



FREDRIKA HARGROVE MARTIN LUTHER KING DAY ESSAY

Directions: Click inside each box and enter your name, grade, school, and teacher. If you have a title for your essay, enter it in the Title box. Begin typing your paper under the title box. The text box will expand as you type. Once you are done and ready to submit, type your initials in the gray box to confirm that this essay is your original work. **Do not change the font or the size.**

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Title of Essay: Click or tap here to enter text.

Imagine you are driving down a one-way street. You can't make a U-turn. You can't reverse back onto a main road, so you are stuck driving down this desolate, winding road. You don't know where it is taking you; the only thing you can do is follow it. This is the feeling hundreds of thousands of teenagers feel every day. You accidentally turn right instead of left, and suddenly you are lost. For so many adolescents, this "wrong turn" is a single mistake that pushes them into a lifestyle that may never have been in the cards for them otherwise. A single act of wrongdoing should not dictate someone's entire future. Minor mistakes do not have to lead to big mistakes. What if you had a GPS in your car? Wouldn't that prevent you from making a wrong turn? With guidance, mentorship, and understanding, these children heading down a seemingly one-way street can receive the support they need to prosper. With a focus on prevention and upstream investment, the school-to-prison pipeline could become a thing of the past.

To begin, focusing on prevention by creating safe spaces for youth would lead to greater support in underserved communities that have long faced disinvestment and limited resources. A significant problem facing our country is the lack of teen spaces. There are areas for children and for adults, but there is a considerable lack of teen-centered communal spaces, especially in less privileged communities. By creating free sports facilities, art studios, gaming lounges, and peer-support communities, it would encourage teens to seek support and foster positive development. It would also build a sense of community, something that can make a world of difference in dark times. When you feel like you belong and that people genuinely have your back, the world feels brighter. Everyone goes through tough times, but having the support you need can make the difference between seeking help and participating in life-altering acts that could impact the rest of your life.

Furthermore, adding dedicated spaces for support would benefit brain development. The teenage years are crucial for developing your personality, critical thinking skills, and emotional intelligence, but they are also when it can feel cool to act out and misbehave. Developing spaces specifically for teens would benefit the mind tremendously. First, it would promote positive social interaction. Effective communication is an essential skill in adult life, and learning it also fosters empathy and understanding among adolescents. Second, being supported by peers and mentors would reduce stress. Knowing that some people understand and relate to you is powerful. It can take some of that weight off your shoulders and make you feel like you're not carrying it alone, but it can also have a positive impact on the brain. Chronic stress can harm areas of your brain responsible for decision-making and emotional control, so reducing that stress can make a world of difference. Taking a preventative stance on the school-to-prison pipeline would not only impact teens' futures but also their development.

However, some detractors may argue that a preventive approach would not reduce the number of teens being sent through the justice system. They might claim that these spaces will only be a band-aid over the problem and will not correct the root causes of the pipeline. While this is a very reasonable concern, the opposite is true. While some causes, such as trauma and circumstances, will not be affected, lack of support for mental health is a root cause and can be avoided. By giving teens access to spaces where they can share openly without judgment, they will have a way to process emotions, stress, and trauma. When teens have nowhere to turn for advice, they cope unhealthily. Because they are trying to suppress all that emotion, teens can be reckless and do things they may regret. Instead of sending teens out on their own to deal with the struggles in their lives, they must be given ways to handle their emotions appropriately. This can be done through communal spaces or school support. By taking measures to deter teens from turning to illegal practices, the root causes of the school-to-prison pipeline could be corrected.

In conclusion, the most effective way to prevent youth from altering the course of their lives because of one mistake is to take preventive measures, such as creating spaces for teens to express themselves. This would build community, especially in underfunded areas, promote healthy development, and help address the root causes of the school-to-prison pipeline. It's easier to navigate life's roads when you have a GPS guiding you. Through community spaces, teens can be given a guiding light to lead them down the right path, rather than down a one-way street.

DECLARATION OF OWN WORK

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