

Daring to Dream:

A MARCH
OF HOPE



MANHATTAN
COUNTRY SCHOOL

27TH ANNUAL
Martin Luther King, Jr.
Commemorative March
JANUARY 19, 2015



27TH ANNUAL Martin Luther King, Jr. Commemorative March January 19, 2015

A Brief History

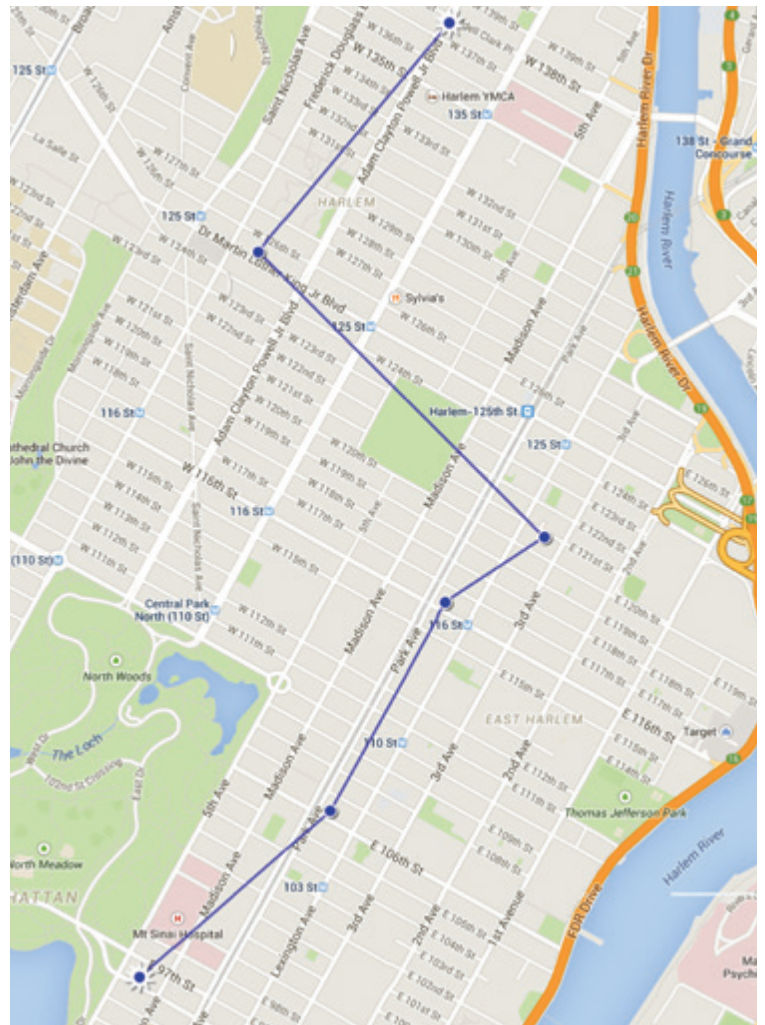
The Martin Luther King, Jr. Commemorative March is a tradition at Manhattan Country School that demonstrates the passion and leadership of its students. Since its founding in 1966, MCS has worked to fulfill Dr. King's dream of unity, peace and equality. Each year, since 1989, the eighth-grade students have planned a march in memory of Dr. King and his legacy. The students are asked to ponder, "If Dr. King were alive today, what would he consider to be a social justice issue worth fighting for and raising awareness about?" Students engage in healthy debate as they work toward group consensus on one theme for the march and develop critical thinking and communications skills as they research and write speeches about contemporary civil rights issues that are presented along the march route.

March Themes of Recent Years

- 2015:** Daring to Dream: A March of Hope
- 2014:** 21 Voices: Letters of Support, Protest and Hope
- 2013:** In 25 Years: Reflecting on the Civil Rights Struggles of Today, Looking Toward Justice for Tomorrow
- 2012:** Equality in Every Language
- 2011:** We Have Another Dream: Civil Rights in the 21st Century
- 2010:** A Peace of the Dream: Living MLK's Dream in a Turbulent World
- 2009:** Dear Barack: Letters to the Leader of Today From the Leaders of Tomorrow
- 2008:** The Colors of Rainbows: Gay Rights and Civil Rights
- 2007:** Walk the Talk of Peace

The 2015 March Route

- STOP ONE:** Former site of the Renaissance Ballroom and Casino (2351 Adam Clayton Powell, Jr. Blvd.)
- STOP TWO:** Apollo Theater (253 West 125th Street)
- STOP THREE:** Harlem Community Justice Center (170 East 121st Street)
- STOP FOUR:** City Council District Eight Office (105 East 116th Street)
- STOP FIVE:** The Young Women's Leadership School of East Harlem (105 East 106th Street)
- STOP SIX:** Manhattan Country School (7 East 96th Street)



STOP ONE: Renaissance Ballroom and Casino

The Renaissance Ballroom and Casino was a premier event space for blacks during the Harlem Renaissance. During its 60 years, it served as a venue for big band concerts led by the likes of Duke Ellington and Cab Calloway, champion boxing matches of pugilists such as Joe Louis, meetings of the NAACP, and home games of the Harlem Rens, the country's first black professional basketball team. Now abandoned for more than three decades and denied landmark status, the building is in a state of severe disrepair. Plans are in place to demolish and replace the iconic Harlem intuition with an apartment and retail development, a decision that has faced push back and protests in the community.



Samori

Here we stand in front of what was once a safe haven. A home to black people who otherwise were abused, oppressed and disenfranchised. Yet as we stand here this building is going to be torn down. A sign of equality in a neighborhood

that is treated otherwise is about to be torn down. There is no justice in such an act. There is no empathy, sympathy, or even respect. In the one true place where justice is meant to flourish, I've found that there is none. Here we stand, at a place that was once a beautiful red brick building that is now a desolate, abandoned, and neglected structure. A building that once was a beacon of hope for people of color is soon to be torn down and manipulated into another haven for the upper class. This building is the perfect representation of the American justice system.

We have a problem right now that is infecting our nation. The problem is the American justice system, an abomination that has employed the likes of Jon Burge, Darren Wilson and Daniel Pantaleo. They've abused a system meant to protect and have been tried by the same system. Only one of them – Jon Burge – was convicted and placed in jail, but his sentence wasn't sufficient.

Over the course of six years Jon Burge tortured over 100 African-American men, and in response to such a horrendous crime he only received a sentence of four-and-a-half years. How dare we as citizens of America call such a ludicrous system our justice system when it resembles one of organized crime. Police officers have been employed to protect you and your children, yet, among them are men and women who rather than help America progress, hinder it. There can no longer be tolerance for this kind of behavior. I can only imagine the wave of feelings that the families of Eric Garner, Tamir Rice and Michael Brown feel in this very moment. The lives of all these people have been stolen. No amount of words, flowers, statements from the president, or news stories bashing the killers will ever return these children, fathers, and friends, nor will it ever deliver the necessary justice to compensate for their deaths. But this system of justice isn't only killing the citizens its sworn to protect, it's also incarcerating them and setting them up for a life imprisoned.

Our justice system is meant to be as fair as possible. Yet, you have people going in to jail for long periods of time for petty crime and you have a system that too readily sets these people up to become repeat offenders. Some would argue that we have repeat offenders due to the leniency in the justice system, that these repeat offenders deserve to be in prison for longer periods

of time. What they're really asking for is an oppression of a group of people. These people, who most often come from low-income families and neighborhoods where there is very little say in what happens to them on a government level, are introduced to police officers as adversaries at a young age, people who come from oppression, an oppression that is silent, and silently removes youth – the future of America – from their homes and places them in a new home, prison. This is our justice system.

That is not even the tip of the iceberg. In Cleveland, a 12-year-old boy named Tamir Rice was shot by the police because they confused his airsoft gun for a real one, even though the 911 call said the weapon was probably fake. That was not the first time an incident like that had happened with these officers. According to personnel records of Timothy Loehmann's time at the police academy, officials were in the middle of firing him when he resigned. The reason he was being fired? He was emotionally unstable and lacked the maturity required to be a police officer. He also lacked the ability to perform basic instructions. This was in regard to a specific incident relating to gun training. If that's not bad enough, the second officer, Frank Garmback, also had a previous problem with using excessive force – a problem that the

City of Cleveland had to pay \$100,000 for. In a confrontation with Tamela Eaton, Garmback used an illegal chokehold, twisted her wrist and repeatedly punched her in the face and body. Tamela had simply called the police to get her car towed, but instead she was hospitalized. Do you see the recurring theme?

My fellow citizens of America, there is hope. We can make change.

My fellow citizens of America, there is hope. We can make change. The first step is to educate ourselves about the policies and problems that exist within the systems of government. I've given you examples but there are way more. We need to find these problems, map them and figure out what causes them. One of the most obvious causes is the lack of representation for the impoverished in our government. The next step is figuring out long-term solutions, ways to create a better system – a system of equality rather than a system of bias and oppression in which money and status play a factor in court. Next, we need to use these solutions.

None of it will be easy, but we have a duty not only to this government but to the warriors who have come before us. We have a duty to Martin Luther King, Jr., Malcolm X, Stokely Carmichael, Huey Newton and Bobby Seale. Because they all had dreams, dreams in which an African-American child doesn't have to walk down the street a certain way to avoid being stopped by a cop. Dreams in which murderers are convicted and families delivered justice. Dreams in which America is for the people regardless of gender, nationality, race, and sexual preference. But this dream doesn't just belong to them, this dream belongs to us, it belongs to America.

