

CSULA and the Civil Rights Movement Legacy

Within the bustling walls of King Hall filled with students chattering as they make their way to class, it is easy to lose sight of the connection between Martin Luther King Jr. 's work and his namesake building amongst the noise and activity. The ultimate goal of the civil rights movement was, in King's words, "to make America what it ought to be" ("I've Been"). By encouraging service and community involvement, CSULA teaches students to engage with fellow citizens, take practical measures to create real change, and better themselves.

Service roots students in the foundations of their community. Personally, research in class broadened my knowledge about food insecurity, but it was volunteering with Door of Hope and the Los Angeles Regional Food Bank (LARFB) that reified it and gave it depth. As King discovered in his fight for justice that "whatever affects one directly affects all indirectly" (King), so we too must understand how framing issues like homelessness or food insecurity or even systemic racism as the plight of a sole "other" not only blatantly discounts the destitute, but also inhibits our advancement as a whole. Through service however, students see firsthand how the lives of the marginalized, the privileged, and everyone in between are interwoven.

King also encouraged people to take "practical" steps to achieve their goal ("I've Been"); CSULA maintains this idea by providing students with accessible volunteering opportunities. By volunteering at a transitional housing facility, I learned that cooking skills are scarce and grocery shopping is often too time-consuming and expensive for their homeless residents, resulting in the compromised health and wellness. This prompted me to compile a booklet of simple recipes and a guide for regrowing plant scraps to inspire them to take care of their nutritional health. While I may not have changed the world, I did what I could to make it a better place, believing that small works lead to big change.

Alongside social progress, the spirit of the civil rights movement embodies personal edification. In the journey to achieve "greater equality and human dignity," (King, "Letter"), King urges us to develop a "dangerous unselfishness" ("I've Been"). Recently the Center for Engagement, Service, and the Public Good hosted a volunteer event at LARFB. In an interview with the University Times, Jasmine Flores reflected on how service made her "more aware, empathetic and

grateful” (Salyk, 2). Besides being a way to help those in need, community service broadens the volunteer’s perspective and sheds light on a shared humanity.

CSULA’s emphasis on civic learning and community outreach is remarkable because it grooms generations of students who, rather than being fixated on their own success, are mindful of others and willing to be a stepping stone for the downtrodden because they recognize the importance of the “brotherhood of man” (King, “A Time”). So perhaps, filled with students ever pursuing a just and perfect society, King Hall is aptly named after all.

Bibliography

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