

Name: Ayannah Obas

Grade: 11

School: West Haven High School

3rd Congressional District

As an African American woman, there's a daily struggle to perform exceptionally well to evade being perceived as less than. I perform specific tasks such as maintaining a smile regardless of the insults hurled at me, maintaining my composure to avoid being labeled an "angry black woman," and maintaining my confidence to prevent exploitation. Unfortunately, these are common aspects present within African American women everywhere. Growing up in the early 2000's I still felt a sense of inferiority compared to my classmates. Due to the lack of representation of black women, I felt ugly and uncomfortable in my skin. I would often beg my mother to style my hair a certain way, similar to my white classmates. I refused to speak my native language for fear of being ridiculed. I kept myself hidden and altered significant aspects of my being. As a young child with a religious upbringing, I vividly recall praying to be white. That one day, I would awake with straight blonde hair and vibrant blue eyes. That one day, I would finally be beautiful. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. was a prominent figure within the Civil rights movement and a significant role model within my life. He demonstrated the effectiveness of unity and fighting for justice and equality. Through his work, he provided a sense of unity through his advocacy of integration. His strenuous efforts established the Civil Rights Act of 1964, a significant breakthrough and achievement.

His work empowered individuals to persevere despite the odds against them. Despite his efforts, the sense of injustice he felt remains in America today. Injustices such as police brutality, flawed court rulings, and unfair advantages still threaten to invalidate Dr. King's accomplishments. But I also have a dream. I dream that one day my children will live in a world where they never once question their existence and they never once pray to the same God and plead to change their melanated skin.

A dream where I no longer have to force a smile amidst insults or have to calm myself down in heated positions. Where I no longer possess uncertainty in my own being. I refuse to continue to deny who I am as a black woman and conform to society's standards. I aspire to be a prominent figure and representative of black women to little black girls struggling with their own sense of beauty. The same prominent figure as Dr. King presents himself to me.

I aspire to be the change Dr. King saw in his dream. I aspire to live in the promised land Dr. King envisioned, to finally be "Free at last!" Finally liberated from the chains of oppression, prejudice, and injustice. The same chains that held my ancestors in bondage centuries ago. "With all deliberate speed," may we, my fellow African Americans of generations to come, be finally "Free at last!"