

Good Morning. I am very happy to have been chosen to stand before you on this special day. Not every day do I get to share my own experience of living in a world that is forever changing.

Every year I am involved in some form of celebration to honor the life of Dr. Martin Luther King Junior and look back on how far society has progressed in developing understanding between peoples. Today I look back on my life and also my first year here at Austin College.

In my World I am a multi-racial young woman, and growing up was a little challenging. My mother is black and Cherokee native American and my father is Caucasian American. Identity has always been a question asked of me, accompanied by the phrase “what are you” which I assume now actually meant “what is your ethnicity”. This was very confusing at a young age and now, given my sarcastic nature, I could come up with any number of smart answers to that question. But what I’ve learned from brave role models like Civil Rights leader, Angela Davis, Inspirational artists like India Arie and MLK himself is that it is not “what” I am, but *who* I am. And who I am involves my ability to sympathize and understand *who* others are and where they come from.

My time at Austin college has been rewarding. I am surrounded by people of all walks of life and all colors and shades. Yet, what I have experienced thus far is that my generation is more accustomed to trying to find out who one another is instead of defining each other based on “what” we are. Our curiosity drives us into interactions and in return we gain knowledge and friends. I see this very environment as a smaller scale of our future world that we will all be apart of some day.

Because of many influential black people, who speak their minds and those who have passed and left legacies, I get to be in an environment, finally, that does not limit my identity as a human

based solely on the color of my skin or my hair texture. I get to live amongst people full of curiosity, sympathy and the will to understand who I am.

So I re-introduce myself... Hi! I am Sierra Salsar. My favorite color is green. I am the eldest sister in a house full of girls who are becoming young women (hopefully some of you can empathize). I am a Lady Roos Basketball player. I am spiritual. I grew up with a single mother. I've held 2 jobs at the same time in which my mother was holding three. I love to sing and Dancing gives me life. I am president of my dorm hall and hope to one day be your President of America. My room is full of my own art work of colorful paintings. I study International Relations; minoring in spanish, and I love realizing the beauty in the many different cultures of the world. This is my identity. Not what one may see on the surface but that of which I attained through adversity and love and support from my kin. One of Dr. King's greatest messages emphasized the importance of agape love which he described as being "more than romantic love... more than friendship...it's understanding". I feel as though we are learning to embrace agape love with every new year. We do this by getting to know one another and sharing our personality and experiences with one another as I have just shared a little of mine with you.

The world still has some work to do. My generation has some big shoes to fill. However, from a young ethnic young woman's perspective I do believe we are making way towards harmony, peace and Dr. Martin Luther King's Dream.

Thank You.