



Cal State LA Undergrad Essay Contest

In Honor of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

In 500 words or less:

*Share your thoughts on the importance
of service and why it makes a
difference at Cal State LA.
How does service further the goals
and ethos of the civil rights movement?*

For more info visit our website.
www.calstatela.edu/engagement

Prizes:

1st - \$350

2nd - \$200

3rd - \$100



**CENTER FOR
ENGAGEMENT, SERVICE &
THE PUBLIC GOOD**

3rd Place

HARNESSING MY EGO, FREEING MY LOVE

By: Denise Ramirez

On February 4th, 1968, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. delivered what has, to society and personally, become one of his most poignant speeches, "The Drum Major Instinct." In this speech, Dr. King reminds us of the importance of being of service to others, and of the responsibility every individual has of relinquishing his ego for the better of mankind. As we celebrate the legacy of Dr. King this month, I have taken the opportunity to reflect upon my actions of service. However, this reflection has not been about the hours I have served, the number of lives I may have impacted, not the methods by which I have been of service. Rather, this introspection has focused on humbling effect being of service has blessed my life with.

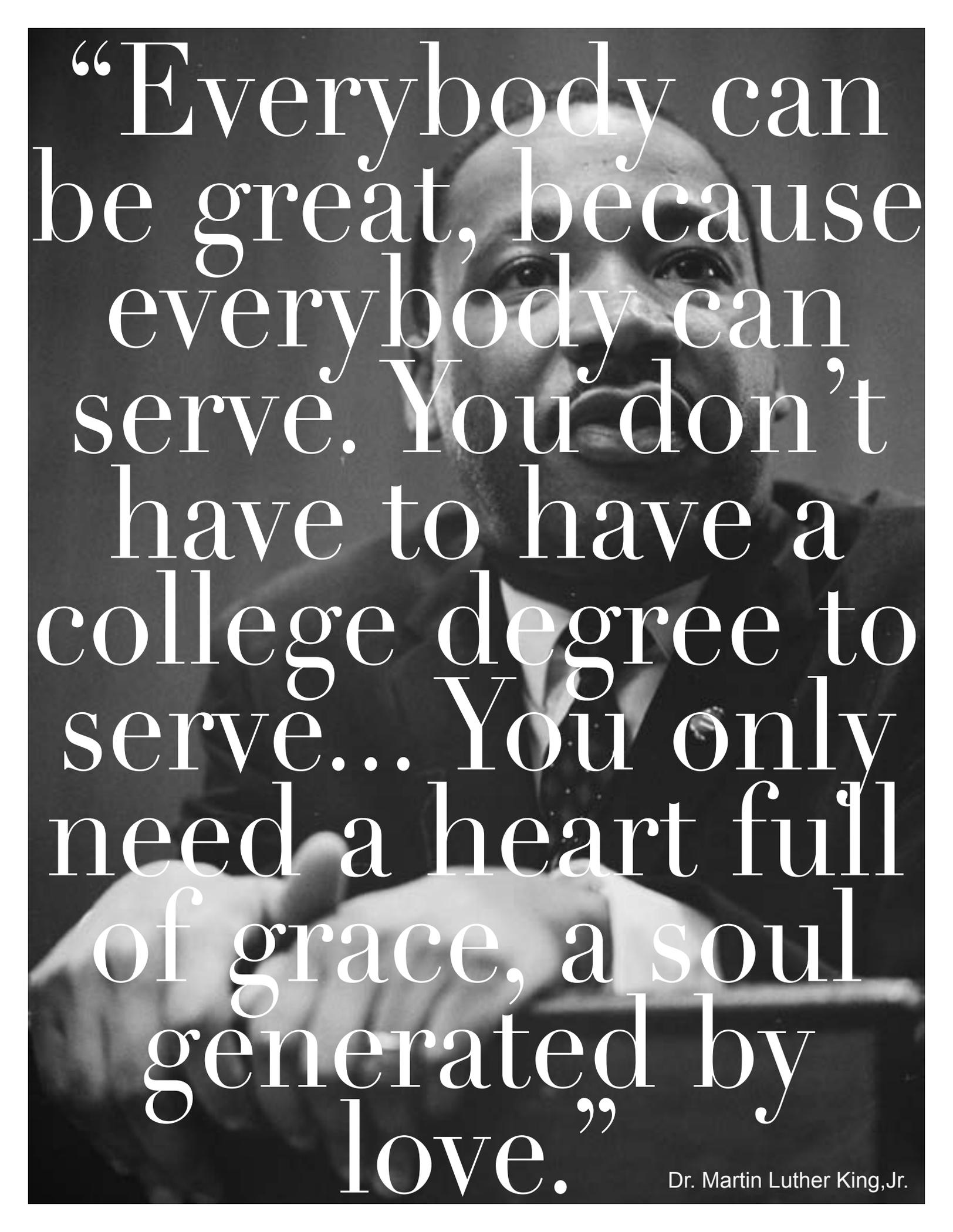
In order to better understand my journey, I will have to share some of my beginnings. I first attended Cal State LA in the fall of 2002. My undeniable passion was fashion. I entered the fashion merchandising program and consumed everything there was to know about the industry. As it happens for many students, I came to believe I had found my ideal job before completing my studies, focused avidely on my new position, and eventually dropped out of the university. As most stories of this kind go, I was mistaken. Lavish as the fashion world was, the workload, stress and lack of spiritual fulfillment began taking a toll on my physical and mental health. I developed a drinking problem(which eventually lead to cirrhosis of the liver), severe depression, and an eating disorder. Luckily, after the guidance of a friend and the study of law, I was fortunate enough to land a job as a paralegal in a firm for Social Security disability claims. That job changed my life. It opened my eyes to the needs of others. It opened up my eyes to my own needs. Compassion and empathy.

