be free and natural and her afro is still a symbol of that time. The black power movement was a time where people were proud to be black and the word black was a term of endearment. James Brown's song sums up the feeling of the black power movement perfectly with the lyrics "say it loud I'm black and I'm proud." This serves as an example to show that when a certain culture is represented in the media, people of that culture learn to be proud of their roots and who they are as a human. Pop culture, despite what people say has a major impact on our society and when I learned about the pop culture aspect of the civil rights movement as an MLK Scholar it was eye-opening to see how much it played a role in shaping the mindsets of Americans.

Education is also a form of representation too. Not only does our social system deprive people of color of positive and correct representation in the media, but our history is also left out of history books as well. As a young black female myself, I grew up attending predominately white institutions where civil rights history was either rarely taught or completely ignored. And through my experience as an MLK Scholar, so much history has been brought to my attention that was falsely taught to me in school or just completely disregarded. In my civil rights class, I have been educated about white supremacy and the strength it still holds in today's culture which I was never taught in public schools.

I was also introduced to black figures and organizations throughout history that contributed to the civil rights movement such as Jo Ann Robinson, SNCC, and SCLC. I learned that these groups consisted of numerous people and organizations working behind the scenes to successfully execute everything. I was able to learn about the impact of how control, structure, and peace led to a successful and cohesive movement. Improving the youth's education system to making it more inclusive would be beneficial in preventing the ignorance that this country has created among its citizens, especially because children are the future of the country.

## "Media Representation"

It is important to educate children because they are the foundation to how this country will be able to move forward to a better, more inclusive future if we properly educate them in school and teach them to have an open mindset so it could be normalized in the future.

Representation is important because it allows people from all walks of life feel appreciated and acknowledged, and yes, we are slowly seeing changes unfold before our eyes due to social media because people are now able to band together and voice their concerns about the state of the country and educate others. However, we still have a long way to travel before we start seeing massive changes and equal representation, and we can begin that process through positive media representation about the Black community.

-Beja Birch '24, MLK Scholar

# "Congratulations! - Now What?"



THE MLK SCHOLAR PROGRAM | ITHACA COLLEGE

**HUMAN RIGHTS**

**CIVIL RIGHTS**



**ITHACA COLLEGE**

Martin Luther King  
Scholar Program

THE MLK SCHOLAR PROGRAM | ITHACA COLLEGE





## ""Congratulations! - Now What?""

The streets of New York City cried in joy for the end of the 45th presidential era. There was no questioning of What if they fail us the way we have been failed before? - only the catharsis of at least there's someone who's willing to try. These ecstatic cowbells that were rung through the Big Apple's Streets was cathartic, but as all catharsis is, it was temporary – and New York put their cowbells down and picked their signs back up.

There is no doubt that the surge of the Black Lives Matter movement in late May of 2020, following the death of 46-year-old hip-hop artist, George Floyd, added more fuel to the fire of “Anyone but Trump 2020” – and our fire burned brighter than those who opposed us: who didn't care about the negative effects the administration held for us, who didn't care that the system that worked out nicely had for them undermined others; but the fight is far from over.

The fight doesn't end because we have a leader from the blue Democratic party rather than the red Republican party. The fight doesn't end because there's a woman of color in the Vice-Presidential seat. Unfortunately, the fight never seems to end – but it most certainly didn't end with a singular person or a singular group having power.

All humans have one flaw that is found in every person: they're human. It's human to make mistakes, to change your mind, to be wrong, to fight for the wrong reasons, to fight for the wrong purpose, to be a three-dimensional human who does or says or agrees with problematic things. While all of this is human, people tend to forget that our social leaders are too. The problem with new-age idolization is the fact that people only see what the reputation precedes them to be. There are no flaws in how one presents themselves in the leadership setting, whether it be professional or for change – but that's not real. It can feel like the other shoe dropped when you realize that people aren't perfect and that a social leader has more than one side of them than “social justice leader.”

Take Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr - MLK was the president of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference and was the face of the Civil Rights Movement within the United States. As advocates for social justice and scholars of the Civil Rights Movement, we discussed as a unit how this “disney-fication” of a real person is inherently damaging. MLK hadn't always been an advocate for the social and civil justice matters that we know and idolize him for – someone needed to inspire him. MLK was also a Christian man, and a family man, but he also cheated on his wife.

It's too easy to get caught up in the rose-colored, airbrushed image of a person – where the soft focus and color distortion hides the shadows and the red flags that make someone almost unhuman. It is human nature to put someone up on a pedestal, and once they're up there, we want them to be 100% worthy of the idolization that comes with the pedestal – but that is also too much pressure to put on one or a small group of people. A pedestal is only as strong as the ones who built it and are holding it up.

