

## National Liberty Museum: Selma Speech and Essay Contest

Made possible through a grant from the John Templeton Foundation and in-kind support from Paramount Pictures



John  
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PICTURES



VOICE  
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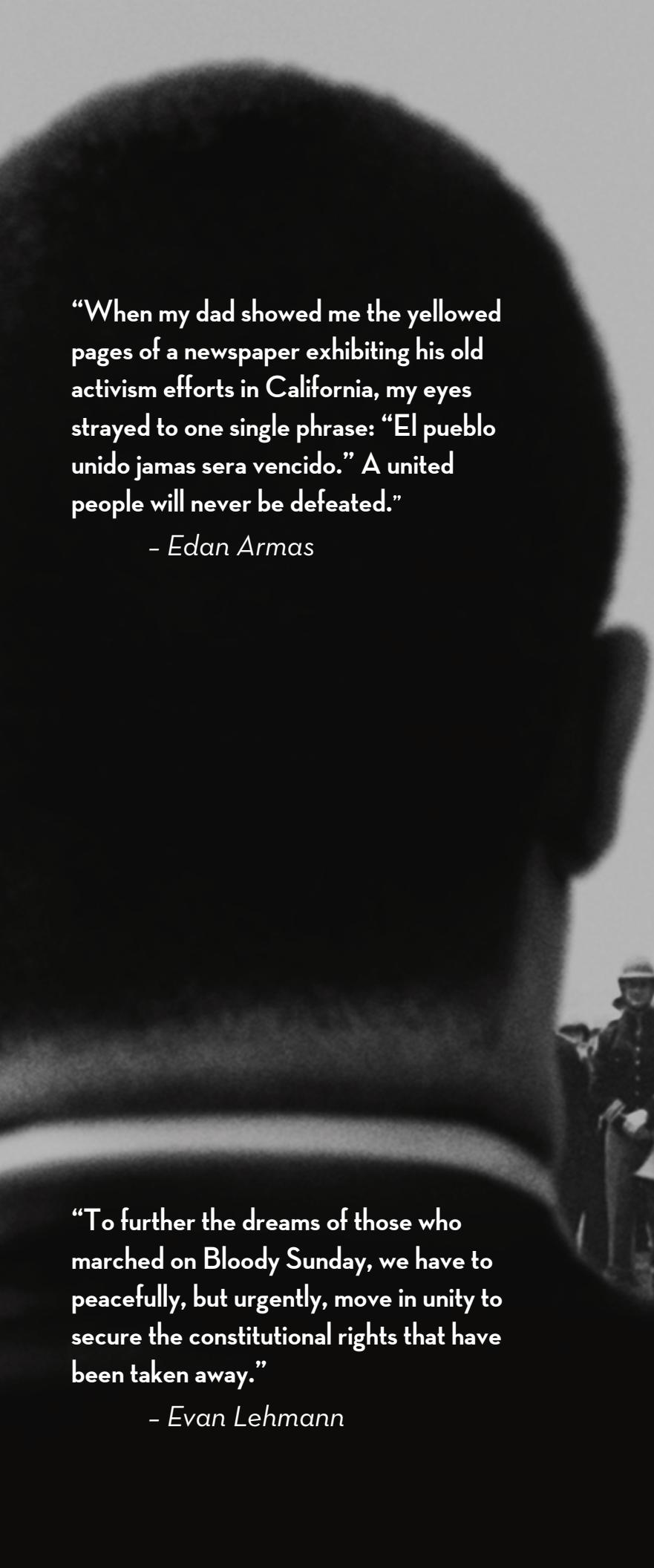


The Philadelphia Inquirer



*fanlala*

Star-Ledger  
POWERING nj.com



**“When my dad showed me the yellowed pages of a newspaper exhibiting his old activism efforts in California, my eyes strayed to one single phrase: “El pueblo unido jamas sera vencido.” A united people will never be defeated.”**

- Edan Armas

**“See I cannot sit, because I already have the seat, but how will there ever be change if nobody is willing to change their ways?”**

- Ifeoma White-Thorpe



**“To further the dreams of those who marched on Bloody Sunday, we have to peacefully, but urgently, move in unity to secure the constitutional rights that have been taken away.”**

- Evan Lehmann

THIS REPORT IS DEDICATED TO THE MEMORY OF OUR DEAR FRIEND  
DR. JACK TEMPLETON, WITH OUR PROFOUND GRATITUDE

May 2015

To the incredible team at the John Templeton Foundation,

On behalf of our staff and board, please accept my heartfelt thanks for your grant support of the Selma Speech and Essay Contest. Thanks to your support and to the involvement of Paramount Pictures around the theatrical release of the film SELMA, the Contest struck a powerful chord among the youth of America. Borrowing from the wisdom of Sir John, “enthusiasm” proved to be “contagious.” In only two months, with nearly 800 submissions, 12 national finalists, three winners and one first-place tie, the initiative has far exceeded our expectations, activating our youth’s civic passion and inspiring thought-provoking, meaningful essays on the topic of freedom.

In addition to the impact on the students (and participating teachers), the Selma Contest effectively raised the national consciousness about the critically important topic of freedom. This is evidenced by the more than 4.7 million broadcast, print and digital media impressions among national and regional outlets and social media impressions of 1.2 million among an aggregate of 14.8 million followers. And, the dialogue on the Selma Contest continues to this day. From beautifully written profiles of our Contest finalists and national media hits in educational and entertainment outlets, to social media mentions from national opinion leaders and some of the highest visibility social influencers, millions have been engaged in speaking about individual freedom and self-determination.

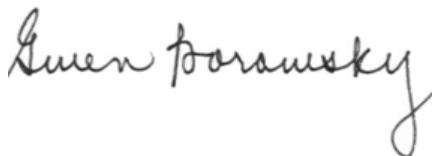
Beyond the reach of the Selma Contest, it is the tangible, sustained impact the project will have on the lives of our winners Edan, Evan and Ifeoma and every student who submitted a stirring essay that will live on well past this clipbook. The students were inspired to lift up their voices and commit to advancing the well-being of freedom. There is no question in my mind that the Contest participants will go on to lead purposeful lives. I am also convinced that, just as Dr. King won a high school speech contest by expressing the essence of his historic “I Have a Dream” oration, so too has the Selma Contest channeled the inspiration of one or more future national leaders.

We plan to stay in touch with the Contest’s participating students, teachers and schools through multiple channels. We are currently establishing a Facebook community for Selma ‘alums.’ We will regularly feature Contest essays on the Museum’s Blog, and also invite students to share their points of view on current events impacting freedom now and in the future. We look forward to watching these stellar young people grow into the kind of civic leaders our nation needs.

The 12 Selma top finalists are now national role models, and the hundreds of thousands of National Liberty Museum visitors who experience our new Selma Contest exhibit in Philadelphia or visit the Selma Contest page on our website will have the opportunity to read their essays, view their speeches and follow in their footsteps.

Thank you again for supporting this incredibly important and timely initiative, and we look forward to many more years of encouraging young people to find their place in the story of liberty.