This new line of work exposed me to the reality of life, that we all can fall upon hard times. Race, economic class, gender, immigration status, religious beleifs, etc ... none of these makes anyone invulnerable to illness and isolation. Our clients are the most diverse sample of Los Angeles inhabitants. Yet, the one thing they all had in common was the need for compassion. By providing what they needed, I gained the courage to being sharing my own personal struggles with others. For too long, my ego had kept me in isolation, in constant fear of having my imperfections exposed. Slowly, I gained knowledge into the freedom of vulnerability. I joined a non-profit organizations such as California Latinas for Reproductive Justice, and became an advocate for the rights of the undocumented, women's access to medical care and the rights of all voters. I began to volunteer for the Los Angeles Public Library's Adult Literacy program, helping anyone interested in learning to read. I fed the homeless on skid row with The Monday Night Mission, campaigned on behalf of Equality California and donated to the Women's Center of Downtown Los Angeles. I simply continued to serve anyone willing to accept my aid.

This year, on January 21st, 2018, I completed my second year of sobriety. My liver has healed and I have regained my mental and physical health. Nothing means more to me than being able to share my story. Nothing attributed more to this than my commitment to abandon my need to play the "Drum Major". I have returned to Cal State LA as an undergraduate pursuant of a degree in business. This year, on January 21st, 2018, I completed my second year of sobriety. My liver has healed Nothing attributed more to this than my commitment to abandon my need to play the "Drum Major". I have returned to Cal State LA as an undergraduate pursuant of a degree in business and I have regained my mental and physical health. Nothing means more to me than being able to share my story. Nothing attributed more to this than my commitment to abandon my need to play the "Drum Major". I have returned to Cal State LA as an undergraduate pursuant of a degree in business with a focus on social entrepreneurship. My experience with the disabled open up the door to a position on campus with The Office for Students with Disabilites. Today, I focus on what it means to be a humanitarian. Being of service is a universal behavior. It is fully inclusive and accepting. As Dr. King stated, "Everybody can be great, because everybody can serve. You don't have to have a college degree to serve... You only need a heart full of grace, a soul generated by love."

Citation:

Martin Luther King, Jr, "The Drum Major Instinct". Delivered to his congregation Ebenezer Baptist Church in Atlanta, Georgia on February 4th, 1968.



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Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.