## ""Congratulations! – Now What?""

But this new age of digital activism, however easily photoshopped, is also a blessing. Social media has taken a new life in advocacy – anyone can join the fight and face the unavoidable together, and it offers a sense of anonymity over the course of history since you are a part of an internet activist domain where the individual is not higher than the message – just as it should be.

This holds onto the echoes of the Civil Rights Movement. While today, we see MLK as the leader of the movement, he wasn't the sole proprietor of Civil Rights. History has washed over the fight that the SCLC fought as a whole, not just the President of it. The history of combating racism in America isn't just The Great March on Washington, it's JoAnn Robinson and her position in the Women's Political Council and organizing the Montgomery Bus Boycott that lasted 381 days. The Civil Rights Movement is not just the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, it's the 16th Street Baptist Church that had gotten bombed because social justice leaders would have meetings there and the Dexter Avenue Baptist Church where JoAnn Robinson and MLK met. The legacy of the Civil Rights Movement isn't just I Had A Dream, it's also I've Been to The Mountaintop.

Every person who advocates for their rights or the rights for themselves has a role they fulfill. When we process a situation, how we act is how our roles are "decided" - and they can change day by day or be multiple all at once. You can be a civilly disobedient troublemaker, a storyteller who amplifies the voices that are attempted to be silenced, or the step on the hose that times the actions at the most effective moment – and the role you fulfill is just as valuable as anyone else's. We all have a drum major instinct: the desire to be seen, listened to, and to have our words and actions appreciated and valued – every voice in a crowd of thousands is somebody's voice.

Alongside those roles, that are fulfilled with our actions, comes along accountability for our actions. Too often when we hear that someone has done something problematic or even if the action was "damned if you do, damned if you don't" - accountability is incredibly important. The way we individually choose to act with how we've processed the situation is a host unto ourselves, but it is the community's right to recognize that however human problematic behavior is, it must be addressed and corrected.

It is the role of our government to serve the people and to act in the citizen's best interests. With such a high-standing role, as the government is the 'table' in a movement's purpose of 'bringing the issues to the table', how the government reacts and moves forward can be a host unto itself. No role is exempt from accountability to their actions, even if it is at the top of the food chain.

The government is viewed as the top of the food chain because it is meant to act in citizens' best interest. For every miscalculation the government makes, there is someone who may not recover from being the "necessary casualty." While mistakes are human, it does not stop the movement that is forever watching from holding the government accountable for fulfilling their role.

## ""Congratulations! - Now What?""

As long as the movement keeps bringing up its grievances until it's unavoidable, the government has a role to fulfill. It's not the same as the role the individual feels, where they have the luxury of running the race at their pace, as long as they're still in the race (because other things such as work and managing their livelihoods take precedent since they need to co-manage their grievances and their graces), the higher government is not meant to have that luxury because of their role of being the one to make the actual change.

A movement is ever processing and learning and educating, a government must do the same to keep up with its nation's citizens and what it takes to be a proactive government. In the United States of America, we go where we naturally go – with the best interests of those who make our country great.