This dream is the true American Dream.



Michael

On February 13, 1923, right here at the Renaissance Ballroom, the Harlem Rens were founded. The Harlem Rens were the first all-black basketball team, and at the time, most people saw them as exactly that. As the team moved forward,

the players' skill became more and more evident. They played the Boston Celtics on a number of occasions, and competed with top basketball teams from around the world. Their home was right here. People would come flooding in to catch the games. But too often they were seen only as the first all-black basketball team. Skin color had not been substituted for skill, but had overtaken the Rens' legacy. Not to say this legacy of breaking a race barrier isn't impressive. It's a great achievement. But today, basketball is seen as a predominantly black sport. In 2011, the NBA was 78 percent black, 17 percent white, four percent Latino, and one percent Asian. Although there are white people who are very talented basketball players, their skin color sometimes overshadows that. This happens too often in sports, where a player's skin color casts an everlasting shadow over their skill, creating a climate where to be considered good you have to be part of the majority race.

In the 21st century, racism is supposed to be eradicated from this world. If you follow soccer, you may have heard of Mario Balotelli. He plays soccer for Italy's national team and the club team, AC Milan. You may be wondering why I am bringing him up. Well, in 2012, during the Euro Cup, Balotelli's Italy played against Spain. Throughout the game, he heard spectators call him a monkey and chant, "Go back to Africa!" Later, when playing for AC Milan, he was subjected to similar chants and had inflatable bananas thrown at him. When CNN interviewed Balotelli, he said the next time he experienced this he would walk off the field.

In 2013, Kevin-Prince Boateng, another AC Milan player, led both his club and the opposing team off the field during the game in protest of the racism he and some of his teammates were facing. This has happened to many more soccer players. In fact, it is the experience of many athletes around the world. This racism makes these players feel alienated. Racism is even used as a weapon by fans of these players' clubs. It is unfortunate to see players being treated this way. Many have said these are big-time athletes and they should be used to these types of situations, but we must remember they are people, too. If you or I were treated this way, we would feel the urge to walk away from something we love, just like these players.

I am a hockey player. I have played with blacks, whites, Latinos, Asians, the list goes on and on. But one thing is for sure: I have

Say no to racism. If you hear or see something racist, call that person out.

never played with someone who is bad or good because of his race. If this is the case, why are there so few black hockey players? Could it be that they just don't play hockey as much? Maybe. The problem is that we just don't know. Maybe most African-American players play in the AHL, where people with dreams of playing hockey in the pros go to try and grow into NHL-worthy players. As of right now, there are only 29 black players out of 600 in the NHL, and most of them don't play at all, they just practice with the teams.

One of the most notable black players in the NHL is Montreal Canadiens defenseman P.K. Subban, who is Jamaican-Montserratian. During a 2014 playoff game versus Boston, Subban scored the game-winning goal in game one of the seven-game series. He was then bombarded with racist tweets from outraged Boston fans. When asked in an interview about the tweets, Subban said, "I don't hold the Boston Bruins organization responsible for the tweets that I received, but the Bruins fans. The tweets I saw were very upsetting, and I think that those fans who participated should be ashamed." While this was happening, P.K.'s brother was a goalie prospect for the Boston Bruins. This whole situation was very ironic. This was not the first time Boston fans

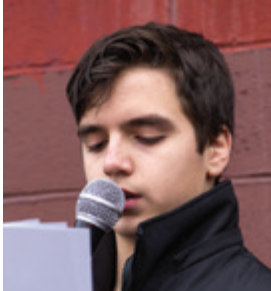
had done this. In 2012, the Bruins were eliminated from the playoffs by an overtime goal scored by Washington Capitals forward Joel Ward. Ward was met with tweets from Boston fans similar to those Subban received.

So why are athletes being targeted because of their race? It could be because of the culture we live in today, where racism hides in the shadows until it sees fit to

come out of hiding to be used as a weapon. It may be that fans see this as funny. Could it be the combination of the two? I don't care. I just want it to stop. When players want to walk away from the sport they love because fans want to single them out and abuse them because of their race that is disgraceful. When fans take out their anger about their team losing on a single player of a certain race and use racist language and slurs to insult them that is just flat out wrong. And it doesn't just affect the players. Imagine a young black hockey player with ambitions of being in the NHL seeing the tweets about Subban or Ward, or a young white kid being told he can't play basketball because he is white. This is the kind of thing that discourages kids from playing certain sports.

A lot of effort is being made to fight racism in sports. The best way is what FIFA's campaign suggests, "Say no to racism." If you hear or see something racist, call that person out. Talk to your coach, a parent, or even a fellow teammate. Make sure that person knows what they did was not okay. Do not let what the Rens stood for go to waste. Racism has no place in sports – none.





Ben

As a young person growing up in the 21st century, I see technology is an ever-present part of our lives. We communicate through our smart phones and computers. Unfortunately, as texting and social media

sites get more popular, they are being used as weapons. It is easy to make cruel comments when you are not face to face with another person. It's easy to send unwanted photos to hundreds of people when you can be anonymous. Bullies can text or post whatever they want without any personal consequences. However, there are often devastating consequences for the victims. Victims may start to get discouraged and depressed. They may start missing school on purpose so they can avoid the bullies. As a result, they fall behind in their classes. Being so hurt and having their lives destroyed, they sometimes take their own lives. This was the case for a teenager named Ciara Pugsley, who committed suicide on September 29, 2012, after being called "ugly" and "a slut" on social media. Her death is one of the many teen suicides caused by cyber bullying.

There are many other cases of people falling victim to bullying, like 18-year-old student Tyler Clementi, who jumped off of the George Washington Bridge in 2010. A teenager named Jessica Logan killed herself because a nude picture was sent around by her boyfriend. A 13-year-old boy from Vermont, Ryan Halligan took his own life because he was bullied on multiple social media sites. These individuals killed themselves because of the abuse they suffered online. This needs to change to stop the pain of cyber bullying and the tragic consequences.

According to NoBullying.com, more than half of young people report being cyber bullied, with 10 percent to 15 percent facing ongoing abuse. More than half of the victims say they never tell their parents. Also, 95 percent of teens who witnessed bullying on social media say the abuse is not reported. One possible way to encourage witnesses is to make

it easier to anonymously report bullying. We all need to be a part of the solution by not standing by while others are hurt.

Another way to prevent cyber bullying is by having more restrictions on language and the length of comments and posts so the hurtful comments will not be as detailed and as strongly worded therefore making them less offensive. I support the banning of derogatory words, which I think will make comments less hurtful.

Sometimes bullying isn't intentional. Sometimes someone writes something in the heat of the moment and sends it without thinking it over. Right here in Harlem, a student group called Teen-Pact is working with the nonprofit Community Healthcare Network, using PSAs to get their anti-bullying message across. One of their PSA messages is, "It's not funny anymore. Don't be an accidental bully." They are trying to prevent social media users from posting comments they will regret. They want us to read what we write before we post. This will cut down on the cyber bullying. This group is taking a step that is needed to bring cyber bullying to its knees.

There are many people working on cyber bullying, like the organization STOMP Out Bullying. It sponsors Blue Shirt Day World Day of Bullying Prevention on the first Monday of each October. *Seventeen* magazine has an anti-bullying campaign called "Delete Digital Drama." Many schools have their own campaigns and anti-bullying laws have been enacted. Unfortunately, the problem continues, but there are stories of hope like Matthew, an autistic man who got a threatening text. His dad took action and the bully apologized. Corina, a young girl who was bullied and tried to kill herself at age 12, survived with the help of family and friends. She wrote in a blog post, "Speak up! Stay strong! Nothing is going to change if you don't."

I have been lucky not to have been cyber bullied, but I do know it is a pressing issue that should not only be handled by the people who are affected. We all have to be careful how we use texting and social media and step in and report bullying when we witness it. There is hope when we all act with kindness and bravery to save innocent lives.



There is hope when we all act with kindness and bravery.



Leilani

Most people in the world have heard about HIV and AIDS, but many of those people are sorely uneducated on the subject. From personal experience in sex ed class and from listening to my peers, I know that most people my age

can't even distinguish between HIV and AIDS. At MCS, we have the privilege of having sex education class and know a lot more than most kids our age on the subject. A recent survey showed that a third of teens in the U.S. thought there was a cure to AIDS. This is in America, where we're supposedly very educated. The HIV and AIDS epidemic started in the '80s when thousands of people were getting diagnosed each year in the U.S. alone. And just last year there were 2.1 million new cases of AIDS reported. Between 1981, when the epidemic started, and 1995 we started to make progress and the rate of new infection went down globally. But between 1995 and today HIV and AIDS rates have been going up rapidly. Everyone in the world is at risk of HIV. This is a global problem that needs to be fixed.



Rob Vassilarakis is originally from El Salvador but lived in Harlem his whole life. He was thrown out of the house at a young age when his mom found out he was gay. He was living on the street barely getting by and started dating a man who didn't have the best habits, including having unprotected sex and using crystal meth. He became addicted. He got tested and found out he was HIV positive at age 23. He checked into rehab and now works at Harlem United where he educates others about how to avoid getting HIV. Rob is taking care of himself now but he is an example of someone who got HIV because of a lack of education and resources.

