

## WEEHAWKEN TOWNSHIP SCHOOL DISTRICT NEWS RELEASE

### Weehawken High School Students Snag Two of 10 NJ-Wide State Department Martin Luther King Day Writing Awards

WEEHAWKEN, N.J., Jan. 16, 2020—Two Weehawken Township High School students on Monday claimed two of 10 statewide awards for essays written on Martin Luther King, Jr.. There were 492 students who had submitted essays to the competition statewide, according to [New Jersey Department of State's Martin Luther King, Jr. Commemorative Commission](#) Executive Director Rowena Madden.

Weehawken High School junior Ayya Kanan wrote about [Coretta Scott King](#), who helped Martin Luther King Jr., King lead the [civil rights movement](#) in the 1950's and 1960's, founded and led the Martin Luther King Jr. Center for Nonviolent Social Change, and led the successful 15-year fight for recognition of her husband's birthday in 1983 as a federal holiday. She was also an activist for the women's movement in the U.S. and against apartheid in South Africa.

Weehawken High School sophomore Jazmin Morales wrote about [Ella Baker](#), a civil rights and human rights activist since the 1920's. She was a key organizer of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, for which, as early as the 1940's, she was creating new branches in the south; she organized the group, "In Friendship" in 1956 that raised money for the Montgomery Bus Boycott; and she was a founder of the influential Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee in the 1960's.

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On Sunday, January 19, the two [Weehawken High School](#) students will get a chance to read their award-winning works at the commission's annual Martin Luther King, Jr. Commemorative event at the [New Jersey State Museum](#), in Trenton.

[Secretary of State Tahesha Way](#), who will provide the keynote remarks for the event, extended her congratulations to all of the essayists, adding, "Congratulations to Jazmin Morales and Ayya Kanan for their fine work in exploring the lives and legacy of Ella Baker and Coretta Scott King. We can all be inspired by leaders of the past and look to this new generation to create their own 'arc of the moral universe,' to quote Dr. King." Added Way, "It is gratifying to know that young people have taken such an interest in this essay contest which recognizes the great women leaders of the civil rights movement."

The writing contest, "Women Who Led: They Cared...They Dared," had students focus on women who have led the struggle for equality and civil rights. The essay contest was structured around three prompts: to describe the leader's mission or motivation to lead; how the leader connected with the work of Martin Luther King, Jr.; and how the leader specifically inspired the student.

"I am very proud of Ayya and Jazmin," Andrea Eberhard, the students' African American history teacher at Weehawken High School said. "They are both knowledgeable and engaged during my African American history class. This essay contest was a perfect complement to the character education that is a part of my daily teachings."

Eberhard is also a New Jersey Amistad commissioner. The [New Jersey Amistad Commission](#) ensures that the state's Department of Education and public schools

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implement materials and texts which integrate the history and contributions of African Americans and the descendants of the African Diaspora.

“As their teacher, one of my main goals is to make my students aware of the African American experience and to teach them about the men and women who pioneered the way,” Eberhard said. “It is absolutely necessary to make sure students from all over the state understand the contributions that African Americans have made to this country. This contest was a great way to pay homage to African American women who led the way.”

Also honored at the commemorative will be Sgt. Hilda Griggs, 96, of the [6888th Central Postal Directory Battalion \(Women's Army Corps\)](#), the only all-African American female unit to be deployed overseas during World War II. The unit of 855 women, whose motto was “No Mail, Low Morale,” had the mission of sorting and sending a two-year backlog of 18 million pieces of mail to service members, filling mail bags from floor to ceiling in warehouses in both England and France. In each country, they completed this assignment in only three months.

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*See following page for photo.*

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**Caption:** *Two of Weehawken High School history teacher Andrea Eberhard's students; sophomore Jazmin Morales, left, and junior Ayya Kanan, right, snagged two of the 10 writing awards given by the New Jersey State Department in connection with Martin Luther King Day. Morales wrote about civil rights leader Ella Baker, and Kanan wrote about Coretta Scott King. They competed against almost 500 students statewide. Eberhard is also a New Jersey Amistad commissioner.*

**Photo Credit:** Alexandra Delgado

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