-Chess Cabrera '24, MLK Scholar


# "Putting Together the Puzzle Pieces of America"



THE MLK SCHOLAR PROGRAM | ITHACA COLLEGE

**HUMAN RIGHTS**

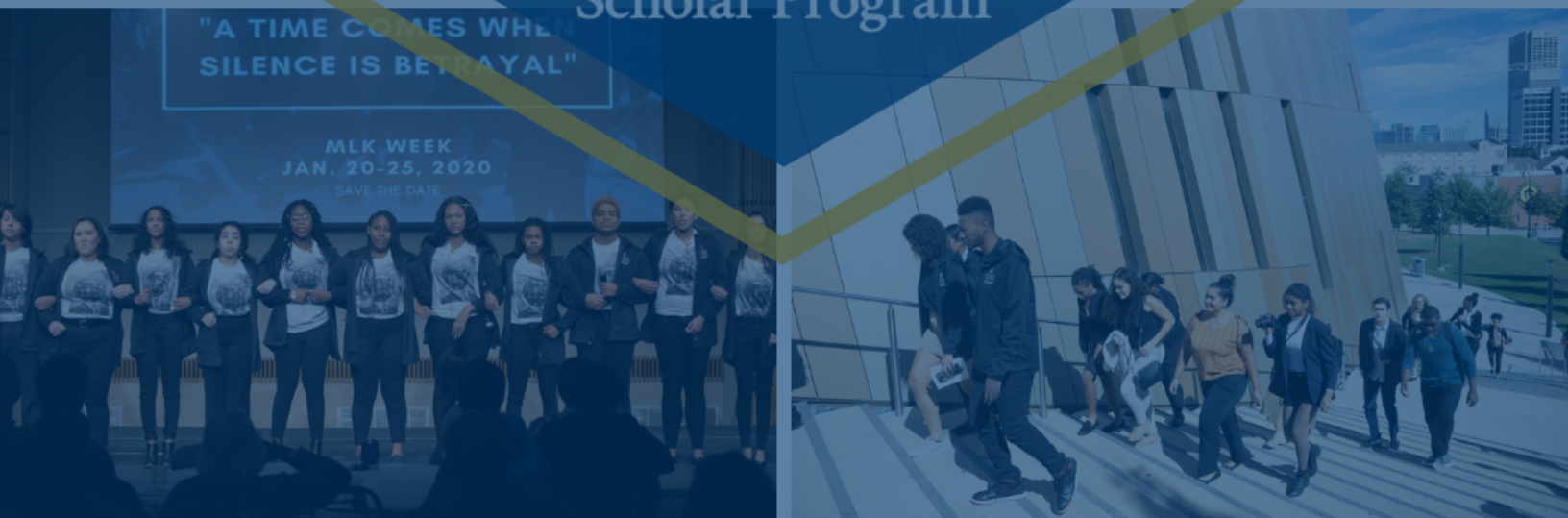
**CIVIL RIGHTS**



**ITHACA COLLEGE**

Martin Luther King  
Scholar Program

THE MLK SCHOLAR PROGRAM | ITHACA COLLEGE



## "Putting Together the Puzzle Pieces of America"

Congratulations on your deserved positions as our nation's leaders. You now have the power to remedy the system of inequality that has plagued our nation. President Joe Biden, in your speech after your election you stated "Black Folks have always had my back". This is backed by a high voter turnout from black women, casting their ballots in your favor. Now it's time that you have theirs and take action.

Dr. Martin Luther King Jr once said "Time is neutral and waits for no man". Time is boiling and under fire from the very systems that continue to corrupt our nation of mass incarceration, inadequate funding for marginalized communities and their schools, and the lack of rehabilitation after the Crime Bill & the War on Drugs; some of which are pieces of legislation you have executed and or have been complicit in. Despite the families who were massively affected by this legislation, we aided in your journey to back the Oval Office. As a result, we are placing our faith in you to remedy the systems that contributed to the generational pain our community has been through.

In this journey it is essential to understand that blatant racism can hide in plain sight, It is hiding within the systems of our democracy in the various forms of housing discrimination, poorly funded schools contributing to inadequate resources essential to the future of our children, our future, The ones who will reform our nation for centuries to come are our children.

The result of the BLM protests is a result of the pain and anger of our bodies being riddled with bullets and the system of justice that demands the most of our beings but frees our adjacent neighbors based on the tint of our skin. While we celebrate your election and the breaking of the glass ceiling of having Vice President-Elect Harris within the White House, there is a higher level of accountability as President and Vice President. For "If you are neutral in a situation of injustice you have chosen the side of the oppressor"- Desmond Tutu.

"Injustice anywhere is a threat to democracy everywhere" -Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. wrote in his Letter To Birmingham Jail. Racism is an umbrella term that can transform itself into housing discrimination, denial of access to resources in educations, sentencing, and COVID-19 disproportionately affecting people of color at a rate much higher than white counterparts. Morally, there is nothing beneficial about racism. The very real existence of it has always impacted the core of our democracy, our laws, and our customs.

There is no remedy for racism. We must take it upon us to enact legislation and be the correction your nation needs. Dialogue around racism is simply not enough anymore. As Dr. King called for in his Letter To Birmingham Jail, we need direct action in the form of legislation. Dialogue around racism is not a new topic but one being recycled and put to rest in a landfill while the stench creeps up to forever strangle our democracy.

Racism is not just the KKK, burning tiki's and the n-word; racism masks itself in the form of silence in systems that work against marginalized groups.

## "Putting Together the Puzzle Pieces of America"

The United States holds the highest number of individuals imprisoned. From the creation of penitentiaries in the 1800s, the "tough on crime" rhetoric from the justice system, mass incarceration has created a culture in America.

In 1993, white legislators introduced the Violence Crime Control and Law Enforcement act. However, when asked to allocate funds for drug treatment and violence prevention programs, it was referred to as "criminal welfare". Many black people at that time, despite having a disease of addiction, were treated and prosecuted as criminals for damage that has been irreplaceable to the black community. Contributing to the cycle of the absence of fatherhood and the cycle of poverty within the community.