This happens to people all over the world, every day. They get HIV from their partners or moms before they even know what's happening to them. Healthcare is very important for everyone. In the places where HIV and AIDS are the most prevalent, healthcare is inconsistent and often difficult to access. Twenty-three-and-a-half million out of the 35 million people living with HIV in the world live in sub-Saharan Africa. That's more than 60 percent of the world's HIV population in one region. The U.N. is very aware of this. In a recent meeting about the AIDS epidemic, they set out some goals and decided to focus on 22 countries. Twenty-one of those countries are in Africa and the 22nd country

People's health should not be impacted by their race or where they live.

is India. Thirty-two percent of Indians are under the poverty line. In many African countries the poverty rates are even higher, which shows that poorer people have less access to things like sex education and accessible healthcare systems.

This is a global issue, but there are many things that can be done to decrease the number of AIDS cases in areas with high rates of infection. There could be more clinics where people could get tested for HIV and AIDS. Schools could include more comprehensive sex education to teach young people how to prevent HIV and AIDS and how to fight it once contracted. Currently there is a program in some countries in Africa and a few other countries with high poverty rates that administers antiretroviral therapy to people. UNAIDS, an anti-AIDS organization, did a recent study and found that this program is helping one fourth of people living with HIV and helping mostly people in Northern Africa, where the problem is not as prevalent. If there were more clinics that administered antiretroviral therapy in places like sub-Saharan Africa and India, AIDS rates could be reduced.

On average there are 17,300 new cases of AIDS among black and Latino men as opposed to 11,200 white men in the United States every year. Here in Harlem, a predominantly black and Latino neighborhood, a neighborhood where I live, people are dying every day of AIDS at a higher rate. Currently the rate of HIV-related deaths in Harlem is still double the rest of Manhattan. We can start to address the rate of AIDS in our own communities through education. Many people don't get tested for HIV because of the stigma that circulates around the disease. Common misconceptions include the beliefs that you can only get it if you're sleeping with lots of people or if you use drugs. All of those are rumors. Admittedly those are some causes but you can also be born with it or you could get it from your partner, not knowing they have it.

HIV and AIDS don't yet have cures, but the number of people contracting the disease could be reduced if more people were educated about the virus. Bono once said in support of the fight against HIV and AIDS, "Where you live should not determine whether you live or die."

I believe that is the case. If you live in a sub-Saharan African country or any other high poverty rate country, you are more likely to die of AIDS. If you live in Harlem or any other predominantly black and Latino neighborhood, you are more likely to die of AIDS. As I think about my hopes for the future, I consider how we are taught about equality, and about how we should treat others as our equals in all senses of the word. I think that having equal access to healthcare is something we often forget. For the future and the generations that come after me, I want people of all kinds, wherever they live in the world, to not have to be concerned if they're more likely to die from disease than their counterparts in America or their counterparts in white neighborhoods. People should feel safe and have access to healthcare. People's health should not be impacted by their race or where they live. That is my hope for the future.

STOP TWO: The Apollo Theater

Since the mid-1930s, the legendary Apollo Theater has played a vital role in shaping American culture. Its stage has been a performance home for marquee and up-and-coming artists in big band, vaudeville, comedy, gospel, R&B and more. With its rich history and continued significance, the Apollo Theater is considered a bastion of African-American achievement.



Daniel

There are those who deny that climate change exists. In fact, there is scientific evidence to show that climate change is progressing at an accelerated rate. Furthermore, there is an injustice called environmental racism that has also been refuted.

Refusing to acknowledge these concepts will lead to a hellish future. If we don't take initiative, destruction will ensue. Neighborhoods will deteriorate, ice caps will melt, soil will become unusable, water undrinkable, and coastal areas will be flooded due to the rise in sea level over the coming decades. To add to that, the ozone layer will dissipate, exposing us to the deadly ultraviolet rays that cause cancer and destroy life. We need this to stop. Together we can save the earth and all its life forms.

Environmental racism is concentrated pollution located in or around black and other minority communities. Companies place dumps and chemical plants in these poor areas. Unfortunately, the people experiencing the brunt of this discrimination are primarily black and Latino, because statistically more minorities live in poverty. This is a horrible practice.

Power-hungry corporations take advantage of communities that are too poor to fight against their polluters. But what's worse is that it poses a real and immediate threat to these residents. These people are exposed to dangerous, and sometimes deadly, chemicals. There was such a case in rural Louisiana, in an African-American community called Mossville. Within a two-mile radius, there were 30 petrochemical and industrial plants. Two of the companies have admitted to dumping millions of pounds of ethylene dichloride (EDC), which is a human carcinogen, into their water. Then, in November of 1999, the U.S. government health agency released a report saying that there were higher amounts of dioxin in residents' blood, and that the cause appeared to be locally sourced. Dioxin is considered the most toxic substance in the world because of its wide variety of destructive effects, including damage to the human reproduction system, cancer and impaired child development. Even though this report of Mossville was published in the nineties, environmental racism is still very prominent today. It's just old wine in a new bottle.

Pollution is the most significant contributor to climate change. Cars, depots, and burning No. 6 oil in buildings are all common contributors. The aspect these pollutants share is that they all use

dirty, nonrenewable resources and energy. Pollution may be harmful to the environment, but more important, it is harmful to all life forms.

Many types of pollution exist today: air pollution, water pollution, soil pollution, heat pollution, light pollution, and the least common but highly infamous radioactive pollution. Air pollution is the most common here in New York City. According to AJPM Online, Central Harlem and the South Bronx have some of the highest rates of asthma in the city. This sickness is directly correlated with the location of the bus depots and garbage disposal facilities in these areas. People suffer and their daily lives are affected because of this strategic congregation of pollution-creating vehicles.

One such polluter is the online grocer FreshDirect. It may be great that they ship food directly to your doorstep, but they hurt the South Bronx community where their delivery truck depots are located. Their trucks emit an excess of smoke every time they pass, and it has disturbed their neighbors. The smoke particles become lodged deep in the lungs of the residents who breathe it in, causing discomfort and posing a greater risk of them developing asthma. Ultimately, this urged the residents to take action and form the South Bronx Unite activist group. This group is suing Fresh Direct for causing irreparable harm to their community. They are still battling the company to this day, and they will not give up.

I am proud to speak here today, near the offices of WE ACT for Environmental Justice. WE ACT has done great things to help the cause of environmental justice. Their commitment in Northern Manhattan communities is just what we need. They educate and train African-American and Latino residents on issues like air, water, and indoor pollution, as well as toxins, land use and waterfront development. And we thank them for their continued teachings on sanitation, transportation, historical preservation and regulatory enforcement. Groups like this help bring about great change in our current society, and if we continue to see groups like this arise, truly great things are to come.

Pollution affects all aspects of life, and all aspects of our modern day contribute to it. The need for more and cleaner energy has risen, as it is a growing concern that we'll run out of coal and fuel. It isn't a matter of where we put the polluting facilities, but a matter of creating alternative methods of energy that will eliminate harmful byproducts. I have hope for a future in which we will grow to leave our old ways of coal and fossil fuel burning behind and find new technologies. Geothermal, wind, and water power will be the energies of tomorrow.

I have hope for a future where low-income neighborhoods, along with the rest of the world, will be able to breathe freely.

Environmental racism is concentrated pollution located in or around black and other minority communities.



Ian

A police force is supposed to protect people from others who wish to hurt them, not use unnecessary violence against people who have committed a minor crime, or no crime at all. Police in New York City and all over the country have increased

their use of violent force and are not reined in, even though communities united for police reform got a law passed that is aimed to destroy discriminatory policing, like stop and frisk, and bring accountability to the NYPD. Police officers should not be the judges of a suspect's fate, nor the executioner of a suspect.

According to News One, in 1997, Abner Louima was at a club in Brooklyn when a fight broke out. Justin Volpe, a police officer, mistook Louima for a man who punched him. Officer Volpe took Louima out to the street and beat him up. He proceeded to take Louima back to the precinct and sexually assaulted him. Volpe then told Louima if he told anyone he would kill him and his family.

In 1999, a man named Amadou Diallo was targeted by police officers who thought he matched the description of a serial rapist. The officers followed him to his apartment, where Diallo reached into his pocket and an officer yelled "Gun!" They shot 41 times; 19 bullets hit Diallo. He wasn't carrying a weapon. What he tried to pull out before he was shot was a wallet to identify himself.

In Queens, in 2006, Sean Bell was leaving a club on the morning of his wedding day when he was confronted by an undercover cop who did not identify himself. When Bell sped off in his car with his friends, the officer, along with his backup, fired 50 shots into the vehicle, killing Bell and severely injuring his friends. The officers were charged with manslaughter, reckless endangerment and assault, but were acquitted. Mass protests broke out.

And just this past summer, Eric Garner was put in a chokehold by an NYPD officer, even though chokeholds are not allowed by the NYPD. Garner, facedown on the ground, repeated "I can't breathe" 11 times. The medical examiner ruled Eric Garner's death a homicide, as he was killed by another person. Then why didn't Officer Pantaleo receive judgment in a court of law for committing this homicide? Violence by police against unarmed citizens is unjust and separates the police from the people they are meant to serve. It creates an environment where people see the police as their enemy not their protector.