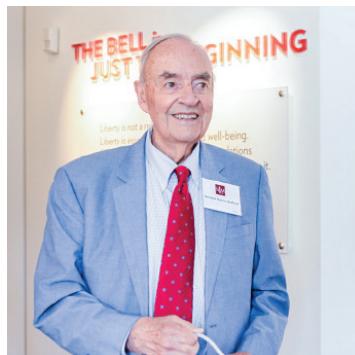
With gratitude,

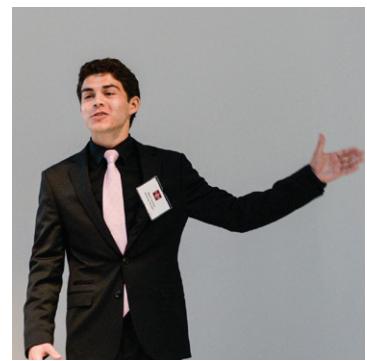


Gwen Borowsky  
NLM CEO



## AWARD CEREMONY SNAPSHOTS: APRIL 21, 2015





## TEN SHINING CONTEST MOMENTS

### 1. SUBMISSIONS TO THIS DAY

Despite the passing of the contest's deadline, several students still sent their entries because they felt the topic of freedom was too important not to address, regardless of their ineligibility to participate. One was Brianna Oppong-Antwi of Wrightsville, Pa., the twin sister of Brandon Oppong-Antwi, a national honorable mention in the Top 12. Brianna wrote in her submission email, "in the face of what is currently happening in the country, addressing these issues is particularly relevant."

### 2. PERSPECTIVES WITHOUT BORDERS

People from every background engaged in discussing individual freedom and self-determination: all major immigrant populations (i.e. Mexican-American, Nigerian, Asian, and Filipino); refugees from war-torn countries such as Palestine; Native Americans; students with learning disabilities and those who face cognitive challenges such as Asperger syndrome and autism; and all major religions and all orientations.

### 3. ENTIRE CLASSROOM ENGAGEMENT

Not only did the National Liberty Museum receive entries from individuals, but a number of teachers from across the U.S. had their entire class submit entries as a class project. Teachers Tiffany Morrow from Gainesville, Fla., and Margaret McNair from Chicago, Ill., both had their students submit essays, and one of Margaret's students, 11th grader Giana Moreno, was a national Honorable Mention ranking in the Top 12. St. Louis, Mo., English teacher LuAnn Fallahi encouraged her class to participate, and had two Top-12 finalists, including national first place winner Evan Lehmann.

### 4. GIRARD COLLEGE “GLORY”

Girard College, a Philadelphia boarding school for academically capable students from families with limited financial resources, was so inspired by the Contest that the school's band and choir offered to perform their own rendition of Glory at the awards ceremony.

“My 3rd-11th grade band and choir students collaborated on creating and performing the Grammy Award-winning song Glory, and... would like to consider it as another ‘response’ to the film Selma and the Civil Rights struggle. Thank you for all you do in empowering the voice of the future.”

- Girard College Band & School Choir Director Paul Eaton

### 5. FROM ROMANIA TO ROCKAWAY

Literature teacher Alina Balan from Romania found out about the Contest and so wanted her students to take on the challenge of sharing their voice about civil liberties that she had her class participate in the Contest and sent the students' videos even though they were ineligible as non-Americans.

## **6. MEETING A TIMELY CHALLENGE**

17-year-old Jade Greene, who lives with her parents on the Ramstein Military Base in Germany, was so determined to participate in the contest that despite challenges with the time difference, Jade persevered and submitted her entry in time for the U.S. deadline.

## **7. PRICELESS GRATITUDE**

The National Liberty Museum received countless unsolicited emails thanking us for offering students the opportunity to amplify their voices through the Contest. In one of the thank-you notes, Andrew Walker of Greensboro, N.C., said,

“I would like to say that, being a part of this contest has truly been a blessing and I truly appreciate it. You are not only given my generation a chance, but an opportunity to express their feelings through writing. I personally believe that if we do not know our history that there is a high probability that we will repeat it. Thank you so much, God bless you all!”

## **8. CONTEST CREATIVITY**

The Contest and its emphasis on both the written and spoken word inspired a great deal of creativity and originality among young people nationwide. Some of the most powerful entries came in the form of short films, video montages, rap songs and spoken word, poetry, animation and dance.

## **9. ESSENTIAL ENTRY TOPICS**

Out of 785 entries submitted, each and every one took the Contest topic seriously, representing a wide range of contemporary issues impacting liberty. The top issues and themes expressed as threats to individual freedom and self-determination in the U.S. today were:

- Racism and discrimination, including bullying and stereotyping, especially in regards to the Trayvon Martin, Eric Garner, and Michael Brown cases.
- Apathy among young people, with low voter participation the most prominent topic mentioned.
- Inequality, with regard to gender and socioeconomic status, as well as access to education, health care and opportunities in general.

## **10. STUDENT SOLUTIONS**

Out of the 785 entries submitted, the vast majority of students expressed positive solutions and the part they can play to help advance individual freedom and self-determination. They included:

- Spreading awareness of the problems at hand, of our constitutional rights, through school/grassroots organizations, social media and in daily life.
- Activism online through social media and actively through peaceful protest.
- Ensuring one's own rights to education and those of others.
- Preparing oneself to be a leader and role model.
- Civic engagement and volunteerism, getting involved with or starting grassroots/school organizations, dialoguing with lawmakers and creating policies.

# SUCCESS BY THE NUMBERS

## Media Impressions

- Total Number of Clips: **89**
- Print Impressions: **2,302,337**
- Broadcast Impressions: **781,429**
- Digital Impressions: **1,656,496**
- Total Media Impressions: **4,740,351**

## Social Media Impressions

- Total Social Media Impressions: **783,914**

## Facebook

- Facebook Impressions about the Selma Contest: **10,589**
- Impressions per facebook post: **129**
- Facebook engagements about Selma Contest: **1,810**
- Total impressions of Paramount Facebook posts: **670,000+**
- Total engagements of Paramount Facebook posts: **27,361**

## Twitter

- Twitter Impressions about the Selma Contest: **75,964**
- Impressions per tweet: **791**
- Twitter engagements about Selma Contest: **1,622**
- Total engagements of Paramount Twitter posts: **676**

## Social Influencer Analytics

- Engagements about Selma Contest from influencers: **25,224\***
- Estimated engagement rate based on NLM's Selma Contest engagement rate: **2.14%**
- Estimated impressions about the Selma Contest: **1,178,692\*\***
- Aggregate followers from all posts **14.8 million**

## Website Traffic

- **73,492** website sessions on the Selma Contest website with a total of **136,234** pageviews
- **11,073** sessions resulted from social media
- **78,396** overall pageviews to the National Liberty Museum website

\* This assumes a tripled engagement of retweets and favorites as link clicks, hashtag clicks, replies and follows cannot be accounted for. It includes only twitter accounts with 6,000-plus followers.

\*\*Calculation was based on the tripled engagement of retweets and favorites and the estimated engagement rate of 2.14% based on NLM's Selma Contest engagement rate. It includes only twitter accounts with 6,000-plus followers.

# NOTABLE MEDIA QUOTABLES



## 'I am the dream,' Pelham High School junior writes in award-winning essay influenced by Selma

"She wanted 'something I can look back on years from now or when I'm older, my kids or grandkids can see hopefully things will be better from what I wrote about, that we've progressed, the world has progressed.'"



## Philadelphia Museum Hosts Essay Contest Based on Hit Film 'Selma'

"A local museum has been chosen to host an essay contest for high-schoolers in regards to the life and works of Martin Luther King, Jr., but it's about more than just the prize money."

## York Daily Record

### Selma essay earns Eastern York student recognition

"Now a high school senior, he didn't accept his peers' attitudes and worked hard to distinguish himself, he said in a speech and essay that's earned him national recognition. He worked to peacefully combat the negative image he found others had of him."