When you deprive the families of the structure and treat addiction as a crime, this revolving door of mass incarceration continues depriving the children of any form of stability necessary for their future. While crime trended downwards, the population of imprisonment with no form of rehabilitation grew. Nonetheless, addressing systemic inequality is not a bipartisan issue and in order to move forward, it must be fully coherent and understood by both sides to enact change. With the crime bill enacted in 1994, the "tough on crime" rhetoric continues to take place in the form of an event like Stop and Frisk, allowing Black male offenders to continue to receive longer sentences than similarly situated white male offenders. Black male offenders received sentences on average 19.1 percent longer than similarly situated White male offenders.

Presently, the racism in the justice system lingers, affecting the backbone of the people who were essential in your victory to the Oval Office. As the people of America, we are asking you with the power you possess to utilize your cabinet and administration to enact policy changes that will address the racism that strangles our justice system and to substantially reduce mass incarceration by providing resources for rehabilitation. Without rehabilitation, mass incarceration becomes a revolving door, and imprisonment without rehabilitation exudes the deprivation of humanity.

Systemic racism in the United States is no foreign entity. Its name can no longer be voiced with no hand in hand action. By voicing the issue with no action, you are complicit in the nature that it dissolves our democracy. Evidently, it has shown in its truths in the worldwide pandemic that has swept the nation off our feet: COVID 19. Despite the already prevalent inequities in the medical setting of black women face a higher mortality rate in hospitals despite socioeconomic status. Black women are 3x more likely to get breast cancer, and 80% more likely to have fibroids or cysts on their uterus, in addition to the high mortality rate of giving birth despite being in an industrialized nation. Additionally, black and brown bodies have been hit harshly, dying at a higher rate and being more likely to be infected.

In a study performed by ADL In Michigan, where COVID-19 hit early and hard, African American people make up just 14% of the total population but 40% of those who have died from the virus. "In Louisiana, Black people account for 70% of coronavirus-related deaths in the state, while making up 32% of the population. In New York City, Latinx people made up 34% of deaths, despite being 29% of the city's population, and African Americans represent 28% of deaths, compared with making up 22% of the city's population".

## "Putting Together the Puzzle Pieces of America"

This disproportionate statistic demonstrates how drastic and the harsh impact systemic racism has on black and brown bodies. Resources not only need to be allocated for the black and brown bodies affected but those in dire need like small businesses.

As President Biden eloquently stated, "America needs to invest in its citizens". An outlet as a guiding path to contribute to the economic wealth of the United States is through education. However, there is a class inequity when considering the funding of majority-black school districts and schools against their majority white counterparts. The report from an NPR article starts off by saying " \$23 billion. According to EdBuild, that's how much more funding predominantly white school districts receive compared with districts that serve mostly students of color. "For every student enrolled, the average nonwhite school district receives \$2,226 less than a white school district," This lack of funding can be attributed to the redlining and gerrymandering of districts that enclosed POC into communities in which deprive them of adequate resources and teaching to supplement knowledge to fulfill a career and invest in America's economy. The economic division between schools deprives children of valuable and necessary education, denying them access to the career pathways and opportunities in the near future.

Without the education provided to these students, these students fall in the continuous cycle of being enclosed within their communities and treating education as a last resort instead of valuing the knowledge it holds. Planting a seed in a community without nourishment, encouragement, and enrichment won't allow it to grow. Instead, it is subject to the dormancy of the family's economic bracket and cycle. Not only does this economic division disproportionately affect black students but, but others at the intersections of identity and marginalization.

In a case study published by NPR, it states "In Arizona, poor, primarily white school districts get about \$19,000 per student — while high-poverty, nonwhite districts get about \$8,000, according to EdBuild. "

"Evidently, school funding relies on geography and the funding within that distinct region, further affecting students who live in poverty-stricken communities. The school funding system centered around income tax has allowed the students, as a consequence, to remain in the community. They were incentivized and redlined into illustrating the historical wrongdoings of politicians. Subsequently, our children of the United States of America will never secure the investment needed for them to contribute to their community without adequate education. Subsidies need to be allocated to the foundation of our investment. As we know, academically the U.S falls inferior to many nations from an educational ranking. Allocating funds to public schooling can aid in our progression. Schools cannot solve this deeply ingrained issue on their own, Without the very foundation of education, investing in American citizens would be virtually impossible. Education is the core principle incited upon our youth.

Mr. President, I am writing this in a time of mass execution through the death penalty from the Trump Administration. Whilst heinous crimes do warrant punishment, this punishment shall not be death.