If the police instilled themselves in the community like they did in Cincinnati, where the police officers were part of the community and worked with neighborhood officials to solve problems, real change could happen. In Cincinnati, they

organized meetings between people in its neighborhoods and police officers to discuss problems. They encouraged police officers get to know the people in the neighborhood they were assigned to protect. Mike Brickner, senior policy director for the American Civil Liberties Union of Ohio, said, "While relations today between police and citizens in Cincinnati are far from perfect, agreed-to reforms have led to significant improvements over the past decade. The centerpiece of those reforms was community policing." Instead of simply showing up when somebody called 911, the police would be able to get to the roots of each problem. The cases of Michael Brown, Sean Bell and Eric Garner demonstrate that the police have a "get out of jail free card" when unjustly using deadly force. The system of justice for police officers is completely upside down. They should be tried the same way all other citizens are, not as a separate entity with



the power to get out of whatever situation they got themselves in to. They should have to follow the same laws other people are expected to adhere to. They should never be allowed to get away with murdering, beating, or sexually assaulting people. They should have to face those crimes in a fair and just court of law. I hope in the coming years the invulnerability of police officers won't exist. I hope that the Stand Your Ground laws legal in some states will dissolve, and I hope that in the next trial where someone is hurt or killed by a police officer unjustly, the jury will make the right decision.

Violence by police against unarmed citizens is unjust and separates the police from the people they are meant to serve.

"We Should All Be Feminists."



Jiji

Almost everyone looks in the mirror each morning. I know I do. I do it to see how I look, to see if my clothes match. We see ads that show women wearing nice clothes and pretty makeup and that makes some girls say, "I want to look like

that," but they can't because the people in those ads have been Photoshopped. A recent Dove commercial shows a woman who has some visible imperfections. It then shows how they put makeup on her and Photoshop her to look prettier and perfect in their eyes and in the eyes of young girls.

But there are countless examples in the media that not only tell young women how to think and feel but also encourage young men to see women as less than human. An example is "Blurred Lines" by Robin Thicke, Pharrell Williams and T.I. The song includes the following lyric, "Ok, now he was close, tried to domesticate you, but you're an animal." This line is saying that the woman is an animal that needs a man to keep her tamed.

Most Americans have a computer, watch TV, and go to the movies. In one week the average teenager spends about 31 hours watching TV, 17 hours listening to music, three hours watching movies, four hours reading magazines, and 10 hours online. Being a teen, I watch those 31 hours of TV. And if you ask me what I learn from those 31 hours I will try to debate and say I know what a PET scan is from watching "Red Band Society" or know what intersex means from watching "Faking It" or even know how you get turned into a vampire from watching "The Vampire Diaries." But really all I get is entertainment, and the idea that women are objects and are lesser than men. All of those shows feature women. Yes, Elena might be a tough female vampire but she is not real. She just makes us want to have her life, want to wear the same clothes, and want to look that pretty, but truthfully the media treats women like objects and makes them look weaker than they actually are.

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, in a Ted Talk titled "We Should All Be Feminists," said: "We teach girls to shrink themselves, to

make themselves smaller. Because I am female I am expected to aspire to marriage. I am expected to make my life choices always keeping in mind that marriage is the most important. Now marriage can be a source of joy and love and mutual support, but why do we teach girls to aspire to marriage and we don't teach boys the same? We raise girls to see each other as competitors not for jobs or for accomplishments, which I think can be a good thing, but for the attention of men. We teach girls that they cannot be sexual beings in the way that boys are." She also states what a feminist means to her, "Feminist: the person who believes in the social, political and economic equality of the sexes."

The way that women are portrayed in the media today does not show the bold women inside. It isn't only in the media. When I walk down the streets of New York City I see ads that show women being sexualized and dehumanized. Equinox and Calvin Klein are two companies whose ads do this. Calvin Klein, for example, uses an ad where a woman is pinned to the ground by a man like she is weak and can't defend herself. Not only does it display the woman as weak but it also implies the man being violent towards her. When I've walked down 125th Street I have witnessed women getting catcalled by men, treating them like they are puppies that they are trying to train. Maybe they like it. Maybe they are flattered, but that is not how I would want to be treated. That is not equal, Martin Luther King, Jr. would most likely agree. Women are people – strong, smart, funny, nice, human beings – not things. Here at The Apollo there have been countless performances by strong women who inspire young girls to pursue their dreams.

I hope that one day soon we don't have to teach girls that they have to put on loads of makeup for a guy to notice them. I hope that we will learn to be powerful and not make marriage our life goal. We should focus on being successful and happy. A way to reach this goal is to focus on schoolwork and studying. Even though that might not be the most fun way to spend your free time, it will help you later on in life. Also, write letters to companies that produce these ads and tell them what you think about them. When I get older I want my kids to go outside and see ads that send the message that women are capable, not powerless. I hope that we can overcome this terrible custom of demeaning women and portraying them as objects because we are the opposite of that. We are strong.



STOP THREE: Harlem Community Justice Center

The Harlem Community Justice Center strives to solve problems in the predominantly black and Latino neighborhoods of East and Central Harlem. Its services include programs that address landlord/tenant conflicts, at-risk youth and the return of juvenile and adult ex-offenders to their community. The long-term goal is to explore the extent to which courts can work together with the community to foster neighborhood renewal.



Savannah

Imagine if you lived in a room where time did not exist. Minutes stretched into endless days and months, and the moon and sun ceased to matter. No one else is near, and the suffocating silence absorbs sluggishly into your body.

It trickles into your bones and invades your mind, filling you up with a dull realization that this is your home. You feel trapped, and wonder how much time has passed, and when you will be allowed to escape from the torture and agony of waiting.

When you are allowed outside, paranoia controls your body and makes everything seem surreal. The people surrounding you blur together and become a part of the cruel nightmare. You hope that you are dreaming, that it is all one elaborate joke, but no one is laughing. For every moment you are sitting close to those people, your life is constantly in threat. Your entire body aches to leave and live your life, but you are stuck, doomed to repeat this same schedule for what seems like an eternity. But what you do not know is that this day will be your last day in prison, because you will be beaten mercilessly by a fellow inmate while eating in the cafeteria. As the assault is going on, you cry out for help and try to gain the guards' attention, but the only thing they do is watch you suffer. The attacker is so bold that he even sits down to catch his breath for a moment then continues harming you. When the guards finally intervene, it is too late. The pain has been inflicted, and now you will have brain damage for the rest of your life. This story is not imaginary, but used to be real life for Hanni Elabed. This is what a private prison is like.

Hanni Elabed was 24 years old when he was sentenced to 12 years in prison for robbery. Robbery is a crime that he should be punished for, but he did not deserve to be battered so badly. He suffered cranial bleeding, and was in a coma for three days. The staff of the prison did nothing until the man stopped beating Elabed.

A private prison is as it sounds: it is a prison that is owned by a private company. According to a U.S. Department of Justice study, 8.4 percent of all people incarcerated in America are in privately owned prisons. Private prisons sound like an ingenious idea because they help states save money, and they take away the state's stress of maintaining a prison. But like many things, there is a darker side. The companies create contracts that say they will cost less money, but the incarceration rate within their facilities has to stay above 90 percent. That means police officers have to arrest more people in order to keep these deals intact. If the prison occupancy is lower than the agreed amount the

government has to pay for the empty beds. Companies, such as the Correction Corporation of America, are going so far as to push state governments to make laws easier to break so more people become incarcerated.

Another downside to private prisons is that they force the inmates to work, earning between 93 cents and \$4 per day. They produce products for major companies such as Victoria's Secret, McDonald's, Starbucks, Microsoft, Revlon, and most important, the United States military. Private prison inmates create all of the military helmets, ammunition belts, bulletproof jackets, ID tags, clothes, tents, bags, and canteens that the Army uses. It is ironic that we are giving the citizens who defend America clothes and utilities created by the citizens who are victimized by America.

I am speaking to you here at the Harlem Community Justice Center because they are a part of the solution. The Harlem Community Justice Center is working within its community to help prevent people from becoming incarcerated. Instead of focusing on the big picture, they focus on what is happening in their home. If more organizations opened up in troubled neighborhoods and paid attention only to the local issues, then we would be one step closer to lowering our prison rates. America has 5 percent of the globe's population, yet we have 25 percent of the world's prison population.

My hope for the future is that America becomes a better place. America was built on the foundation of peace, liberty and justice. Seeking to make a profit by taking away someone else's freedom is blatantly disregarding what the United States has worked so hard to achieve. Instead of making progress toward the American Dream, we have gone backwards because of our need to save a few pennies. By confining people and forcing them to work for others' profit, we are repeating our history. Humans look back at many events with disgust and wonder how people could commit such awful acts. If we continue to incarcerate people in private prisons, the generations after us will think the same about us. I want people of the future to look at this time period as a time of advancement, innovation and understanding. As Martin Luther King said, "I have a dream that one day this nation will rise up and live out the true meaning of its creed: 'We hold these truths to be self-evident; that all men are created equal.'"

I hope that in the future people will not have to fear being harassed or arrested by the police. I hope that when people are released from prison, they will never go back. I hope that private prisons do not become a common place to send people when they disobey the law. I hope that there will be no other cases like Hanni Elabed. I have big goals for the future, and I know some day they will come true. I dare to dream about the future because dreams can become reality if you truly have faith in them.



Zack

Noemi Álvarez Quillay was just 12 when she began her trek from Ecuador to America. Her parents had hired coyotes, or smugglers, to help take her to New York. "I went with a coyote and spent two months in Nicaragua and came back from

there," she wrote in a school information sheet. Then, in March of last year she got even closer, making it to Ciudad Juárez, Mexico. This is where she was caught. On March 7, the police found Domingo Fermas Uves, a coyote, urinating outside a truck with Noemi inside. Noemi was taken to a shelter. Then on March 11, when called to eat, she went inside the bathroom and hung herself with a shower curtain. Noemi was 12 years old.