## NeighborNews

### White-Thorpe of Denville writes her way to big win in national contest

"Philadelphia was amazing, it was surreal," said Ifeoma. "I felt blessed to be a part of it and share it with the other contestants who were so amazing."



### National Liberty Museum hosting 'Selma' contest for high school students

"One reason National Liberty Museum was handpicked to spearhead the initiative, VP of Advancement Peggy Sweeney told PhillyVoice.com, is the museum's location in Philadelphia and unique focus on individual liberties that have particular resonance right here, right now."



### Three Students Honored in Philadelphia For Essays Honoring Dr. King's Selma March

"I feel so blessed to be here and to receive this distinction," said Rockaway, NJ tenth-grader Ifeoma White-Thorpe, who tied for first place and won \$5,000, thanks to her stirring spoken-word essay about decreasing freedoms among young black young men following the shooting last year of Michael Brown in Ferguson, Mo.

## CALL FOR NOMINATIONS COVERAGE



### Selma Speech and Essay Contest

Inspired by the release of the film Selma, which documents the civil rights movement, the National Liberty Museum and John Templeton Foundation are sponsoring an essay contest for high school students. Students aged 14-18 are asked to submit essays that address civil rights issues today.



### National Contest Encourages Students to Watch Selma, Reflect on MLK

Inspired by the release of the film Selma, which documents the civil rights movement, the National Liberty Museum and John Templeton Foundation are sponsoring an essay contest for high school students. Students aged 14-18 are asked to submit essays that address civil rights issues today.



"Since our founding in the year 2000, we've been committed to bringing liberty to life through exciting exhibits," Borowsky said. "We can't wait to see the incredible submissions from students around the country."



### Common's cause

Old City's National Liberty Museum is holding an essay contest in honor of the movie "Selma," about Martin Luther King Jr.'s campaign to secure equal voting rights. Rapper Common, who is nominated for an Academy Award along with Penn grad John Legend for their original song "Glory" in the movie, is one of the judges of the contest open to high schoolers. The prompt: Dr. King used his words to change history. How will you use yours?



## Liberty Museum offering ‘SELMA’ prize

The Liberty Museum will award a cash prize to the high school student who can channel the spirit of the movie “Selma” into an essay and video-recorded speech.

The Old City museum is hosting a national contest for high school students aged 14 to 18. Students are asked to submit an essay and a video-recorded speech that tie together with the overall theme – individual freedom and self-determination – of the recently released movie “Selma.”

## BUCKS COUNTY Courier Times

### ‘Selma’ contest for high school students

The National Liberty Museum in Philadelphia is holding a Selma Speech & Essay Contest for high school students.

To participate, students must watch the film “Selma,” about the three months leading up to the historic march led by Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., and then submit a 500-700 word speech and video by Feb. 15.



## The Selma Speech & Essay Contest For High School Students

Calling all high school students! Martin Luther King, Jr. used his words to change history. How will you use yours?

## Burlington County Times

### What does freedom mean?

The National Liberty Museum in Philadelphia is holding a Selma Speech & Essay Contest for high school students.

To participate, students must watch the film “Selma,” about the three months leading up to the historic march led by Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., and then submit a 500-700 word speech and video by Feb. 15.

# TOP 12 FINALIST COVERAGE

## Johns Creek Patch

### Johns Creek Student Named Finalist in Contest Honoring Selma March

The National Liberty Museum (NLM) in Philadelphia has announced the top 12 finalists in its Selma Speech & Essay Contest, a national competition inviting high school students around the country to join together in exercising their power of words.

Maxwell Turk, a 10th-grade student at Northview High School, is among those 12 finalists in the contest.

## York Daily Record

### Selma essay earns Eastern York student recognition

Oppong-Antwi beat out nearly 800 students to become one of 12 finalists in the Selma Speech and Essay Contest, hosted by the National Liberty Museum in Philadelphia to mark the 50th anniversary of the Selma march. Student participants were asked to watch the movie "Selma" and write an essay and film a video describing what needs to be done today to protect individual freedom and self-determination.



### 'I am the dream,' Pelham High School junior writes in award-winning essay influenced by Selma

Asked about the most important message in her essay, Sanders said during an interview, "I think the very beginning line when I said, 'I am the dream,' because a lot of my peers and a lot of my teachers have read that and said, 'I can hear Dr. King and I can hear you saying it at the same time.'"



### Morris Hills High School student a winner in national essay contest

Ifeoma's entry was one of nearly 800 pieces submitted to the contest. The field was narrowed to 12 submissions from which the top three were chosen.

Jonathan Johnson, a home schooled senior from Irvington, was one of those 12, earning him honorable mention honors.

## FINALIST ANNOUNCEMENT/ AWARD CEREMONY COVERAGE



### Ceremony Honoring High School Finalists in 'Selma' Contest to Be Live Streamed

The nationwide Selma Speech and Essay Contest award ceremony will be live streamed from Philadelphia and will honor three finalists from all over the country for their ability to "peacefully use the power of their words."

## The Citizen of Morris County

### Morris Hills student a finalist in Selma essay contest

Ifeoma White-Thorpe, 15, of Denville, a sophomore at Morris Hills High School in Rockaway, was selected out of nearly 800 submissions as one of the three finalists in the contest. Her speech covered becoming the change she wishes to see in the world, and to peacefully fight for the change people crave.

"This competition was a lot of fun for me because it involves two things that I have a deep passion for," White-Thorpe said.

## TEMPLETON REPORT

news from the John Templeton Foundation

### Liberty Bell Rings for Winners of SELMA Speech and Essay Contest

The winners of the National Liberty Museum's SELMA Speech and Essay Contest, supported by the John Templeton Foundation in partnership with Paramount Pictures, were announced on April 21, 2015. In the year that marked the 50th anniversary of the Selma march, the top prize was awarded jointly to two teens, who each received the \$5,000 Grand Prize at a ceremony in Philadelphia. The ceremony included a keynote speech from former U.S. Senator Harris Wofford, an original Selma marcher and advisor to Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

## NeighborNews

### White-Thorpe of Denville writes her way to big win in national contest

"Philadelphia was amazing, it was surreal," said Ifeoma. "I felt blessed to be a part of it and share it with the other contestants who were so amazing."

One moment in particular stands out for Ifeoma. It was when her name was announced and her grandmother ran up to the podium and took pictures as the audience applauded.

# TOP 12 FINALISTS

## First Place Tie



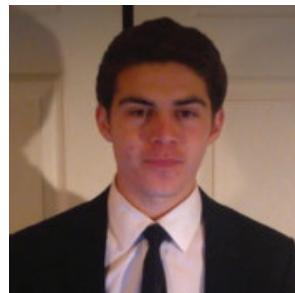
**Ifeoma White-Thorpe**  
Grade 10, Morris Hills High School,  
Rockaway, NJ

## First Place Tie



**Evan Lehmann**  
Grade 12, Parkway North H.S.,  
St. Louis, Missouri

## Third Place



**Edan Armas**  
Grade 12, Lake Park High School,  
Roselle, Illinois,



**Maxwell Turk**  
Grade 10, Northview High School,  
Johns Creek, Georgia



**Danielle Saunders**  
Grade 11, Pelham High School,  
Pelham, Alabama



**Brandon Oppong-Antwi**  
Grade 12, Eastern York High  
School, Wrightsville, PA



**Giana Moreno**  
Grade 11, Trinity High School,  
River Forest, Illinois



**Madeline Kujabi**  
Grade 10, Bishop Grimes Junior/  
Senior High School, Syracuse, NY



**Layla Kousari**  
Grade 12, Parkway North High  
School, St. Louis, Missouri



**Jonathan Johnson**  
Grade 12, Home-schooled,  
Irvington, NJ



**Ethan Davis**  
Grade 12, East Chapel Hill High  
School, Chapel Hill, North Carolina



**Ashley Chico**  
Grade 10, Lake Highland Preparatory School,  
Orlando, Florida

9 HONORABLE MENTIONS

AS SEEN IN...