# "Putting Together the Puzzle Pieces of America"

The death penalty does not improve the decrease in homicide rates nor does it provide justice for the families. Whether the perpetrator of the crime does deserve punishment or not, it seems the concept of an "eye for an eye" rather than taking the high road in the justice system devalues itself. Too, many families of the victim of the crime exclaim there was little to no satisfaction in killing the inmate.

In a study done by the University of Minnesota, UM sociology-anthropology professor, Scott Vollum and colleagues found 2.5% of co-victims reported achieving closure as a result of capital punishment, while 20.1% said the execution did not help them heal. One is left wondering if a mass majority of families say that the death penalty of the person who took their loved one away is serving the justice we need? Additionally, the death penalty can subject innocent persons to death. The National Academy of Sciences determined 4% of people on death row were likely innocent.

With a flawed justice system and the combination of pressure for many victims to plead guilty in fear of a lengthy sentence, we risk an innocent life being taken. Economically, executing an individual proves a costly expense in combination with legal defense (if the defendant cannot provide for their own attorney, pre-trial costs, selection of the jury). A trial which on average is 4 times longer than non-capital trials. Incarceration



# "Striving for Equity"



THE MLK SCHOLAR PROGRAM | ITHACA COLLEGE

**HUMAN RIGHTS**

**CIVIL RIGHTS**



**ITHACA COLLEGE**

Martin Luther King  
Scholar Program



## "Striving for Equity"

Social justice and cultural change are a part of every person of color's life. We are all advocating for visibility, acceptance, and seek to subvert a culture rooted in systemic racism.

The importance of making a change in our nation is to think holistically, providing an equitable framework for all, which requires seeing things from another's perspective and worldview.

Today the use of social media is a great tool for bringing awareness and community organizing, but often does not lead to practical results. Make sure if you are committed to social change that you know what you are up to, there are going to be people that act like they are on your side, but often will do it because it is a trend. Slacktivism, which constitutes most activism on social media, can introduce communities to the rhetoric of a movement in social change but does not reach the people that need the most help in changing their perspective.

People of color have been fighting for better public schools, healthcare, and diversity in aspects of life. Social media discord has dramatically changed the way we interact with one another. To make an equitable society, we must promote meaningful public discourse on issues of social justice in the United States. Older generations, while familiar with the Civil Rights Movement, have a different understanding of race relations and cultural power in the United States. It is up to younger generations to find meaningful ways to establish an equitable framework that benefits everyone.

Constantly having to fight the same fight with the same type of people is tiring and exhausting. Often being the only person of color in a room can be difficult, often when you try to bring awareness and/or share the struggles we all have to go through is a difficult burden to bear. We are often left with the responsibility of teaching those of the dominant culture of our struggles, political plight, and lack of influence in all aspects of American life. The anxiety that comes with this responsibility makes minorities in America question their identity. Should we continue trying to educate our oppressors, which is still servitude, or should we stay silent? Perhaps I am asking the wrong questions. A better question might be, how to disrupt a culture and government built on white supremacy?

White supremacy makes you question what makes you, you.

From the macro to the micro, white supremacy is a mental prison with real consequences. For example, the way Native American history is taught in public schools perpetuates the idea that before the Pilgrims, so-called "Indians" were primitive, murderous, and lacking a civilized culture. Think about the damage done to Native American students, how those histories might shape their identity. Another example is how those of Mexican descent are often portrayed as "aliens," "illegal", or taking American jobs. However, if you look at history,

Mexican people are indigenous and were here long before European contact. Finally, if we look at the Covid-19 pandemic, minorities and communities of color are adversely affected.

## "Striving for Equity"

White supremacy is not only bigoted people with tiki torches marching and chanting racist rhetoric, it is often more subtle. Nelson Mandela believed we all have to examine our contributions to white supremacy and be willing to forgive our oppressors. In a country and culture built on systemic racism and white supremacy, we are all victims, and we all are responsible for upholding that system as well.

Often people confuse equality and equity: when discussing social justice it's the equity we seek not equality. Equity, as defined by the constitution, is "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness" but minorities have to fight for those rights, which is where equity becomes a factor. Native Americans have been seeking equity on multiple fronts including but not limited to land rights, inclusion in the federal government, and cultural appropriation. For example, the supreme court acknowledged that treaties made between the U.S. The Federal Government and Native Nations are law and should be honored. This decision represents decades of advocacy within the judicial system. Most recently, President-Elect Joe Biden nominated House Presentative Deb Haaland, as Secretary of the Interior. The first Native American to hold that position.