We gather here at the Harlem Community Justice Center, which works to aid both adult and juvenile ex-offenders returning to the community. They work on seeing how far a court can go with helping those around it. They work to help people, including our country's millions of undocumented immigrants, live a life outside jail. They work to prevent the violence and crime that is visible in many of the places undocumented immigrants come from.

Presently there are an estimated 11.4 million undocumented immigrants in America. They all come here looking for a better life. And recently children have begun to flood across the border alone to rejoin parents, family or friends. Many of them come to escape gangs and violence. Noemi was just one of tens of thousands of examples. Alejandro Rodriguez is yet another. He and his brother left their home in Honduras to come to America to reunite with their father, whom they had not seen since Alejandro was five. According to *The New York Times*, 68,541 unaccompanied children crossed the border during 2014. In many of these cases gangs and violence are the reason for their illegal migration. In Alejandro's hometown, teenage boys are being forced into gangs, while the girls get raped or sold. Those gangs tortured or killed at least seven children in one month last spring. Alejandro and his brother had no adults to protect them.

They left home with a change of clothes, some water and food and about \$283. Throughout their journey Alejandro stayed awake in order to watch over his brother, and they always stayed together. Along the way they saw three other travelers get beaten up or robbed, but they were able to make it unscathed. Once they got to the border their group decided to seek border agents as to not wander cluelessly through the desert. When picked up they were fed and given clothes, but their journey wasn't over. Alejandro is now with his father and going through deportation proceedings, though he is seeking asylum in a country that should provide him with a safe, new life.



If not for these stories of people who needed to do what they must, I would not have been born.

I have just one more story to tell you. There was once a girl who had lost her immediate family and only had two aunts left to take care of her. She had been with her aunts for a few years, but when they decided to move to a new country, she had to fake her birthday and identity in order to accompany them and needed to take the place of her dead cousin. She was just nine years old.

This happened almost 70 years ago. The place she was leaving was a displaced persons camp in Germany after the Holocaust. She was going to Palestine. This girl is my grandmother. Years later she came here to America and met my grandfather.

My father's parents and mother's mom are immigrants. They came here to live in the Promised Land, to have a family in a country that is full of opportunity. My great-grandfather came from China as a paper son. Like my grandmother when she immigrated to Palestine, he had to fake his identity because the only way he could come to America, the Golden Mountain, was to prove he was the son of a U.S. citizen. So he came to America under someone else's name, and was able to make a life for himself here. If not for these stories of people who needed to do what they must, I would not have been born.

Many fear that undocumented immigrants will come to America and take their jobs. But they come here for the same reasons as those who come here legally. They come here to work and make a life for themselves and their families in a place where they could live without the fear of violence. They come with new ideas. They come and start a business. They come for a better education. They come to make a better life for their children. Abraham Lincoln once said: "America will never be destroyed from the outside. If we falter and lose our freedoms, it will be because we destroyed ourselves."

I hope one day children will not have to flee from towns filled with violence. I hope one day undocumented immigrants will be able to live without the fear of deportation. I hope one day there will be a way for all immigrants to come here legally. I hope one day children will not have to deal with deportation when brought at a young age, that one day children will not need to brave the long journey here alone.

In the words of Martin Luther King, Jr: "And this will be the day, this will be the day when all of God's children will be able to sing with new meaning: 'My country 'tis of thee, sweet land of liberty, of thee I sing. Land where my fathers died, land of the pilgrims' pride, from every mountainside, let freedom ring!'"

If America is to be a great nation, this must become true.





STOP FOUR: City Council District Eight Office

The City Council District Eight Office serves East Harlem and the South Bronx and is home base for City Council Speaker Melissa Mark-Viverito, the first Puerto Rican and Latina to hold a citywide elected position. In her work, Mark-Viverito has pushed for changes in immigration and gun violence laws, which significantly impact the constituents in her district.



Asha

Some of my earliest memories are of my grandparents telling me stories about their lives as undocumented immigrants. My grandfather would tell me about his first day in the U.S. and how he had to take the train, ferry and buses to get to Staten Island by himself. I used to love

sitting at our kitchen table with my cousin listening to all of his stories. Everything sounded so amazing and funny. I felt as though America was so nice letting immigrants move to its country. But from an early age, I was also aware of all of the horrible things that America had done to its own people and people all around the world. I often asked myself: why would our country be so willing to help other people when it continued to treat some of its own people so horribly?

The answer came not that long ago when I started to ask serious questions. The romanticized stories of my childhood were just that. They were my grandparents trying to make the most out of their experiences. The events themselves were not so positive, but they always told them with a smile. It's easier to laugh and look at the bright side than to face some of the darker memories because, like millions of people who immigrated to this country, my grandparents truly believed this was the best country in the world.

People who immigrate to the United States often have ideas of America being the Promised Land, yet their experiences tend to be the opposite. Because millions of people coming here from Central and South America predominantly are undocumented, they have no protection from the government. Companies can pay them half of what they'd pay a legal resident and force them to work longer hours. This has become something we encounter on a daily basis. Migrant workers pick almost all the food that is commercially grown in the United States and more than half of these workers are undocumented. Most are men who plan to send money to their family and return home after a short amount of time, but it isn't ever that simple. Because they are almost always paid below minimum wage, saving money to send home could take years longer than they had originally planned.

According to the National Farm Workers Ministry, the average migrant worker makes between \$10,000 and \$15,000 a year. Most farms pay based on production rates. If the worker does not make \$7.25 an hour based on production the farm is supposed to compensate them. But because most migrant workers are undocumented, they are often paid an average of \$6.80 an hour. This lower pay means they often can't even afford to live in the U.S. Sending money home becomes impossible. And because Immigration and Customs Enforcement is aware that thousands

of undocumented immigrants live and work together, they often go to their workplace and deport as many people as they can. Parents are often sent back to their native country, leaving their children to fend for themselves.

Even before immigrating to the United States, people face problems. Green card applications can take decades to process and once they are people will often be denied. As of May 2014, people who had applied for visas as early as 1990 were only then being approved. If people decide they can't wait to be approved because they are fleeing or their visas are running out, they have to live every day in fear of deportation.

In 1995, what is known as the "Wet Foot, Dry Foot" law was put into place. It states that anyone from Cuba who is able to touch American soil would be able to apply legally for a green card. This law encourages people to risk their lives and they often get caught by the Coast Guard. Not only is the Coast Guard supposed to stop them, they often act desperately in order to prevent them from getting to U.S. land. In January 2006, 23 Cubans got to one of the bridges in the Florida Keys. Because the bridge had been out of use, it was disconnected from land. The Coast Guard found them walking on the bridge and arrested them. Because the bridge wasn't connected to U.S. land, they were found to have "wet feet" and were returned to Cuba. This policy often encourages people to pile too many into an unseaworthy boat and many of them sink. In July 1999, while the U.S. Coast Guard was attempting to catch one of these boats, it capsized and one of the women on board drowned.

Today we stand in front of Melissa Mark-Viverito's office. She is one of the many people in New York's government who has spoken out against certain laws that Congress has passed regarding immigration – specifically a number that were voted on by Senator Kirsten Gillibrand before she was elected to the Senate. In the last few months, she has asked President Obama to make a decision regarding his immigration reform if Congress is unable to.

Although the United States I heard stories about when I was younger is even harsher on immigrants now than it was in the '70s, I believe it could once again become a haven for immigrants. Making it harder for people to enter the United States is only going to cause the number of undocumented immigrants to rise. If migrant workers could get a short working visa or if green card applications took less time to be approved, the numbers would most likely plummet.

We are here today to celebrate Dr. Martin Luther King and his dream of equal rights. In order to fully fulfill his dream we have to think about equal rights for everyone, including immigrants who risk everything to come here and live it. Though this is not going to happen overnight, I do see a brighter future for the United States immigration system.



Akil

On December 14, 2012, in Newtown, Conn., 20-year-old Adam Lanza killed 20 children and six adults at a local elementary school, then went on to commit suicide. October 16, 2014, Detroit, Michigan: 3-year-old Amiracle Williams was killed over a Facebook

dispute. June 29, 2008: 15-year-old Nathan Allsbrooks was killed for no reason on 127th Street and Seventh Avenue, three blocks away from his house as he was coming home from a party. Do you know what all three of these stories have in common? They're all stories of gun violence.

Statistics from 2010 state that about 100,000 people were victims of gun violence in the U.S. Out of those 100,000, over 30,000 died. This means that over 80 people died from gun violence each day, which is equal to three deaths an hour. On top of that, in the same year 73,505 people were hospitalized because of gun shot wounds.

In the first seven years of the U.S-Iraq war, 4,400 people were killed. That's less than the number of people killed with guns in our country every seven weeks. You can tell it's a problem when the police, the people who are supposed to be protecting us, are contributing to gun violence statistics. In 2014, there were 3,017 incidents where police fired a gun. Officer Darren Wilson is one such example.

He should have let Michael Brown off with a warning, but instead he took his life. This is not the only time a police officer used unnecessary violence. What happened to Officer Daniel Pantaleo, the officer that killed Eric Garner? What happened to Peter Liang, the rookie police officer who killed unarmed Akai Gurley in a Brooklyn stairwell? The list goes on.