The Philadelphia Tribune

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education world®  
Connecting educators to what works



Star-Ledger nj.com  
Everything Jersey

PHILLY VOICE

York Daily Record

TEMPLETON REPORT

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The Citizen of Morris County

NeighborNews

edutopia

BUCKS COUNTY Courier Times

Johns Creek Patch

Barista.net Family  
EDUCATION

Star-Ledger  
POWERING nj.com

THE Selma Times-Journal  
SERVING SELMA AND THE BLACK BELT SINCE 1827

The Dallas Weekly

Burlington County Times

The Intelligencer

San Francisco **BayView**  
National Black Newspaper

STATEHOUSE NEWS

# BEST OF: MEDIA HIGHLIGHTS

The Philadelphia Inquirer

philly.com

## Fight for freedom and the change we crave

By Ifeoma White-Thorpe

Tick tock. Time is ticking. How many years do I have left to make a change? To not just be a soul moving past, to not just be a reflection in glass? What if the change I make is minimal? Does that mean it doesn't count?

Looking back in time, it is evident that Rosa Parks did not have to shout to be heard, but Rosa also didn't sit to relax. She sat because she knew what those marks meant on those slaves' backs. See I cannot sit, because I already have the seat, but how will there ever be change if nobody is willing to change their ways?

The Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. said, "Let freedom ring," and for the longest time I had thought that freedom had been rung, and that the fight for freedom was done. But when my brother no longer felt safe walking to the bus stop, or putting his hood up on rainy days, I began to question what is freedom, and how free am I today.

My brother wasn't free. Everywhere he turned, a young black boy was being gunned down, found face down, so his spirit sunk way down. My brother was confined to his room, no longer allowed the leisure of going to play basketball after 5 o'clock at night, for my parents feared for his safety; the robbery of human life grown out of spite.

Dictionary.com defines "freedom" as "the power to determine action without restraint." All Americans are protected under the U.S. Constitution, yet it does not seem so. But if people do not feel free in their own community, then where will they be free and what will enable them to be self-determined? Stripped of their colors, in order for others not to fear them.

In 1960, freedom meant integrated schools. In 1965, freedom meant being able to march to Selma and back without being brutally abused or slaughtered, and it also meant the right to vote without excessive restraints. In 2015, 50 years after the Voting Rights Act, what exactly does freedom mean?

In order for me to make a change, I must first change

myself. It is left to me to assist in dispelling the biases that the black girl cannot be knowledgeable. It is up to us who are fortunate enough to receive an education to pass on the knowledge that we have acquired.

We must peacefully fight for the change we crave, no matter the circumstances we are in, as Dr. King did. When faced with adversity over who we are, we must have the strength to overcome. In order to advance my rights, I will continue to dismiss the stereotypes of the black female, and assist in creating a new mold in which we are viewed as atypical of what we once were.

I will be outstanding, so that others will respect me. I will be ravishing in the way that I sew my words together to conceive a beautiful unmitigated harmony. Education is the key to a door that has already been unlocked, but is still shut closed. It is available to all Americans, yet not all pursue it; but I will.

As Dr. King once said, "The function of education is to teach one to think intensively and to think critically. Intelligence plus character — that is the goal of true education." Education is essential for change, and I aspire to be that change.

*The National Liberty Museum in Philadelphia is today hosting the culminating event of the 2015 Selma Speech and Essay Contest, honoring the three student finalists who were chosen from about 800 submissions. Local and national leaders, representatives from the John Templeton Foundation and the museum, as well as parents, teachers, and friends, will celebrate the three finalists: Edan Armas of Roselle, Ill., Evan Lehmann of St. Louis, and Ifeoma White-Thorpe from Morris Hills High School in Rockaway, N.J., whose essay, "Let Freedom Ring," is published here.*

*For the contest, which marks the 50th anniversary of the Selma march, students were asked to watch the film "Selma" and then submit a 500- to 700-word essay and video on the following: What needs to be done today to protect individual freedom and self-determination? What are you doing or will do to peacefully advance those rights?*

*For more information on the contest and the museum, visit [www.libertymuseum.org/selmacontest](http://www.libertymuseum.org/selmacontest).*



## Live Stream the National Liberty Museum as They Honor the High School Finalists of Nationwide Selma Speech & Essay Contest

From December 2014 to February 2015, students everywhere participated in the 2015 Selma Speech & Essay Contest. Celebrating the 50th Anniversary of the Selma March, teens were able to exercise their power of words.

Using the following prompt, entrants shared their vision of a brighter future for their communities and the people living within.

The movie Selma tells the story of how Martin Luther King, Jr. and others peacefully protested to advance voting rights. What do you think needs to be done today to protect individual freedom and self-determination? What are you doing or will do to peacefully advance those rights?

On Tuesday, April 21, the three winners will be honored at the red carpet. Edan Armas, Evan Lehmann, and Ifeoma White-Thorpe will find out their placement in the national contest. If you want to see the contest for yourself, make sure you check out the live stream here when the red carpet premieres!

We want to commend these three finalists for kicking off an amazing start towards community improvement, along with the rest of the students who submitted their ideas. Show them your support by tuning into the live stream next week - we can't wait to see it!

And don't forget to check out Selma, out April 21 on Digital HD.



## Protecting Individual Freedom: The Voice of an Immigrant's Son

By Edan Armas

## Peacefully Sharing A Young Voice On Civil Liberties

By Evan Lehmann

## Let Freedom Ring

By Ifeoma White-Thorpe



## Morris Hills High School student a winner in national essay contest

By Christina Giannantonio/The Star-Ledger

ROCKAWAY — Ifeoma White-Thorpe, a sophomore at Morris Hills High School, has been named one of the top three finalists in the National Liberty Museum's Selma Speech and Essay Contest, a nationwide contest to mark the 50th Anniversary of the freedom march from Selma to Montgomery in Alabama.

Ifeoma's entry was one of nearly 800 pieces submitted to the contest. The field was narrowed to 12 submissions from which the top three were chosen.

Jonathan Johnson, a home schooled senior from Irvington, was one of those 12, earning him honorable mention honors.

To enter the contest, students in grades 10 to 12 first watched the film "Selma" and then submitted a 500- to 700-word speech and video in response to the questions, "What do you think needs to be done today to protect individual freedom and self-determination? What are you doing or will do to peacefully advance those rights?"

Ifeoma and the other winners will take part in a two-day awards ceremony in Philadelphia next month, where the \$5,000 grand-prize winner will be announced.



## 'I am the dream,' Pelham High School junior writes in award-winning essay influenced by Selma

By Martin J. Reed / mreed@al.com

In her national award-winning essay influenced by the events of Selma, Pelham High School junior Danielle Sanders wanted her message to reflect the words of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

"I am the dream," Sanders wrote in her opening line. "I am the dream that Dr. King saw fifty years ago. I am that little black girl whose first friend was a little white girl. I am the student in class who is known not by the color of my skin but by the content of my character. I am the little black girl who has grown up in what used to be known as the state with the most 'vicious racists.' I am the little black girl from Alabama."

