



# 2020 Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Art, Essay, & Multimedia Contest

## Ending Gun Violence

In an era where violence runs rampant in streets and schools, some feel there is nowhere to turn, nowhere that provides sanctuary, nowhere to feel safe and protected. This perceived era of advancement and development is plagued by the same issues and struggles minority groups faced over 100 years ago. There are mothers and fathers burying their own children, and bullets blasting away entire bloodlines. Because of this we must ask ourselves, are we fulfilling the dream Dr. King had for us, are we living hand in hand, brother with brother, sister with sister? Ubiquitous gun violence headlines say otherwise, and prompted me into action, because people who have the power to make a change, and instead turn their backs no longer are bystanders, but are part of the problem. One of the biggest issues facing the young generation is gun violence and I felt it was my duty to have enough courage to speak out about this tragedy before even more innocent lives are taken.

During the previous year, I participated in a Martin Luther King, Jr. essay competition dedicated to decreasing the gun violence epidemic in schools and neighborhoods. Within my essay I detailed that adding curriculum into classes to teach students about the dangers of guns could mitigate the increasing rate of gun related deaths in minority communities. I introduced many ideas like this in front of educators, policy makers and community members when I read aloud my essay to a local church facing copious amounts of gun violence. I believe with my suggestions and passion towards this topic, one day violence can be decreased. I furthered my involvement in this issue when I participated in the Future Agents in Training Program run by the FBI in an attempt to find the underlying issues of law enforcement that has produced police brutality in communities. This program and specifically a simulation that I participated in offered insight into the thought process of police when encountering a potential suspect. The rush of adrenaline and anxiety is a breeding ground for mistakes, some of which have taken the lives of members of the African American community. I learned that a solution requires effort from both parties. Both the community and law enforcement need to be educated which leads me into how I would like to help these situations in the future. I plan to study psychology in college which focuses on unconscious biases we all possess and also offers ways to tame those biases in order to function efficiently and fairly. If police were educated with seminars and classes on how to not let their snap judgments overpower their training, society in general will be a safer place.

The venerable Dr. King once said that “we cannot be satisfied as long as our children are stripped of their adulthood.” I wonder if Dr. King would be proud of how far we have come, or dismayed by how distant we are from his expectations. “A man dies when he refuses to stand up for justice,” and a child’s dreams die when they are not given the chance to live. In order to cultivate a better generation, we need the younger generation to survive and thrive. If gun violence persists, we may not be afforded the chance to ever truly see Dr. King’s dream come true, a world where race, color and appearance don’t matter, only character. We have come a long way, but the goal has not been reached, which is why I plan to continue my search for justice and an end to gun violence.

**Torre Wilks**  
**12th Grade Essay Winner**  
Solon High School, Solon  
Nanci Bush, Teacher  
Erin Short, Principal

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