Furthermore, within the last 6 months, both the Cleveland Indians and the Washington Redskins changed their names and mascots which were decisive wins in the fight for respectful depictions of Native Americans. In terms of social change, it's applying that equity framework and moving together as one proactively. It's worth noting this progress was achieved in the courts, free elections, and activism through social media. Social media is such a powerful tool today.

The ability to reach 100s and 1000s of people in a matter of minutes is very cool. What you do with social media can have a major effect on social change. Using it the right way can bring visibility to social justice issues. However, issues related to social justice must be fought on several fronts.

Often people post social justice topics because it is trending, as opposed to the type of work required to make real change. Slacktivism is a term often used when a person uses a minimal amount of effort for a social cause. Social media is only one tool against white supremacy and oppression.

Anyone can make a post and say they are an activist, it takes real-world effort and perseverance to change our society for the better.

Often when you start devoting yourself to a social justice topic you have to learn to be comfortable being uncomfortable. Have to understand that not everyone is going to support you and during this time you can build a community with like-minded people. While being an advocate for social change you have to choose a topic that really means a lot to you and a topic you are able to push through without stopping. You can't just back down when it gets too hard; it's a lifetime commitment.

Often people will act like they care about social justice and make a statement online and call it a day. Well-intentioned white people will often talk about social justice but are privileged in that they do not experience the daily struggles minorities face.

## "Striving for Equity"

Taking this course changed my perspective on the Civil Rights movement, social justice issues, and my identity as a Native American woman.

The fight for Civil Rights didn't begin and end with Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., it was much bigger than that. It takes all of us, minorities and communities of color, to demand social change. In seeking equity everyone benefits in that all are treated according to their needs, everyone can have the freedom to live a good life, to be happy. While these issues are complex, the outcomes are simple.

The vital thing in social change is to think about others and their needs, to be proactive when trying to fix a problem. We have to have compassion and empathy so that we can see one another's humanity.

Striving for equity takes patients to ensure everyone's voices are heard, needs to be met. No one should be judged for being different. Instead, we should embrace that difference and come to an understanding.

-Kenji Frazier '24, MLK Scholar

# "Leading With Your Conscience"



THE MLK SCHOLAR PROGRAM | ITHACA COLLEGE

**HUMAN RIGHTS**



**ITHACA COLLEGE**

Martin Luther King  
Scholar Program

THE MLK SCHOLAR PROGRAM | ITHACA COLLEGE

**CIVIL RIGHTS**



## "Leading With Your Conscience"

Dear Joe Biden, Kamala Harris, and Lovely Biden Administration,

My name is Olivia Celenza and I am writing to you as a Martin Luther King Scholar from Ithaca College. Before I get into anything too serious, I just wanted to take the time and say how thankful and relieved I am to be writing to you. With you being in office, my hope has been restored in humanity. We did it!

These past four years have been unlike any other and as an optimist, who lives and breathes positivity and wants to do her part in making our nation the best it can possibly be, I have never been this challenged before in my life. Challenged by people's hatred for things outside of their understanding simply because they are different, disgusted by the fact that so many people can hate each other simply because of the color of their skin, a physical aspect of themselves unable to be changed, and broken-hearted by the fact that we, as a country are divided and have truly forgotten what it means to be a united people, as the weight of the world we seem to be living in, is violently being pressing on the shoulders of the innocent. However, with you in charge I have hope.

The road to getting to our destination of betterment and peace may be cluttered and filled with seemingly immovable obstacles, but I am ready to tackle this turmoil! Having a leader who cares about *all* American people rather than just his supporters is refreshing, hearing them form cohesive sentences while working so closely with doctors in the hopes of ending this pandemic, that has been raging war against the world is revitalize, and seeing your cabinet filled with capable individuals instills me with the confidence that we can overcome these difficult times. Because you are here, I see that the American people have chosen love, and that is something I can proud of. I cannot wait to see the good that you do, and if it's anything like the love and dedication I've seen in your Animal Crossing town, bursting with life and filled with smiling faces, I know things will be okay.

Now, let's get started:

Coming from a predominantly white community in the middle of suburbia Pennsylvania as a biracial young woman, makes it extremely hard to feel accurately represented and heard within my educational experiences. When discussing historical events like the Civil Rights Movement and its pivotal leaders including Rev. Martin Luther King Jr., Rosa Parks, Malcom X, and W.E.B. Du Bois,

I got a glossed over struggle that completely ended racial injustice and segregation with singing and the all too well known "I Have A Dream" speech at the steps of the Lincoln Memorial. However, racism is still alive and well within today's current day and age. In fact, saying that it thrives is an understatement. Oppression continues to run rampant in our society, and the "brilliant" leadership of Donald Trump, our 45th president, only further built on the foundations of those corrupted ideals.