Her essay not only captured the attention of judges who last month named her one of 12 finalists in a contest held by the National Liberty Museum in Philadelphia, but Sanders also knows it held the attention of other readers, including herself.

Asked about the most important message in her essay, Sanders said during an interview, "I think the very beginning line when I said, 'I am the dream,' because a lot of my peers and a lot of my teachers have read that and said, 'I can hear Dr. King and I can hear you saying it at the same time.'

Sanders was the only finalist from Alabama in the essay contest that generated nearly 800 entries from high school students throughout the country and elsewhere including the Virgin Islands and Guam.

In the contest supported by a grant from the John Templeton Foundation and in-kind help from Paramount Pictures, there were 10 entries from Alabama and the finalists, including the top three winners, came from nine states.

Students responded with an essay and speech to the question: "The movie Selma tells the story of how Martin Luther King, Jr. and others peacefully protested to advance voting rights. What do you think needs to be done today to protect individual freedom and self-determination? What are you doing or will do to peacefully advance those rights?"

Sanders in her essay pointed to ongoing struggles that society faces 50 years after the Selma civil rights marches.

"Once and for all, we must reject revenge, reject hatred and reject aggression. We must open our eyes and reject what the past is trying to bring into the present. Let us acknowledge how we are able to sit on a bus without worrying whom we will have to give our seat up to. Let us not quiet those who speak out, let us not reject someone who does not pray to the same God, and let us not deny the people's right to protest," she wrote.

She also noted specific incidents that sparked outrage in the country's recent past, including the Trayvon Martin case.

Encourage young people to vote, she wrote, "So that maybe one day, after becoming registered voters, we are able to serve on a jury to determine cases like that of Trayvon Martin, to determine whether or not a civil right was violated. Because it is cases like this that makes people worry about their freedoms. Freedom where a young man cannot walk down the street with a hood on and with skittles in his pocket without being questioned or accused. This is where we have got to do better."

Sanders decided to enter the Selma essay contest after her English teacher, Connie Hayes Nolen, told her about it as the class had assignments to write argumentative papers. Sanders jumped at the opportunity.

"I wanted to convey not only what I'm seeing on the news, not only what I'm experiencing in life, what I see at school and outside of school, I wanted to write about something that is real, something that is current, something that is relevant," she said.

She wanted "something I can look back on years from now or when I'm older, my kids or grandkids can see hopefully things will be better from what I wrote about, that we've progressed, the world has progressed."

Sanders, who was born and raised in Pelham, worked on the essay after reading a collection of speeches delivered by King. She wrote the essay over about three weeks and worked on it in Nolen's class.

The notice that she had been named a finalist came in an email she received on her cellphone during history class a couple of weeks ago. "The whole emotions, all of the emotions I felt, it just hit me at one time," she said, remembering how the announcement brought tears to her.

She couldn't wait to tell Nolen as well as her parents, Loretha and Andre Sanders. For becoming a finalist, the Pelham junior received a \$500 cash prize while Nolen received \$300 for being her sponsor.

Sanders, who's a member of several honor societies as well as the high school's Junioresettes community service organization and the Cultural Exchange Club, is hoping to attend Auburn University and possibly become a lawyer. She also wants to visit Selma soon.

"Now that I've done the research and written the essay and I've also seen the movie, it's just a lot of history -- it's a lot -- and it's very emotional to know that that many people including Dr. King had the courage to go through what they went through," she said.



## Common's cause

Old City's National Liberty Museum is holding an essay contest in honor of the movie "Selma," about Martin Luther King Jr.'s campaign to secure equal voting rights. Rapper Common, who is nominated for an Academy Award along with Penn grad John Legend for their original song "Glory" in the movie, is one of the judges of the contest open to high schoolers. The prompt: Dr. King used his words to change history. How will you use yours?

For more info go to [libertymuseumselmacontest.org](http://libertymuseumselmacontest.org). Essays are due Sunday, with the grand-prize winner receiving \$5,000.



## Ceremony Honoring High School Finalists in 'Selma' Contest to Be Live Streamed

Article by Nicole Gorman,  
Education World Contributor

04/20/2015

The nationwide Selma Speech and Essay Contest award ceremony will be live streamed from Philadelphia and will honor three finalists from all over the country for their ability to "peacefully use the power of their words."

Edan Armas, Evan Lehmann, and Ifeoma White-Thorpe are the three remaining finalists in the contest, down from the original pool of nearly 800 submissions from across the country.

They will be judged by an impressive and well-known judging panel including Common; Dr. Marvin W. Berkowitz; Xavier de Souza Briggs; Van Jones; Shiza Shahid; and Douglas O. Tozour.

Hosted at the National Liberty Museum in Philadelphia, the three finalists will find out which one of them is the recipient of the grand prize- \$5,000. The following two will receive \$2,500 and \$1,000, respectively.

The ceremony will also include a speech from former Senator Harris Wofford, an original Selma marcher and special messages from the cast of Selma.

According to the press release, "To enter the contest, students were asked to watch the film SELMA and then submit a 500-700 word speech and video responding to the following prompt: 'The movie SELMA tells the story of how Martin Luther King, Jr. and others peacefully protested to advance voting rights. What do you think needs to be done today to protect individual freedom and self-determination? What are you doing or will do to peacefully advance those rights?'

The ceremony will start at 10:30 a.m. on April 21st, and the live stream can be found [here](#).

To check out the finalists' submissions, [click here](#).

## Student writers honored for powerful essays

Posted: Tuesday, April 28, 2015 12:15 am  
Bobbi Booker Tribune Staff Writer

Historic Philadelphia recently served as a unique gathering site for a trio of student essayists from around the country to mark the 50th anniversary of the Selma March. The National Liberty Museum hosted the culminating event of the “2015 Selma Speech & Essay Contest,” honoring the top three student finalists — Edan Armas from Lake Park High School in Roselle, Ill.; Evan Lehmann from Parkway North H.S. in St. Louis, Mo., and Ifeoma White-Thorpe from Morris Hills High School in Rockaway, N.J. — who were chosen from close to 800 student submissions.

Museum CEO Gwen Borowsky welcomed the three winning students, who were feted with guests on the red carpet on the museum’s front steps leading to the welcome gallery last week. KYW community affairs reporter Cherri Greg emceed the event where former Sen. Harris Wofford spoke about his experience as an original Selma marcher, and students and the Girard College Band and Choir performed, “Glory.”

After watching the film, “Selma,” the essayists submitted 500-700-word speeches and videos responding to the following prompt: “The movie ‘Selma’ tells the story of how Martin Luther King Jr. and others peacefully protested to advance voting rights. What do you think needs to be done today to protect individual freedom and self-determination? What are you doing or will do to peacefully advance those rights?”

Although the original intent of the contest was to choose 10 finalists, the submissions were so overwhelmingly powerful, 12 finalists were ultimately chosen. The finalists’ ability to use the power of their own words to inspire others, to practice the rights of individual freedom and self-determination was evident in the delivery of each essay.