President Obama has been trying to pass laws that establish stronger background checks, including spending millions of dollars to access the criminal and psychological records of an individual before allowing gun purchases. You can tell he hasn't gotten much help from Congress because in 2014, according to GunViolenceArchive.org, there were a total of 49,169 incidents of gun violence in the U.S., including 12,027 deaths and 21,706 injuries. In one year, 608 children from birth to

age 11 have either been killed or injured by gun violence. Some 2,234 kids between the ages of 12 and 17 have been injured or killed because of gun violence.

By creating the Gun Violence Crisis Management System, City Council Speaker Melissa Mark-Viverito and Mayor Bill de Blasio have taken a step forward in making an effort to eliminate gun violence in New York City. This is "a citywide initiative to reduce gun violence, from five to 14 different precincts accounting for 51 percent of shootings across the city." One of the main reasons Melissa Mark-Viverito wants to eliminate gun violence is for the safety of kids in her district. Also, she recently had a bullet hit the tail light of her car, a stray from a shooting between one gang and another. The *New York Daily News* reported: "Mark-Viverito, who has long been a vocal critic of police tactics in minority neighborhoods, said the NYPD handled the incident appropriately. Still, she's troubled by the fact that teens were involved." This quote shows two things. One, that not all police officers handle situations violently. It also shows how big of a problem gun violence is, specifically amongst teens.



I agree that there should be thorough background checks so that the wrong people don't end up with a gun and that guns will only be used in necessary situations. In 2014 there were 1,480 accidental shootings. We can at least reduce that number with better background checks.

I hope that in the near future there will be no more guns. I hope that MLK's message of peace will come true and that the next generation won't have to fight against gun violence.

I hope that there will be no more incidents like the one in Ferguson, Mo. I hope that all police will learn how to deal with situations differently so that we don't have to hear about the next Michael Brown.

This change is up to us. We have to do something. Nothing happens automatically; someone has to make change happen. MLK once said: "The ultimate measure of a man is not where he stands in moments of comfort and moments of convenience, but where he stands in moments of challenge and moments of controversy." So here is our challenge. We must make ourselves heard so we can make a change. We can't wait until it's one of our own on their deathbed. If we wait and don't do anything, then who is next?

STOP FIVE: The Young Women's Leadership School of East Harlem

Ann and Andrew Tisch founded The Young Women's Leadership School of East Harlem (TYWLS) in 1996 with the goal of providing economically disadvantaged girls with a high-quality college preparatory education modeled after the finest private schools. Today there is a network of five TYWLS public schools in New York City serving more than 2,000 students. Alumnae of the all-girls school are often the first in their families to attend college and they earn degrees at approximately triple the rate of their peers.



Lillian

When I was younger, I never thought about how I looked, never worried if my hair lay flat, or how much I weighed. I would wear 20 different colors, stripes and polka dots, and everything in between. But as I've gotten older I've awakened to the rules of society and

the expectation that we conform to them. I have become aware of the fact that in some areas in this country, and world, there is a set image you have to look like in order to fit in.

Luckily for me, I have grown up in New York City, a place, I think, that accepts everyone for how they look, act, and present themselves. When I get on the train every morning and afternoon, I look around and find that almost no one looks the same. I am also fortunate to have gone to a school that accepts everyone no matter what. I feel lucky that I can go to school and not worry about being called fat, ugly, or dumb. But I have learned that this is not how everyone lives. Some girls, my age, younger and older, are afraid to go to school because they don't conform to the image of the perfect body.

According to the website Hey U.G.L.Y (Unique, Gifted, Lovable You), "Approximately 160,000 children a day stay home from school because they are afraid of being bullied. That's over three million students a month, and 36 million a year." This is disgusting. In this day and age we should not be hearing stories of kids who stay home because they don't feel safe at school. The majority of my friends and I would call our school our second home. This is the way things should be. A child should feel safe to go to school no matter what they look like or how they present themselves.

Some girls, my age, younger and older, are afraid to go to school because they don't conform to the image of the perfect body.

Ally, a 15-year-old girl was close to killing herself at the age of 13 because she was bullied about her weight. Rebeca Golden almost ended her life at age 12 because she too was physically bullied about her appearance. This is not how our society should be. When I hear stories like these I try to imagine how it must have felt to be so uncomfortable in your own skin, apart

from the awkwardness of puberty. Imagine waking up every morning dreading having to get up and go to a place where you constantly get taunted for being yourself. Imagine the emotional and physical pain you endure for many hours each day before you get to go home, the only place you feel safe. There is, however, hope for these victims. There are many websites such as StopBullying.org, Pacer Teens Against Bullying and so many more that help these children get through this. These websites have been created mostly by survivors of bullying who are telling their stories so the bullying victims of today don't feel so alone.



Lizzie Velasquez is a 21-year-old woman who was born with a rare syndrome that prevents her from gaining any body fat. Many may also know her by a horrendous nickname: the ugliest woman in the world. She has had to deal with bullies all of her life. She has become a motivational speaker and anti-bullying activist. Like Lizzie, there are so many other activists who are in this battle to stop bullies.

However, I have hope for the future. My hope is that the word fat will be eliminated from our vocabulary when talking about young girls and boys. I hope that the term fat-shaming will no longer exist. And I hope that I will not have to worry about being bullied for my appearance.

Here we stand in front of The Young Women's Leadership School of East Harlem, a school that empowers young girls to be their best selves and create change; a school that does not tolerate bullying of any kind; a school that does not sweep the stories of bullied victims under the rug like so many other schools do. And here we are marching through the city to remember Martin Luther King, Jr., a man who dared to dream of a brighter future where all were equal; a man who said: "Now is the time to make justice a reality for all of god's children." I have been told that my generation can change the world. So what are we waiting for?

We should be the ones who improve the world for ourselves, and for the generations to come.



Mia

Once upon a time there was a damsel in distress. This damsel, however, was different than most other damsels. She wasn't in distress over being stuck in a tower or needing a prince to save her. While working at the kingdom's law office as a lawyer, she noticed something

was off. A simpleton, who happened to be a man, was making more money than she ever would, while both of them were doing the same work. It was in the moment that the damsel knew there was an inequality there, a wage gap between men and women, except she would be saving herself from the distress she was in.

The inequalities women have faced over countless years have been vast, whether it was the right to vote or breaking stereotypes that were centuries old. A huge problem in this day and age is the one centered on the wage gap between women and men. In 1963, women received 59 cents for every dollar a man got for the same work. Thus the Equal Pay Act was enacted in the same year, pushing women on the path to greater equality. The Equal Pay Act disallowed any discrimination of payment for men or women employees for the same work. However, as time went on, women still weren't getting the same pay for equal work. As said by the National Women's Law Center: "American women who work full time, year-round are typically paid only 78 cents for every dollar paid to their male counterparts." Seventy-eight cents for every dollar might sound like a minor difference, but in fact it shows a drastic divide.

A young woman named Margaret recently shared her story. "I was a cashier at an Italian restaurant in high school in the early '90s. I worked with a boy, also in high school, and learned he made more than me when we compared paychecks one day. Neither of us had any idea that we were being paid differently for the exact same job. I complained to the boss, one of the owners of the restaurant. At first, he tried to justify it by saying the boy was a grade older than me. Finally, he admitted that he just thought boys should be paid more. End of story. I was infuriated." This story proves how, even from a young age, a woman who

The inequalities women have faced over countless years have been vast, whether it was the right to vote or breaking stereotypes that were centuries old.

works in a low-paying service industry job can experience an injustice towards her.

Feminism: a word so often thrown around while few know of its true meaning. To believe in feminism is to believe in political, economic and social rights for both women and men. To be a feminist is to believe in equality for both sexes. However, feminists today are often seen as man-hating, aggressive individuals, when in truth they're driven and determined people. So when you hear of feminists fighting to take down such issues as the wage gap, it's often ignored.

Today, we stand in front of a school, not any school though, The Young Women's Leadership School. "The Young Women's Leadership School empowers young women to achieve their higher education dreams and to fulfill their learning and leadership potential." It's a school that focuses on helping girls achieve their best possible future. But, it's been estimated that women aren't expected to earn equal pay until 2058, in 43 years. What we're dealing with right now will be an obstacle to the young women graduating from The Young Women's Leadership School today and tomorrow.

It's been said it will take almost 50 years to put an end to this gender divide. When we're in school both genders are treated the same, but as soon as we leave those grounds, it's a competition that can't be won.

My hope for the future is that the wage gap will cease to exist and that when women realize they are being unequally paid they will have the courage to ask for the pay they deserve.





Willa

The education system of the United States of America is supposed to be quite good. Millions of children are able to go through middle school, high school, then college before making their way into enjoyable and successful careers. At least, that is what I have been told: that every

child has a fair chance to do what he or she is good at, to follow his or her dreams.

Yet, about a year ago, I was walking to the train station with a friend and her mother. We passed some restaurants and noticed a man wearing dirty, light clothing despite the cold weather. He was pulling a shopping cart behind him. He often turned to the windows of the restaurants lining the sidewalk and knocked on them with the back of his hand, causing studying students to look up. After passing a few more stores the man stopped and swung around to look at the people behind him. "I don't mean to be disrespectful," he told us. "I just want my education back."

He went on to tell us about how he was the only person in his class to pass science, but that he couldn't continue because of money. He finished by banging his cart down and saying, "I don't even want to carry this stupid cart," before picking it up again and pulling it away.

This man could have become a scientist, an inventor, a chef, a congressman if only he was able to receive a good education – one where he did not have to drop out because racial and economic prejudice turned him in to a second-class citizen.