Of course, while Trump's toxic political environment provided a platform for white supremacy, it has always existed, lurking in the shadows until the perfect opportunity came to raise it into the light. It just so happened to be that we had a racist, xenophobic, homophobic, and misogynistic leader that allowed their twisted dreams to be "acceptable" throughout our nation.

## "Leading With Your Conscience"

As we enter into your new administration, one would like to assume that this behavior will not be tolerated and steps will be taken to ensure that all people have equal rights and opportunities, no matter what their race, gender, sexual orientation, political affiliation, or ethnicity may be, so that this unjust war on race can finally come to an end. However, we cannot just base this idea of change on the assumption that just because you're here means things will get better.

We must put actions behind our promises, and there is a multitude of ways in which every community across the country can get involved in helping our black and brown brothers and sisters obtain the rights they deserve. One of which being proper education on racism and the Civil Rights movement. No person is born racist. However, due to the upbringing instilled by parental figures and role models in their lives at an impressionable age, have their innocent minds built on the grounds of hate for the color of a person's skin. The educational system alone feeds on this idea of privilege as White Americans are required to take classes on their history while the history of African Americans and people of color are only seen as electives. Therefore, by implanting anti-racist seeds in the young minds of adolescents, we can forge fighters of the good fight and future social justice leaders, in the hope for a brighter future where everyone's voice is heard, and all are seen and judged by their character.

This educational shift should begin with an intense diversity and race training requirement for all teachers. We are a part of a progressive era, a period of widespread political reform and social activism where silence only contributes more to the issue. By giving teachers the capability to understand children from a variety of cultures and backgrounds, problems in the classroom can be settled with maturity, grace and respect. Before Coronavirus blindsided us and the world came to a complete standstill, my high school had a race issue involving a white student's use of a slur that infuriated me.

The administration handled the situation poorly, the student was not reprimanded, and what made matters worse was the fact that a minority of my school's white population, teachers included, even supported their actions. As a place that supposedly "values diversity" you should not allow students to talk down to one another, especially minorities, and almost makes it feel as if this "diversity" is more of a tokenism made to make the school look better through advertising. A school whose teachers are well prepared in civil rights matters and truly value diversity would furnish a better sense of security and belonging within the school for its minority students.

I believe Jane Elliot is onto something with her "Brown Eyes Blue Eyes" experiment and feel that including this exercise into the curriculum of young children would be crucial in shaping the young perspective on the issues of race.

If you are a white American, a child especially, you do not understand the minority struggle; people who live to fight, each and every day, against those who want to strip them away of even basic human rights given to all American people by the Constitution. But, then again, when the constitution was written, where our founding fathers really thinking about blacks and African Americans? They believed them to be property, unworthy of even the simplest of necessities.

## "Leading With Your Conscience"

Therefore by doing this examination, no child would not know what it felt like to be excluded, cast out, and seen as lesser than, due to an aspect of a physical feature that does not define them as an individual. Granted while this study was conducted in 1968 and received some backlash in the beginning, change is mandatory and not easy. We cannot sugarcoat the situation that has plagued our everyday lives and must combat the issues that face us head-on.

When teaching about the Civil Rights movement, why don't we start by teaching in color? We act as if this has happened a millennial ago, but in reality, it was only 60 years ago. We cannot turn a blind eye to the way history is repeating itself today and must stay informed to continue to protect our neighbors. First and foremost, Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. was more than his "I Have A Dream" speech. He was an optimist, who strived for equality and non-violence, yet constantly doubted the movement. Discuss the Church Bombings and how they forced the movement forward since even a place once meant for peace and unity, had become a battlefield. Emphasize the importance of Claudette Colvin and Jo Ann Robinson, two groundbreaking yet unrecognized women who launched the movement and used their voices to do their part in moving the nation in the right direction. T

talk about the SCLC and SNCC, John Lewis, even Malcolm X, and how his differentiating views collided with MLK's. Let them know the realistic uphill climb it took African Americans to be seen, show peaceful protests turned bloody due to police brutality, and highlight the way in which American "heroes" used the African American plight as political opportunities to get ahead. The Civil Rights movement is many things, but it is not just about King and a dream.

African American history is a part of American history. This country was built on the backs of slaves and people of color, and they are pushed aside in order for the white man to gain power, success, and wealth. We cannot ignore the fact that the United States was never great as our domain was "founded" on stolen land with the help of cruel forced labor. We are America and what has happened in the past is unspeakable and horrifying, yet we cannot pretend like it didn't happen. Millions of African Americans have suffered for the growth and development of our nation, and it is despicable to believe that even after 400+ years, our country still contains a multitudinous amount of racial tension. No skin color is better than another, and we cannot live as a cohesive nation believing otherwise. So, what are we going to do about it? Choose education over ignorance.