White-Thorpe pondered, “Dr. King said, ‘Let freedom ring,’ and for the longest time I had thought that freedom had been rung, and that the fight for freedom was done. But when my brother no longer felt safe walking to the bus stop, or putting his hood up on rainy days, I began to question what is freedom, and how free am I today. My brother wasn’t free, everywhere he turned, a young Black

boy was being gunned down, found face down, so his spirit sunk way down. My brother was confined to his room, no longer allowed the leisure of going to play basketball after 5 o’clock at night, for my parents feared for his safety; the robbery of human life grown out of spite ... In 1960, freedom meant integrated schools. In 1965 freedom meant being able to march to Selma and back without being brutally abused or slaughtered, and it also meant the right to vote without excessive restraints. In 2015, 50 years after the Voting Rights Act, what exactly does freedom mean?”

After viewing a “White silence is violence” sign during a #BlackLivesMatter protest in his St. Louis hometown, Lehmann owned up to possessing an “immense amount of racial privilege” and decided: “I don’t speak up, I myself am complicit; I’m permitting a system of racism to exist if I don’t use my voice to combat it, to speak out ... I organize under the mantra I found at my first march: ‘My silence is violence.’ If I don’t use my voice, others will remain silenced. This is not just a St. Louis problem, nor is it just a racial problem; people are being stripped of their liberties throughout our nation and throughout our world. To further the dreams of those who marched on Bloody Sunday, we have to peacefully, but urgently, move in unity to secure the constitutional rights that have been taken away.”

Armas noted: “Fifty years later, however, the power of unity and courage has waned. In the epoch of globalization, the growing popularity of social media mixed with general political apathy is perpetuating a plague of indifference masqueraded as unity by technology. Because attaching a hashtag to the word Ferguson on Twitter might raise awareness. Sharing the video of Eric Garner’s death on Facebook might make some people bubble with anger. But real change is not made when the actual people behind the computers and phones have no emotional investment behind their actions, when the admirable courage to act in the name of freedom is superseded by the simple desire to follow a trend? The problems of racism and poor police organization infecting this country today won’t be solved with emotional outbursts that parallel the ineffective screams and posters of unorganized Blacks 50 years ago. If we want action to be taken, we need real, human unity: marches, organized protests, community-wide discussions.”

In addition to an all-expense paid travel, the finalists took home prize money ranging from \$5,000 — \$1,000. All essays and winner backgrounds can be found at <https://libertymuseum.org/selma-contest-winners/>.



## Philadelphia Museum Hosts Essay Contest Based on Hit Film ‘Selma’

By Kevin Pulsifer

A local museum has been chosen to host an essay contest for high-schoolers in regards to the life and works of Martin Luther King, Jr., but it's about more than just the prize money.

The National Liberty Museum in Philadelphia was chosen late last year to be the hosts of this contest due to its contributions to society and the work they've done year in and year out. Entrants are asked to watch the movie Selma, and submit a speech and video as a response to a prompt regarding King's story in the film and how they personalize his life's story.

The contest was the brainchild of the John Templeton Foundation, who partnered with Paramount Pictures on the project, according to Peggy Sweeney, Director of Development for the museum.

Among a star-studded judging panel is Academy Award-nominated and Golden Globe-winning hip-hop artist Common, who starred in Selma. Common joins Dr. Marvin Berkowitz, Shiza Shahid, Van Jones, Xavier de Sousa Briggs, and Douglas O. Tozour.

“At the awards shows, Common talked so beautifully about civil rights and the issues we see today,” said Sweeney. “He is a great example of what can be accomplished in a creative democracy.”

In the film, Common plays James Bevel, a leader in the 1960’s Civil Rights Movement. Bevel and King joined hands with other civil rights activists and walked peacefully across the Edmund Pettus Bridge and helped to bring about change in a non-violent manner in the famous Selma to Montgomery march.

It is this leadership that the museum is hoping to cultivate in young minds all across the country.

“In particular, we hope to inspire the next generation to become empowered, contributing, and caring citizens,” said Sweeney.

According to a press release, the top prize in this contest is \$5,000, but there will be 10 prizes given away, and the top

3 finalists will be flown to Philadelphia for a two day awards ceremony in mid-April.

All students enrolled in high school in the United States and its territories are encouraged to enter the contest. The deadline for submissions is February 15th. More information about the National Liberty Museum and the contest itself can be found [here](#).

As of right now, Sweeney said, they have received over 150 entries, but that number is increasing faster and faster every day.

The contest has truly become a nationwide event. The museum has received submissions from 30 states, including California, Texas, and Georgia, where King once entered and won a speech contest very similar to this one. The ideas he focused on in this speech were inspiration for his “I Have a Dream” speech.

“The film really inspires young people to take a stand, to contribute and keep liberty strong in our country in constructive ways,” Sweeney said. “We hope that our future leaders realize the power of their words and will use them to make a positive difference moving forward.”



“Eyewitness News was at the Liberty Museum in Old City for a contest inspired by the film SELMA. It asked students their thoughts on individual freedom and self-determination.

Evan Lehmann from St. Louis, Missouri and Ifeoma White-Thorpe from Rockaway, New Jersey shared the top prize, each getting \$5,000. KYW News Radio Community Affairs Reporter Cherri Gregg emceed the event.”



**KYW**  
NEWSRADIO  
**1060**

## Three Students Honored in Philadelphia For Essays Honoring Dr. King's Selma March

By KYW community affairs reporter Cherri Gregg

PHILADELPHIA (CBS) – The National Liberty Museum, in Old City, rolled out the red carpet today for three students who submitted the winning essays and video speeches marking the 50th anniversary of historic march in Selma, Ala. led by Dr. Martin Luther King.

The 2015 "Selma Speech and Essay" contest drew nearly 800 entries nationwide. Judges, including rapper Common, sifted through the submissions, whittling them down to the top three, who were honored today in a full scale celebration.

"I feel so blessed to be here and to receive this distinction," said Rockaway, NJ tenth-grader Ifeoma White-Thorpe, who tied for first place and won \$5,000, thanks to her stirring spoken-word essay about decreasing freedoms among young black young men following the shooting last year of Michael Brown in Ferguson, Mo.

"I began to question: what is freedom, and how free am I?" White-Thorpe says in her videotaped essay.

St. Louis, Mo. senior Evan Lehmann shared the first-place honor for his speech about "white silence" and his decision to protest amid riots in his home city.

"It's exciting to know that my perspective is valued," he said.

Roselle, Ill. student Edan Armas won third place.

"We read so many negative stories about young people, and young people are amazing," National Liberty Museum CEO Gwen Borowsky said at today's ceremony.

The students also saw special video messages from David Oyelowo and Ava DuVernay (the star and director of the movie Selma, respectively).

Former US senator Harris Wofford (D-Pa.), who marched with Dr. King in Selma in 1965, was the keynote speaker.

The essays and speeches of the top 12 entrants are now on display at the museum.

**metro**

## Liberty Museum offering 'SELMA' prize

The museum is hosting a national contest for high school students.

The Liberty Museum will award a cash prize to the high school student who can channel the spirit of the movie "Selma" into an essay and video-recorded speech.

The Old City museum is hosting a national contest for high school students aged 14 to 18.

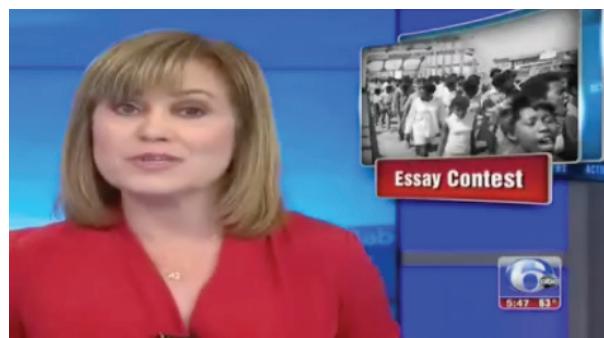
Students are asked to submit an essay and a video-recorded speech

that tie together with the overall theme – individual freedom and self-determination – of the recently released movie "Selma."