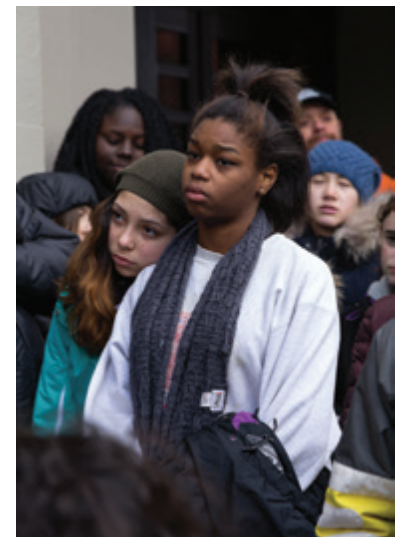


This is the case with many children. In high-income neighborhoods children are able to get the highest percentage of experienced teachers. In contrast, children in low-income and minority areas are faced with, according to *The Washington Post*, a "less stable teaching staff," which stifles the children's chances of continuing on to a well-performing high school and college. But the children never got to choose this for themselves. They were only given the path that was set out for them and many others. Globally, people are not able to get an effective education

because of their finances, race, gender or where they live, which is unjust and inexcusable. And because of this they can never reach out and grasp their dreams with open, understanding hands.

Throughout the world, only about 30 percent of girls are enrolled in secondary school. Around the globe, approximately 57 million children are not able to complete a primary school education. And in the U.S.A, according to the ACLU, "2004 findings from researchers at Johns Hopkins University [found] that, in as many as 1,000 schools around the country, students have a mere 50/50 chance of graduating." No matter how much we do not want it to be true, we still live in a country where many people believe that your race defines your identity. Because of this racist belief that can poison people's minds, many people of color are not able to get as strong of an education as others.

We are standing in front of The Young Women's Leadership School, founded in 1996, where they focus on fighting three portions of this major issue: children and teenagers not being able to attain a quality education because of their gender, income or race. The founders, Ann and Andrew Tisch, had a dream to give girls who are financially underprivileged a high-quality education similar to what they could receive if they went to private school, and now more than 2,200 students are able to attend these institutions. I hope that we can work together to fund school and afterschool programs to provide more opportunities for our forgotten citizens. I hope that we can raise awareness to the unfairness that poisons our country's education system so that Ann and Andrew's dream will emerge in other locations around the world and give the same thoughtful, excellent educational opportunities to everyone.



Students at the Young Women's Leadership School and Manhattan Country School are lucky. We do not have to walk miles to get our education, girls are not limited in what they can learn, and children of many races and ethnicities are able to come together to learn math, English, and science, but also community involvement, activism, and how to follow our dreams. And I hope that soon, the entire next generation will be given the essential rights of education that many children today are deprived of. I hope that soon we can step up and give them the same excellent experience that we have, an experience that changes your life and who you are. I hope that access to thoughtful schooling – to dreams – will be in everyone's grasp.

We still live in a country where many people believe that your race defines your identity.

STOP SIX: Manhattan Country School

In 1966, Manhattan Country School founders Gus and Marty Trowbridge set out to create an independent school where equality, social justice, a diverse community with no racial majority, and the inspiration of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. would form the basis for children's education. Today, MCS is recognized as a model of both progressive education and socioeconomic, racial, and ethnic diversity. Graduates leave not only with a first-class academic education and preparation for a wide range of the nation's top high schools and colleges, but also with a deep understanding of our multicultural world.



Maya

At a very young age we are taught what is right and what is wrong. We are told that being kind is important and misbehaving is bad. We are also taught to see things as the truth when they merely represent one perspective, a perspective that begins to formulate unrealistic expectations

of how we should look, act and feel. One of these expectations is the idea of perfection – perfection that exists for only people who have similarities to Barbie and Ken, the perfect, plastic heterosexual couple, with blonde hair, blue eyes and unblemished skin. How can people who are gay, transgender, of color, or people with normal body types aspire to this wildly unrealistic idea? I have encountered many stories of teenagers trying to conform to society's expectation of perfection – cutting, starving, harming their bodies because their peers and family do not accept them for who they are.

I stand here today at Manhattan Country School, a place where everyone is accepted, flaws and all, for who they are, telling you the story of 17-year-old Leelah Alcorn, a transgender teen who was born a boy but who defined herself as a girl. She committed suicide on December 28, 2014 in Cincinnati, Ohio. The day that Leelah committed suicide she left a note on her Tumblr blog announcing her reasoning for ending her life. In many suicide notes written by teenagers the cause of death is bullying. In Leelah's case the reason was because her parents could not accept her as the person she wanted to be. Her parents could not accept her as transgender. They told her she could not take part in transitioning treatment and would only recognize her as Josh Alcorn, her government name. They did not support her decision to live her life the way she wanted. They did not support her when she needed it most.

I remember reading the suicide note the day after Leelah had passed and being completely shocked and heart broken. Up to this day, I reread her note and there is one sentence that continues to astonish me. Leelah wrote: "The life I would've lived isn't worth living in... because I'm transgender." This sentence angers me, and if it does not anger you, then maybe I was unclear the first time. She wrote: "The life I would've lived isn't worth living in... because I'm transgender." Seventeen-year-old Leelah Alcorn thought that her life was meaningless because she was being herself.

In the United States approximately 2 million adolescents attempt suicide each year. The causes for these suicides include depression, bullying, self-esteem issues and not being accepted – problems that many teenagers experience. I constantly see people getting bullied and tormented about their weight, sexuality and appearance. To say I have never made a remark that wounded someone's feelings would be a lie. But I am not perfect and I've

I have learned that nobody is perfect and nobody will ever meet society's unrealistic expectations.

learned that words hurt. I should know. I am constantly comparing myself to other people to determine my own beauty because of the sly comments I hear about my appearance, comments about the beauty mark on my nose that I can't do anything about, making me self conscious about my face, covering it up in pictures so it goes unnoticed. We are so caught up with wanting to fit in that we start to demean ourselves. By judging Leelah on who she wanted to be on the outside, what was on the inside was dismissed. The judgment of others pushed her over her limit.

There are organizations to support suicidal adolescents, including the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention, The Yellow Ribbon Project and It Gets Better. These organizations do help many suicidal teenagers, but what needs to change is the way people treat one another. There is always an effect to your actions, and every action that torments someone else only pushes them closer to their last meal. We have to be more conscientious about our behavior, thinking about the effects it could have, and be more accepting towards people because the only way to lower the suicide rate is to stop what provokes people to attempt it. Before writing this I never understood why and how someone could end his or her life. Now I realize that people commit suicide because the only place they can call home is inside the skin they've been taught to hate by a society that shuns their flaws. I have learned that nobody is perfect and nobody will ever meet society's unrealistic expectations.

For the teens of the next generation, I hope they see their lives as meaningful. I hope that people can confront society's obsession with what is acceptable and unacceptable. I hope they learn to care about each other and each other's feelings. I hope that suicide won't be the third leading cause of death for people ages 15 to 24. I hope that they can look back at the people of today and thank us for making them realize that LGBTQ people matter, that all lives matter. Martin Luther King had a dream that everyone could be equal. He had a dream that one day we could all walk hand in hand and accept each other's differences. I hope and dream that one day people follow the words of Savannah Brown, a 17-year-old poet who said: "Gender, looks, weight, skin, where your loves lies, none of that matters because standards don't define you. You don't live to meet the credentials established by a madman."



Zuri

Our country is dealing with a lot on our home soil. We are dealing with even more overseas. When the United Nations was founded it created the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The declaration described the basic civil, political, economic,

social and cultural rights that all human beings should have and enjoy. It is a priority and a law to the countries who have signed off on it. It laid the fundamentals of human rights that everyone should respect and protect. This doesn't mean that all countries and their leaders agree with and follow through with this declaration. The right to education – women's education in particular – is often violated in certain regions of Iraq, Pakistan, Afghanistan and Iran.

A shocking number of countries have violated specifics of the human rights declaration, in particular the right to education and the right to freedom from torture and degrading treatment. Two well-known groups known for human-rights abuses are the Taliban and ISIS, operating in certain regions of the Islamic State in Iraq, Pakistan and Syria. These groups have raging hate against women's education and use acts of torture, assault and enslavement to build fear into every woman who disobeys their law. In certain regions of Pakistan, young women who desire an education must attend secret schools, in fear of getting caught. These are terrible crimes and should be stopped. But stopping these powerful factions is extremely risky and will cause a lot of tension and violence.

Malala Yousafzai is one of the faces defying Taliban rule. She played a huge role in fighting for education for women in the Middle East. Malala had first become well known when she started posting diaries on the Internet about living under the Taliban's rule and going to school as a girl. Malala was interfering with Taliban rule through her online diary by giving hope to other young girls who wanted to go to school as well. On October 9, 2012, a Taliban masked gunman boarded her bus home from school. "Which one of you is Malala? Speak up, otherwise I will shoot you all," he shouted. After she was identified, the gunman shot her. Malala was hit with one bullet, which went through her head and neck ending in her shoulder. Malala is truly an icon

My hope is that the right to education will be everyone's deserved right and will be respected worldwide by every nation.

and is known worldwide for her inspiring story that empowered more people to do what they believe is right.

The attempt to kill Malala received a tremendous amount of media coverage and there was a huge amount of sympathy for her and her family. There was also a lot of anger aimed at the Taliban. Everyone wanted to keep her dream – "that every child will be educated" – alive. Protests were held in Pakistani cities the day after the attack and over two million people signed the Right to Education petition, which led to approval for the first Right to Education Bill in Pakistan. That is the effect one person can have.

