

Law Day Essay Contest 2024

Voices of Democracy

The CBA congratulates this year's Law Day Essay Contest winner, Luisa Villasenor! For the second year, the CBA recognized Law Day with a civics education essay contest for students across Colorado. Villasenor, an 11th grader at Cherry Creek High School in Greenwood, was awarded the top prize in the high school category. Her essay, reprinted below, responds to the prompt, "What is freedom of speech? Write about a specific speech in US history when a person used their voice to effect change."

How "I Have a Dream" Changed Everything

Freedom of speech is a fundamental right that is valued in the United States and protected by the First Amendment to the Constitution. It allows people to express their opinions and beliefs without fear of censorship or government reprisals. This right enables an open exchange of ideas, empowers individuals to challenge the status quo, and contributes to social progress. Throughout history, many people have used their voice to bring about change and promote a more just and equal society.

In the United States, freedom of speech is a cornerstone of democracy, and it is essential for the functioning of a free and open society. Without the ability to freely express opinions and ideas, progress and social change would be severely hindered. It is through the open exchange of ideas that societies are able to grow, evolve, and address issues of inequality and injustice.

One of the most influential figures in American history is undoubtedly Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., a renowned civil rights leader who delivered his iconic "I Have a Dream" speech for jobs and freedom in Washington, DC on August



28, 1963. Dr. King was a champion for racial equality and an end to segregation in the United States, using his powerful voice to inspire hope, ignite change, and galvanize individuals into action. With more than 250,000 people gathered in front of the Lincoln Memorial (census.gov), his speech resonated deeply with the nation, as he passionately articulated a vision of a future where individuals would be judged by their character, not their skin color. In calling for an eradication of racism, discrimination, and inequality, Dr. King urged Americans to unite in the pursuit of a more equitable and inclusive society. This speech united individuals from all backgrounds in the pursuit of a more equitable society, showcasing his ability to inspire hope and ignite change through his unwavering commitment to racial equality and justice.

The enduring impact of Dr. King's "I Have a Dream" speech lies in its universal appeal and demonstrates a profound resonance across diverse audiences. King's iconic speech exemplifies the power of words to inspire and ignite change. Through the masterful use of imagery, such as his vision of children "not judged by the

color of their skin but by the content of their character," King illustrates a vivid picture of a future founded on equality and unity. His words, like a symphony of justice, echo in the hearts of individuals from all backgrounds, transcending racial divides and awakening a shared desire for a better world. With each repetition of "I have a dream," King's message gains momentum, fueling the flames of a movement toward freedom, justice, and equality for all. By harnessing the universal values of dignity and fairness, Dr. King galvanizes a nation to join hands in pursuit of a society where every individual is judged not by their outward appearance, but by the richness of their humanity. In another example King says, "Let freedom ring from Stone Mountain of Georgia." This phrase is an invitation to freedom and equality everywhere, and a clarion call to combat segregation in the United States. The resonating power of Dr. King's speech lies in its ability to unite individuals from diverse backgrounds behind a shared vision of a more equitable and inclusive society, showcasing his unwavering commitment to inspire hope and ignite change in the pursuit of racial equality and justice.

The iconic speech of King's "I Have a Dream" stands as a powerful illustration of the transformative influence of free speech within a democratic society. By asserting his right to speak out against racial injustice and oppression, King shines a spotlight on the deep-rooted racism and discrimination that pervaded American society. His impassioned words serve as a rallying cry, urging individuals to confront their biases, resist institutional discrimination, and actively contribute to the creation of a more inclusive and equitable social order. King's speech reverberates throughout a generation, galvanizing activists, leaders, and ordinary citizens to unite in the struggle against racism and advocate for civil rights and social justice. King's iconic speech not only highlights the transformative power of speech in a democratic society by shedding light on racial injustice, but also underscores the crucial role of freedom of expression in driving positive societal change and advancing principles of justice and equality.


The unmistakable honesty and clarity of King’s word choice in his speech reinforces the critical role of free speech in fostering a healthy democratic environment. The freedom to voice opinions, challenge authority, and effect positive transformation is fundamental to the essence of democracy. King’s adept use of rhetoric ignited activity that brought about substantial advancements in the civil rights movement within the United States.


His enduring legacy serves as a poignant testament to the dynamic impact of free speech and the necessity of utilizing one’s voice to champion principles of justice, equality, and human rights, thereby inspiring future generations to pursue social change through the power of expression. King articulates his resounding belief in the power of free speech to drive positive social change through the acknowledgment of the challenges that come with safeguarding this

fundamental right, particularly in contentious issues like hate speech and misinformation that can harm marginalized communities.

It is equally important to recognize that freedom of speech is not without its challenges. There are often debates and discussions about the boundaries of free speech, especially when it comes to hate speech, which incites violence, and spreads misinformation. Examples of hate speech during King’s time are that of Bull O’Connor, Alabama Governor George Wallace, and others who publicly sided with the Ku Klux Klan in antagonistic rallies against King and other civil rights’ demonstrators. While it is crucial to protect the right to express opinions, it is also important to consider the impact that certain forms of speech can have on marginalized communities and the potential harm that it can cause, as seen in the archived footage of civil right marchers being arrested and

beaten or bitten by police dogs. While freedom of speech is a fundamental right essential for the functioning of a democratic society, it is imperative to address the challenges it poses, especially in regard to hate speech and its potential harm to marginalized communities.

Freedom of speech is a vital right that is fundamental to the functioning of a democratic society. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.’s “I Have a Dream” speech serves as a powerful example of the impact that free speech can have in inspiring, uniting, and mobilizing people toward a common goal. It is through the exercise of this right that individuals are able to challenge the status quo, advocate for change, and contribute to the betterment of society. As we continue to navigate the complexities of free speech, it is important to uphold this fundamental right while also being mindful of the responsibilities that come with it. 






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