The winner will receive a \$5,000 cash prize. The contest is funded by the John Templeton Foundation.

The essay question is: "Inspired by the movie 'Selma,' what do you think needs to be done today to protect individual freedom and self-determination? What are you doing, or what can you do, to peacefully advance those rights in the spirit of Martin Luther King Jr. and others?"

Students should visit the Liberty Museum website for submission details. The deadline is Jan. 30



"The National Liberty Museum Honored the winners of the Nationwide Selma Speech and Essay Contest"

# SELMA SOCIAL MEDIA BUZZ

 **Ava DuVernay**  @AVAETC 

Explore the power of words. A very cool SELMA speech and essay contest for young people. st8.fm/rSv @LibertyMuseum #MarchOn

 RETWEETS 70  FAVORITES 64 

10:32 AM - 24 Jan 2015

 **Mark Burnett**  @MarkBurnettTV 

Calling all high school students: For the film Selma, enter the **#SelmaSpeechContest** on freedom at [libertymuseumselmacontest.org](http://libertymuseumselmacontest.org)

 RETWEETS 31  FAVORITES 27 

8:14 PM - 28 Jan 2015

 **John Legend**  @johnlegend 

Calling all high school students: Tell us what inspires you to **#MarchOn** in the SELMA speech & essay contest at [LibertyMuseumSelmaContest.org](http://LibertyMuseumSelmaContest.org)

 RETWEETS 281  FAVORITES 254 

2:33 PM - 5 Jan 2015

 **ian somerhalder**  @iansomerhalder 

Calling all high school students. For the film Selma, enter the **#SelmaSpeechContest** on freedom at [LibertyMuseumSelmaContest.org](http://LibertyMuseumSelmaContest.org) **#MarchOn**

 RETWEETS 2,043  FAVORITES 4,672 

12:28 AM - 20 Jan 2015

 **Selma Movie**  @SelmaMovie 

Calling all high school students: Tell us what inspires you to **#MarchOn** in the SELMA speech & essay contest at [LibertyMuseumSelmaContest.org](http://LibertyMuseumSelmaContest.org) RT

 RETWEETS 292  FAVORITES 247 

7:05 PM - 17 Dec 2014

 **Randall Lane**  @RandallLane 

Cool learning opportunity for HS students ahead of release of **#Selma**, **#MLKDay**: [libertymuseumselmacontest.org](http://libertymuseumselmacontest.org) **#SelmaSpeechContest**

 RETWEET 1  FAVORITES 4 

12:55 PM - 9 Jan 2015

 **publiccharters.org**   
@charteralliance

High school students: how will you use your words to change history? Enter the **#SelmaSpeechContest**: [j.mp/1HUuWqx](http://j.mp/1HUuWqx) **#MarchOn**

 RETWEETS 2  FAVORITES 2 

2:31 PM - 8 Jan 2015

 **AFFRM**   
@AFFRM

MLK used his words to change history. How will you use yours? Enter the **#SelmaSpeechContest** today! Deadline 2/15! [bit.ly/16vKwLK](http://bit.ly/16vKwLK)

 RETWEETS 18  FAVORITES 6 

7:00 PM - 13 Feb 2015



US high school students: Make your voice heard in the SELMA speech & essay contest from the @LibertyMuseum! LibertyMuseumSelmaContest.org

RETWEETS 97 FAVORITES 41

5:28 PM - 7 Jan 2015



Inspired by MLKJr. .@LibertyMuseum's #SelmaSpeechContest is calling on HS students to use words to change history LibertyMuseumSelmaContest.org

RETWEETS 2 FAVORITES 3

6:40 PM - 14 Jan 2015



Final deadline is Feb. 15 for students to enter the #SelmaSpeechContest. bit.ly/1HZv1ao How will you use your words? #MarchOn

RETWEETS 9 FAVORITES 3

12:02 PM - 2 Feb 2015



High school students: If you've seen the film #Selma, enter the #SelmaSpeechContest on freedom: LibertyMuseumSelmaContest.org. #MarchOn

RETWEETS 10 FAVORITES 8

8:39 PM - 20 Jan 2015



Martin Luther King, Jr. used his words to change history. How will you use yours? Enter #SelmaSpeechContest bit.ly/1LsFvnk #MarchOn

RETWEETS 7 FAVORITES 3

3:00 PM - 31 Jan 2015



Tell every H.S. student u know about #SelmaSpeechContest. They'll b xcited 2 lrn their wrds r more powerful than guns & can change the world.

RETWEETS 8 FAVORITES 11

2:31 PM - 8 Jan 2015



Calling all HS students! Enter the #SelmaSpeechContest. You could win \$5000! LibertyMuseumSelmaContest.org #MarchOn

RETWEETS 38 FAVORITES 19

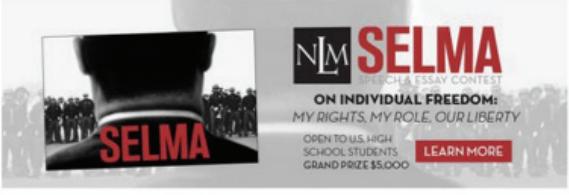
4:35 PM - 29 Jan 2015



Calling all high school students for #SelmaSpeechContest: What inspires you to #MarchOn? buff.ly/1BCKr4H #MLK

RETWEETS 24 FAVORITES 10

4:08 PM - 18 Jan 2015



# PARENT APPRECIATION

To the National Liberty Museum:

My husband and I are SO proud of Ashley [Chico], for taking the initiative to understand the importance as a today's youth in bringing awareness of the importance of preserving our civil rights and constitution.

My husband and I both moved from Puerto Rico to this country in 1991 and our children have all been born and raised here in Florida.

What an honor for us as foreigners to have one of our daughters advocate among her peers for the importance of protecting our freedom and for bringing awareness to all constituents to never take for granted what those before us, like Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. worked so hard for.

To honor those before us who paid with sacrifice and their own lives to achieve their ideals for the betterment of a fair and just society; and for the opportunity of equality of the civil rights for ALL its citizens!

Thanks to you and the essay competition coordinators for giving this opportunity to my daughter and other youth who participated thus allowing them to showcases their committing to preserve a fair and balanced just society for all!

Gratefully yours,

Dr. Vanessa Chico,  
DPM, ABPM, FACFAOM  
Foot & Ankle Specialist

Mother to Selma honorable mention, Ashley Chico



**Ashley Chico**  
Grade 10, Lake Highland Preparatory School,  
Orlando, Florida

# TOP 3 WINNING ESSAYS



## Let Freedom Ring

By Ifeoma White-Thorpe

Tick tock. Time is ticking. How many years do I have left to make a change? To not just be a soul moving past, to not just be a reflection in glass? What if the change I make is minimal, does that mean it doesn't count. Looking back in time, it is evident that Rosa did not have to shout to be heard, but Rosa also didn't sit to relax she sat because she knew what those marks meant on those slaves backs. See I cannot sit, because I already have the seat, but how will there ever be change if nobody is willing to change their ways? Dr.King said, "Let freedom ring", and for the longest time I had thought that freedom had been rung, and that the fight for freedom was done. But when my brother no longer felt safe walking to the bus stop, or putting his hood up on rainy days, I began to question what is freedom, and how free am I today. My brother wasn't free, everywhere he turned, a young black boy was being gunned down, found face down, so his spirit sunk way down. My brother was confined to his room, no longer allowed the leisure of going to play basketball after 5 O'clock at night, for my parents feared for his safety; the robbery of human life grown out of spite.