Malala has a hope that every child will be educated. If someone has a hope, anything is possible. My hope is that I will grow up and become Secretary of State and everyone's basic human rights will be upheld. I live in America and that automatically gives me more rights than many, including the right I take for granted, the right to education. I hope that one day everyone will be able to go to school without the fear of being hurt. I am very fortunate to go to such a great school. MCS has taught me a lot and made me socially aware, whether it is connected to MLK's fight for civil rights or the pay gap. Whatever it is, I have used it to my advantage.

My hope is that the right to education will be everyone's deserved right and will be respected worldwide by every nation.





Roscoe

Over 50 years ago, Martin Luther King, Jr. said: "A second evil which plagues the modern world is that of poverty. Like a monstrous octopus, it projects its nagging, prehensile tentacles in lands and villages all over the world."

Dr. King went on to note: "Almost two thirds of the peoples of the world go to bed hungry at night. They are undernourished, ill-housed, and shabbily clad. Many of them have no houses or beds to sleep in. Their only beds are the sidewalks of the cities and the dusty roads of the villages. Most of these poverty-stricken children of God have never seen a physician or a dentist."

It has been 30 years since Mario Cuomo gave his famed "A Tale of Two Cities" speech about growing economic division in this country, wherein he responded to President Reagan's description of this country as a "shining city on a hill," saying "Mr. President, this nation is more a 'Tale of Two Cities'...."

"A shining city is perhaps all the President sees from the portico of the White House and the veranda of his ranch, where everyone seems to be doing well. But there's another city; there's another part to the shining city; the part where some people can't pay their mortgages, and most young people can't afford one; where students can't afford the education they need, and middle-class parents watch the dreams they hold for their children evaporate."

Today, the economic division in our nation has grown even worse. The United States has become two cities on the verge of collapse.

At his Nobel Peace Prize address Martin Luther King, Jr. said, "The time has come for an all out world war against poverty." That war has not been won. It has not even started.

Poverty seeps in and affects people in ways they cannot even see. The richest 1 percent of Americans own 40 percent of the nation's wealth and take home 24 percent of the national income. Compare that to 1976 when the richest 1 percent of Americans only took home 9 percent of the national income.

A Harvard business professor conducted a study on inequality in America, which concluded that the top 1 percent has more of the country's wealth than the majority of people agree the top 20 percent of people should have, while the bottom 80 percent of this country only has 7 percent of the total wealth.

In 2013, 45.3 million people lived in poverty. That is 14.3 percent of the population. Many people live in poverty today because they simply cannot work. One of these people is Robert Burke, who worked in physically intensive jobs such as scrap metal collecting and cutting timber. He has had two back surgeries and cannot work these jobs anymore. He, his wife and three children live off only \$1,000 a month in Social Security and disability

payments along with \$200 in food stamps. This is only one story from the millions of people who live under the poverty line.

There is also a problem of underemployment, where millions of people are poverty-stricken, "not because they are not working, but because they receive wages so low that they cannot begin to function in the mainstream of the economic life of our nation. Most of the poverty-stricken people of America are persons who are working every day, and they end up getting part-time wages for full-time work."

The purely profit-driven business model is willing to practically kill its workers to make money. Companies like Walmart, McDonalds and Target are among the top companies that pay their employees the least. Walmart, which is run by America's wealthiest family, employs more people than any other public company in the world, including 1.4 million people in the United States. Walmart's financial success has been attributed, at least in part, to its workers' low wages. Workers have no other option but to accept these low-paying jobs because they need money. This is a vicious cycle forcing people to get less than what they need to survive, constantly sending them back to poverty.

Poverty stops people from getting a better education and exposes them to health hazards because they cannot afford healthcare. The myth of the American Dream is that you can work hard and you will succeed, but that just isn't true. With poverty comes problems of lack of quality education, lack of healthcare, lack of resources to get out of poverty. It takes decades to solve every social problem. You have to find a common root before you can solve it. In all cases this root is poverty.

That war [against poverty] has not been won. It has not even started.

Students who come from low-income families are seven times more likely to drop out of school. Children who live below the poverty

line are 1.3 times more likely to develop learning disabilities. We stand outside MCS, a school founded on the idea of giving people an equal chance for an education, regardless of economic status. Here people pay based on their means, giving everyone access to a great education that they can afford.

Poverty is a cycle that traps you like a whirlpool and makes it extremely difficult to escape. Eleven days ago was the 51-year anniversary of Lyndon B. Johnson declaring the war on poverty. That is 51 years without progress.

But poverty is a problem that can and should be fixed. One solution is creating more jobs to lessen the 5.9 percent unemployment rate. Another solution is to raise the minimum wage, which is currently only \$7.25 an hour. If someone works eight hours a day, five days a week they will make \$1,160 a month before taxes. That's \$13,920 per year or \$10,000 less per year than what the U.S. government considers the poverty threshold for a family of four.

There are ways to lessen poverty, to end income disparity and the long-standing tale of two cities. As Dr. Martin Luther King said, "Ultimately a great nation is a compassionate nation. There is nothing new about poverty. What is new, however, is that we have the resources to fix it."



Pilar

Dear Future Mother, I looked at my mother while she stood there with worry on her face, as my tears started to flow. "He pointed to me. He said he liked me, the one in the white coat, that was me," I stammered. "I rolled my eyes, just like I always do. I couldn't say 'Back

off.' He could've blocked my path or shouted profanities in my face. I didn't see him. I thought he was gone, but he was right behind me. Adam told him to back off and he did." But that won't wash away the way he made me feel, as if I were fresh bait for him to pounce on. It was just like that man who whistled at me three times. Was one time really not enough? To this day I can't get the picture of him out of my mind. I can't forget the sound of his whistles. My mother had to hold me as we sobbed about the world we live in, the world where a 13-year-old girl can get harassed and it is okay. Dear Future Mother, I hope that you don't ever have to see your daughter like my mother had to see me.

I remember being 10 years old, sitting on my couch, excited that my parents had let me stay up to watch "Saturday Night Live." The nightly news was ending and we were watching stories pop up on the screen. One stuck out. "Two young girls harassed in an elevator in Astoria, Queens," the anchor said.

I felt sick as my best friend's mother was on the screen sharing the story. I burst into tears thinking about my friend. I was full of hatred for the man who could make her feel scared and trapped, the man who could begin unzipping his pants as the elevator got to her floor.

Those are only two stories, but for every one there are thousands more. In a recent survey of over 800 women, 99 percent confirm that they had experienced street harassment, ranging from kissing noises, honking, and whistling, to having one's path blocked or being assaulted. Women experiencing street harassment have very few options. You can ignore what is being said to you and accept being violated, or face it and run the risk of becoming a victim of violence. This is a tragedy for the victims and anyone who tries to come to their rescue.

In Philadelphia, a man was knocked unconscious for defending women who were being catcalled. In San Francisco, a man was stabbed nine times while asking a man politely to stop harassing his girlfriend. And last month, in Germany, a 23-year-old woman was killed after she stood up for three teenage girls who were experiencing street harassment. The fact that people are being hurt and killed for merely standing up for these victims demonstrates how extreme this problem really is. This isn't only about unwanted compliments or attention. This is a violation of civil rights.

*Beautiful isn't a whistle,
beautiful isn't a "Damn!" and
beautiful isn't a grab.*

Women have come a long way. Women now have the right to vote. They are fully recognized as capable business people, breadwinners, and later this year women may be able to participate alongside men in ground combat missions with the Marines. With all these advancements, we should be able to walk home from our jobs or schools without having the power we all work so hard for torn away from us before we reach our doorsteps.

Who has the audacity to catcall? What drives them? Power is at the core of catcalling. Catcalling is a small remark said by a weak person that can have a huge effect on a powerful one. Martin Luther King, Jr. once said, "I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin, but by the content of their character." If you were to switch the phrase "color of their skin" to "the shape of their bodies," the similarities become clear.

Dr. King believed that content of character is what people should be judged upon, but too often people are only appreciated for their bodies.

Dear Future Father, I hope you know that street harassment is just as much your issue as it is a woman's. I hope that when you see a group of

men harassing a girl you stand up for her. I hope you think, what if that was my daughter? I'm calling out to men and women. If you see a woman being harassed, stop it. Street harassment has become culturally accepted and the only way to undo it is to rewrite the culture it was born into.

We stand here today in front of Manhattan Country School, a place that makes me feel safe. It is the place where I can turn to one of my guy best friends if I were to get whistled at and he won't laugh because street harassment is not a joke. It is the place where I can turn to a teacher who has heard countless stories from girls and they can help me come to peace with the incident. It is the place where a visitor can stand up for me when I get followed, like Adam did. It is the school that taught me it's okay to be scared, but to channel that hurt and fear into making a difference.

I hope one day women won't have to shield their bodies to avoid being harassed. I hope women can be safe in their bodies, and wear whatever they want, because outfits don't ask for it. Beautiful isn't a whistle, beautiful isn't a "Damn!" and beautiful isn't a grab. Dear Future Parent, I hope you don't have to hold your daughter while she cries about being harassed on the street, because society has the power to change and if catcalling is still accepted 10 years from now it will be a damn shame.







Thank you

to all who marched as a community with us – all the students, staff members, families, alumni and spontaneous participants.

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Thank you for living the dream