Defunding the police is something I also believe would be extraordinarily beneficial to our society. It's no secret that there has been a massive misuse of power that results in people of color being treated with hostility and brutality by law enforcement, whether they be guilty or innocent, to the point where merciless killings become a normal everyday occurrence and movements to combat this issue, such as Black Lives Matter, have transpired from the wreckage, in order to stand against the injustices faced through the law.

I could get into the fact that people like George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Keenan McCain, Gamel Antonio Brown, Joshua James Brown, Dominique Antwon Antwon Anderson, Jeremy Grayson, Bobby Joe Gibbs, Desmond Hayes, Manuel Ellis, Elijah Jamaal Brewer, and countless others should be alive today and that their deaths have marred the American streets with innocent blood.



## "Leading With Your Conscience"

I could go on to express the fact that justice is rarely served, as many of these beautiful people are left as forgotten murders in a sea of killings, while their families and friends are left unsupported and grieving at the loss of their loved ones. However, just saying that something is wrong isn't changing the situation. Saying that things must be done in order to bring about change isn't taking action, and unfortunately, this problem is nothing new and has plagued our nation longer than anyone could imagine as the law has been formed and developed out of the slave catchers back in the days of the Civil War. Therefore I believe the best way in which we can resolve most of these violent occurrences is by defunding the police so that we can truly make an impact and do better for our neighbors.

Defund the police by definition means to redirect and reallocate funding away from the police and other law enforcement to other government agencies funded by the local municipality. To put it short, defunding is not abolishing policing, and even those that say we must abolish the police, do not mean we should get rid of law enforcement altogether. Through defunding the police, we are able to hold law enforcement fiscally responsible, advocate for an approach driven by the market to taxpayer money and reduce crime and police violence.

The last point I would like to address is the abolishment of the death penalty. There is no person in the United States of America who isn't aware of our flawed justice system. Innocent people are being thrown into jail, are sentenced to lives away from their families and homes, and are even being put to death all because of crimes they didn't commit. They are charged, wrongly prosecuted, and are stripped away of all dignity and any sense of normalcy as they are sentenced to spend the rest of their eternity behind bars. Looking at this from a statistical standpoint, we have sent literally hundreds of innocent people to their deaths simply because they are unable to prove their innocence. From a moral perspective, I don't believe that anyone deserves to die. Yes, people can be corrupted and cruel, and some do horrible things that don't necessarily deserve forgiveness but killing them does not make us any better. Life is a sacred gift meant to be treasured. We shouldn't have the capability and power to strip someone of that. And if that doesn't persuade you in any sense to eliminate the death penalty, let's take into consideration the indisputable fact that we simply cannot afford it. Each death penalty case costs approximately 2-3 million dollars. Since we have put hundreds on death row and have carried out a majority of these killings, we are literally spending billions of dollars we probably don't have just to have the death penalty. Alternatives are also a multitude, and the money we don't use on capital punishment could be put to better use in communities through tax cuts, crime reduction, and education.

I know that this presidency of yours will be nothing short of stressful, however you have the ability to be the change we so desperately need in our American society. You can be the leader that effectively stands for all people and represents the ideals that our nation strives to achieve. We are holding you accountable and are emphasizing that you must use your position of power to lead with your conscience and do what's best for the American people.

Wishing you nothing but the best.

## OUR MISSION

The Martin Luther King Scholar Program prepares academically talented, historically underrepresented, undergraduate- students of color for the development of knowledge, skills, and ethical values by engaging them in meaningful learning opportunities that foster social justice service, leadership development, and global citizenship.

## OUR VISION

The Martin Luther King Scholar Program facilitates the students' pursuit of academic and personal success within a challenging developmental experience by fostering scholarly excellence, social justice service, leadership development, and global citizenship."

## OUR PROGRAM OUTCOMES

By the completion of the program, each MLK Scholar will have:

- identified a social justice issue to which they are committed and demonstrate that commitment through knowledge and understanding of the issue and by sustained service.
- utilized Dr. King's teachings to explain and analyze the fundamental ideas associated with social justice issues.
- demonstrated their capacity as leaders by successfully completing the Student Leadership Institute Leadership Certificate Program.
- demonstrated competent writing and presentation skills.
- demonstrated their understanding of the intersection between global citizenship and social justice in their field of expertise through their project proposal and written reflections.