

I was five years old when my teacher played Dr. King's 'I have a Dream' speech. We sat on the rug in a dark classroom, the hum of the projector and his voice echoing through the room. "I have a dream," he declared. "I have a dream that one day this nation will rise up and live out the true meaning of its creed." I listened, thinking his dream had already come true. I went to school in a community where people of all backgrounds lived together. Only as I grew up did I really start to see past the surface. Some had more opportunities, received better treatment, greater equality—while others did not. I was too young to understand the unfairness in this nation still existed. But now the truth is clear to me now: we haven't completed his Dream. I know now that equality is not automatic. It needs to be fought for, nurtured and carried forward by everyone.

I've already had tastes of making change in my community. Last year, I participated in a flag planting ceremony at St. John's Cemetery. The symbolic act felt small at first. And then, I lifted my head and looked around me. I saw people I've never met all doing the same thing. Children. Adults. Seniors. People of every background all doing the same thing—planting flags. I realized how even small actions can be so unifying. Nobody knew each other at the ceremony, yet we were all committed to a larger cause because we all shared respect and honor for those who served our country. In this realization, I understood where change comes from. It's not just from grand marches and powerful speeches, but from people coming together to do their part. This moment inspired me to think about how I want to contribute in my own life, and how the simplest actions can spiral into encouraging others to act and care for a cause greater than themselves.

Each experience—no matter how small—has been some of the most fulfilling feelings in my life. My studies in the history of law and government have taught me that equality doesn't happen by accident. It requires knowledge, effort and endurance. In my studies, the majority of change has been made by informed citizens who fought against unfairness every chance they could.

I've enrolled in every class relating to civics, law, and justice, and I dive beyond the curriculum, immersing myself in ideas and subjects that challenge me. I do all of this because I want to complete the Dream. I want to help move us closer to fulfilling the Dream he dreamed long ago—the Dream that this nation carries since its founding, the creed of our nation. I want to shape and fight for policies that give everyone a fair and equal chance. I know that making real change takes time and effort, but I am committed to persisting and growing so that I can do my part. I may be young and idealistic, but I understand that continuing Dr. King's Dream begins with the willingness to believe and act. His Dream has become my Purpose.