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Keynote Speech by  
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I want to thank President O' Day and Austin College and the various organizations that are a part of this college. I used to live right up the street for more than 10 years and I got to be a part of many things that were going on in this community. So, thank you all for the great work that you do in the community and encouraging your students to get involved in the community. I want to thank Victoria; that was a very inspiring word that you gave. You know, I was sitting there wondering why they didn't get her to be the keynote speaker! Victoria, thank you for your love of literacy. I'm sure that you are going to make a great impact as you walk out of the doors of Austin College and into the world where I hope to see your name written in many places in the future.

So, today I am tasked to speak on Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. I was slated to be the keynote speaker for last year, but some guy named Hershel Walker showed up and I got bumped. Unfortunately, neither Emmet Smith nor Michael Irvine was available, so you're stuck with me. I am glad to be here to speak about Dr.

King. As Andie mentioned in my introduction, I grew up in Birmingham, Alabama in the '60s and am fortunate to still have my mother around who is 93 years old. When I get the chance to visit Birmingham, I always ask about growing up and the things that occurred in her life. They grew up in a time when being literate was not expected. But my mom raised us to believe in education and to believe that being citizens of this nation was something to be proud of. I thank God to have a mother and a family like that. I am the youngest of 8 kids. In 2 days I will be 60 and when I talk to my mom she says "I can't believe that I have a baby that is almost 60 years old." She said, "that makes me old!" I said, "No, that makes you wise."

In the March on Washington in 1963, Dr. King shared his dream for America with America. Dr. King was the passionate voice that awakened the conscience of a nation and inspired people from all over the world. The power of his words resonated because they were spoken out of an unwavering belief in Freedom, Justice, Equality and Opportunity for all. "Let Freedom Ring" was Dr. King's closing call for a better and more just America.

Martin Luther King Jr. is the man that we know as the Preacher, the Activist, the man with a dream. But, let's rewind; before all that, Martin Luther King Jr. was a young educated Black man inspiring to change the world one day for the better. A student, a graduate with a PhD, a dreamer devoted to change. Yet after more than 50 years following his death, issues of race and criminal injustices are still at the forefront of our nation.

Dr. King was born at a time when he could buy a hat but he couldn't try it on. He was born at a time when he could only sit in the balcony of a movie, and even that was only in some movies. There were others that he wasn't allowed in at all. He was born at a time when he had to sit in the back of the bus or he might be barred from riding the bus totally. He was born at a time when he would have to wait in line and others of a different hue could always stand in front of him. He was born at a time when discrimination and segregation was lawful. Dr. King was born at a time when there were few who were willing to challenge the hate and the bigotry that was emanating from this country. But Dr. King was a person who understood that “that which you will tolerate you will not change.”

Martin Luther King hated violence. He believed that violence “is a descending spiral, begetting the very thing it seeks to destroy,” and that “returning violence for violence multiplies violence, adding deeper darkness to a night already devoid of stars.” He also believed “an eye for eye leaves everyone blind.” Dr. King, as a young man, managed to find a dream, one that he pieced together from his readings--in the Bible, literature, and just about any other book he could get his hands on.

Not only did those books help him educate himself, but they also allowed him to work through the destructive and traumatic experiences of blatant racism, discrimination, and the discriminatory abuse inflicted on himself, his family,

and his people. Martin Luther King Jr. knew that Education was crucial to all in order to avoid and combat ignorance. He knew that great education rests in the foundation of a great society, one that is ethically and morally sound.

By being educated, a person can break out of the social evils like racism, discrimination and injustice, making one stand out as an equal with people of different classes, colors, and creeds.

One of Dr. King's quotes on education is: "Education must enable one to sift and weigh evidence, to discern the true from the false, the real from the unreal, and the facts from the fiction." In 1947, while a student at Morehouse College, King penned an article for the campus newspaper, *The Maroon Tiger*. In the piece, King said that "Education must also train one for quick, resolute and effective thinking."

To think incisively and to think for one's self is very difficult. He stated, "We are prone to let our mental life become invaded by legions of half-truths, prejudices, and propaganda." The events at our Nation's Capital a few weeks ago is the prime example of that. When half-truths and propaganda is spewed over and over again, it leads to riots and deaths. Just because one says something over and over again doesn't make it true. And just because it's on Facebook and Twitter doesn't make it factual.

As a child growing up in Birmingham, Alabama in the sixties, some of the vivid images on the nightly news broadcast were of water hoses and dogs being

turned on young black men and women. Those young students were not rioting; they were not vandalizing; they were simply seeking racial equality, human equality and dignity. That is what the civil rights movement was all about. While the face of the civil rights movement may have been Dr. King, the backbone of the movement was those young students, young college students. Simply seeking to be able to go to colleges that they desire to go to, to be educated like their counterparts. Can you imagine being told where you can & can't go, work, get educated, and live?! Simply based on something you were born with?! It sounds so unbelievable now, but it was very real.

Dr. King in his movement led the young people, and I look out into this audience and see the young college people and I think about the fact that you are the generation that does not care about a person's color. You are that generation that is more educated than any generation that has come before you. You are that generation that I believe Dr. King was talking about in his speech "I Have a Dream". I look out in this auditorium and see young students who have been labeled generation Z. Your generation has grown up in a diverse world and it's all you know. Neither race, sexual orientation nor religion are the identifying characteristics that concern your generation. People are just people to your Generation. It doesn't mean you won't judge, however. You are more likely to judge someone for what they are, rather than for who they are. With changing demographics happening in America, your generation will be the last generation where a majority of the population is white. Gay marriage and a

black President are a way of life to your generation, making diversity “the norm.”

One of the things I am so encouraged about is as you go out in the world students like, Victoria, Nadia and others sitting in the audience today, you go out with the idea that I’m not going to accept what I see. Something I saw in some statistics was that your generation came out in droves in this year’s election and helped make an impact. Because you are concerned about justice, you are concerned about literacy, you are concerned about our environment, you are concerned that you’re going to have a world that you don’t have to pay for with all your taxes. So, to all the students sitting here today I encourage you to use all the knowledge you are gaining here at Austin College to go out into this world and make a great impact.

I want to close today by sharing my ABC’s of life – tattoo these in your hearts.  
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I want to close today by sharing my ABC's of life – tattoo these in your hearts.

- A- Accept the Challenge set before you as this generation
- B- Believe in Yourselves
- C- Convert your thoughts to Hopes
- D- Determine to convert your Hopes into Dreams
- E- Expect some obstacles on the way
- F- Fight on and be faithful to that which you started
- G- Get God on your side
- H- Have a heart of Servant Leadership
- I- Inspire someone else
- J- Take Jesus on your Journey
- K- Keep, keeping on - kick those negative thoughts and people to the curb
- L- Be a Leader
- M- Make every day count
- N- Never give up
- O- You must overcome your obstacles as you...
- P- Put your best foot forward
- Q- Quit Quitting
- R- Run your race with Patience
- S- Strive on while...
- T- Trusting in the Lord
- U- Use your talents to make this a better world
- V- Value your time
- W- Wait for understanding
- X- X-ray your own lifestyle
- Y- Yearn to achieve all that you seek
- Z- Be Zealous when reaching the top