Let us define freedom, according to Dictionary.com, freedom is defined as "the power to determine action without restraint". All Americans are protected under the United States constitution, yet it does not seem so. But if one does not feel free in their own community, then where will they be free and what will enable them to be self-determined? Stripped of their colors, in order for others not to fear them.

In 1960, freedom meant integrated schools. In 1965 freedom meant being able to march to Selma and back without being brutally abused or slaughtered, and it also meant the right to vote without excessive restraints. In 2015, 50 years after the Voting Rights Act, what exactly does freedom mean?

In order for me to make a change, I must first change myself. It is left to me to assist in dispelling the biases that the black girl cannot be knowledgeable. It is up to us who are fortunate enough to receive an education to pass on the knowledge that we have acquired. We must peacefully fight for the change we crave, no matter the circumstances we are in, as Dr.King did. When faced with adversity over whom we are must have the strength to overcome. In order to advance my rights I will continue to dismiss the stereotypes of the black female, and assist in creating a new mold in which we are viewed as atypical of what we once were. I will be outstanding, so that others will respect me. I will be ravishing in the way that I sew my words together to conceive a beautiful unmitigated harmony. Education is the key to a door that has already been unlocked, but is still shut closed. It is available to all Americans, yet not all pursue it; but I will. As Dr.King once said "The function of education is to teach one to think intensively and to think critically. Intelligence plus character - that is the goal of true education." Education is essential for change, and I aspire to be that change.



## Peacefully Sharing A Young Voice On Civil Liberties

By Evan Lehmann

I live in St. Louis, Missouri. St. Louis is not just the Gateway Arch; it's crumbling shopping centers, food deserts, and unaccredited schools, too. For this reason, St. Louis is often characterized by its segregation, disparity, and inequality. These characteristics came into spotlight the moment Michael Brown was shot on August 9th, 2014. On August 9th, St. Louis became the contemporary Selma, our streets the Edmund-Pettus Bridge.

I was a little late to the protests. For the first few months after Michael Brown was killed, I stayed in the world of Twitter activism. The morning after the non-indictment, though, I decided to lace up my marching shoes, grab a few friends, and brace the November cold alongside other activists. We began the morning with a prayer vigil that was reminiscent of clergy activism under Martin Luther King Jr. and Ralph Abernathy. Unsurprisingly, we discussed the importance of peace that morning, too. We then marched through the affluent streets of St. Louis. Signs read: "Black lives matter," "No justice, no peace," and "White silence is violence."

"White silence is violence." After I went home, shed my coats, and warmed my toes, that line reverberated in my mind. I kept pondering it, and it began to make sense. I benefit from an immense amount of racial privilege, and it is essential that I speak up in a way that disrupts apathy and ignorance. If I don't speak up, I myself am complicit; I'm permitting a system of racism to exist if I don't use my voice to combat it.

So, the next week, I bought a cardboard box and some blue paint and made a "white silence is violence" sign of my own. Since then, it has been my companion at

every peaceful action I've attended. I hope to inspire others to stand up, speak out, and take action.

In 1965, Martin Luther King Jr., John Lewis, and numerous others marched for voice. And, despite voting rights being furthered, many people in our society still lack this fundamental right. Due to discriminatory voting policies, elitist politics, and oppressive policing, American people are being stripped from the constitutional right to be heard. That's why protesting is so essential. From St. Louis to Selma, protesting is a way to give voice and power back to the communities of the unheard.

No matter how many times people in 1965 or people in 2015 try to silence our first amendment right, peaceful organizing will prevail. Every protest, every march, and every outspoken person can help inch towards the reclamation of our autonomy and self-determination. A community with voice creates better schools, better government, and a better life for us all. Now is the time that we reclaim and use our voices. As illustrated in Selma, a strong community can accomplish anything.

With this realization, I began to organize in my high school. I brought Ferguson to a dialogue group that I had started a while back. A diverse group of my peers and I dissected the roots of our current state, and we planned how to raise awareness in our school. First, we organized a die-in, where over thirty students laid on the floor in 4.5 minutes of silence during my school's passing period. This was to represent the 4.5 hours Michael Brown's body was left on the street. Secondly, we organized a walkout, and over 100 students raised their voices with us. I've also become extremely involved with my Social Justice Action Team to uplift the opinions and perspectives of those who are too often silenced. The organizing is not slowing down; I continue to raise others' awareness in my community.

I organize under the mantra I found at my first march: my silence is violence. If I don't use my voice, others will remain silenced. This is not just a St. Louis problem, nor is it just a racial problem; people are being stripped of their liberties throughout our nation and throughout our world. To further the dreams of those who marched on Bloody Sunday, we have to peacefully, but urgently, move in unity to secure the constitutional rights that have been taken away.



## Protecting Individual Freedom: The Voice of an Immigrant's Son

By Edan Armas

**"The movie Selma tells the story of how Martin Luther King, Jr. and others peacefully protested to advance voting rights. What do you think needs to be done today to protect individual freedom and self-determination? What are you doing or will you do to peacefully advance those rights?"**

When my dad showed me the yellowed pages of a newspaper exhibiting his old activism efforts in California, my eyes strayed to one single phrase: "El pueblo unido jamas sera vencido." A united people will never be defeated. The words resonated within me, because I realized they were more than just ink on paper. That mantra was an embodiment of an essential truth upon which this country was founded: it is the power of a people tightly united by the need for change and the courage to fight for that change that protects our freedom and furthers our right to self-determination even in the face of fierce opposition. As displayed in the film Selma, it was not Martin Luther King's private meetings with President Johnson or the scattered protests across the country that led to the passage of the Voting Rights Act. Perseverant even in the face of death, it was the hundreds of people glowing with the courage to act and the willingness to come together in the march from Selma to Montgomery that persuaded Johnson to finally act.

Fifty years later, however, the power of unity and courage has waned. In the epoch of globalization, the growing popularity of social media mixed with general political apathy is perpetuating a plague of indifference masqueraded as unity by technology.

Because attaching a hashtag to the word Ferguson on Twitter might raise awareness.

Sharing the video of Eric Garner's death on Facebook might make some people bubble with anger.

But real change is not made when the actual people behind the computers and phones have no emotional investment behind their actions, when the admirable courage to act in the name of freedom is superseded by the simple desire to follow a trend?

The problems of racism and poor police organization infecting this country today won't be solved with emotional outbursts that parallel the ineffective screams and posters of unorganized blacks fifty years ago. If we want action to be taken, we need real, human unity: marches, organized protests, community-wide discussions. The Constitution did not grant the right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness to Twitter accounts and cellphones— it was given to We the People. We need to realize that technology is not the weapon of self-determination— it is just the messenger. The real power comes from kindling the courage to fight for freedom as a human being, not just words on a screen.

We might not all be inspirational orators like Martin Luther King, but we are like the brave freedom soldiers of the Civil Rights Movement. Form discussion groups in your community. Ignite the fire of courage within your heart and join a protest. Find it within yourself to look up from your phone and into the eyes of your fellow man, woman, or child and fight together for the justice you deserve as Americans.

**“The function of education is to teach one to think intensively and to think critically. Intelligence plus character - that is the goal of true education.”**

*- Martin Luther King, Jr.*

