

Why We Can't Wait

On January 12, The Mu Zeta Chapter of Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, Inc. sponsored an oratorical contest to commemorate the birthday of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. The winner of the contest was Janet Roach, a broadcast journalism major. Her essay entitled "Why We Can't Wait" is printed below.

*Black pride, black pride, please tell us
Where have you gone to hide
Happily we thought you'd come to stay
But your actions indicate otherwise
Oh Black pride, young black pride
It saddens us so much today
To find that we lost you along the Way*

This poem by Margaret Burroughs makes me realize how badly we need our black pride. With the existing problems in the black community, we can't afford to lose our black pride. We can't afford to lose it because we need it in order to continue a struggle for freedom. It is the loss of this pride that has been one of the main contributing factors to the problems in the black community. Now we can't wait on or sit down on these problems because our future is at stake. We can't wait because we will have nothing to leave our children and they will be lost when it comes to black history! We can't wait because our people are trapped at the bottom of the economic ladder! We can't wait because prejudice lurks in every corner. Blacks hate whites, and whites hate blacks! We can't wait because right here at this university black enrollment is going down and only a handful of us graduate. Ladies and gentlemen, I don't think we have the time to stand in a waiting line. We as a race and we as an entire nation can't wait if we have any interest in seeing the American Dream come alive.

Before we can enter the world of equality, we have to undertake the responsibility of getting our priorities and sisters who are less fortunate than we are. We're too involved with meaningless things. To a good portion of us, the important thing in life is getting a good job so we can buy a nice car, nice clothes, and just sit back and live the good life. But there will be no good life as long as we allow things such as discrimination exist. I met a man not too long ago, and he told me that he was a student back in the 60's. He also told me that the only thing he was interested in was getting involved in the struggle. If his contribution was small, it didn't matter. He just wanted to get involved in the struggle, something meaningful.

Certainly this man wasn't the only man who devoted a good portion of his life fighting for equality. There were several others who fought for the integration of the hotels we sleep

in today. There were several others who were beaten or spit at for taking a seat in a restaurant that we sit in today. These people fought too long and too hard for us to just sit back and enjoy the benefits resulting from their struggle.

I have been told that back in the 60's at black colleges the students who spent their time concentrating on meaningless things such as who looks the best or who dresses the best were the students who were ridiculed and ostracized. They were treated this way because the majority of the students knew that something more important was going on—something that would determine the future of the black race, something to some blacks worth putting aside their education because they felt the education of their children and their children's children was more important. Therefore they got involved in the struggle which was something meaningful.

According to Martin Luther King Jr.'s book *Why We Can't Wait*, in the 60's during the marches and protest, there was a little girl marching in a demonstration with her mother. An amused policeman looked down at her and asked "What do you want?" Unafraid, the girl looked straight in his eyes and replies, "Freedom!" She couldn't even pronounce the word "freedom," but as King put it, "No Gabriel trumpet could have sounded a truer note."

Today a child as young as this probably doesn't know the meaning of the word "freedom" and understand the extent of the problems we face today. We need to get our priorities straight so that we can teach ourselves and our children that something more important is still going on besides the meaningless

things we focus on. We also need to learn how to come together and stop destroying ourselves.

Because we live in a nation where the white man has viewed and still views the black man as inferior, some of this negative thinking has actually been accepted by our own black race. We place a negative light on blackness ourselves. Some of you may not realize that this goes on but it does. I'm sure some of you have observed a fellow black brother or sister acting a little rowdy, loud or just doing anything out of the ordinary. The first thing you observers let come out of your mouths is, "He's actin' black and showin' his color!" Comments like this indicate that we associate rude behavior with blackness! Whether you realize it or not, we destroy ourselves! We need our Black Pride!

It may be true that the white man cannot ignore the problems in the black community because our problems are his problems. But sometimes it might not matter if he ignores us if we do not have desire to help ourselves.

Our children today are desperately seeking black role models. They need someone to look up to to help them develop a sense of confidence and competence. Because of the lack of emphasis on black history in schools, churches, and in the community on a whole, our young people are looking up to the wrong people. An illustration of this can be seen with a little boy who picks his role models from people he sees on television. He lives at home with his mother. His father left the home when the boy was just a baby. One day the boy walks in the room with his mother after looking at the T.V. show "Good Times." The boy looks up at his



mother and says, "Momma, ya know what? When I grow up, I wanna be just like J.J. Yeh, Momma I wanna be able to shuffle the women around like he does and most of all Momma, I wanna be DYNAMITE! Yeh, when I grow up I wanna be like J.J."

His mother looks down at him and says, "Son, now there's nothing wrong with being popular and DYNAMITE but do you want to live in a ghetto all your life and be unable to keep a decent joy?"

A week later the boy walks up to his momma again and says, "Momma when I grow up, I wanna be just like George Jefferson! Yehhh Momma, I wanna be rich, own dry cleaners and live in a big apartment in the sky! Yeh, when I grow up I wanna be like that 'ole Jefferson!"

His mother then says, "Well son, certainly there isn't anything wrong with being rich and owning dry cleaners, but do you always want to find the easy way out even if it means bribery, cheating, and lying?"

The boy looked up at his mother so confused, he dropped his head and just walked out the door.

There are probably many children with this same problem in our black community. One factor contributing to this is the weakening black family. In Chicago, over 65 percent of the black families are single-headed. Nationwide, one-half of single mothers are in poverty, with 70 percent of them being black. In order to minimize the problem of the black family, now is the time to examine the strengths of the family and incorporate these coping mechanisms into family planning programs and demand black participation. As far as other problems in the black community are concerned, now is the time for the black community to develop programs in academics, career counseling, and black history.

Economically, now is the time for blacks to take control of their economic destiny. Black businesses need to emerge in black communities and they need to take advantage of assistance programs and training opportunities.

Politically, now is the time for black organizations to assist black families to vote in every election from the local school board to the elections held nationwide.

Now is the time for us to come together and continue to be together tomorrow. It is the time to strive to do God's will because he is on our side. We can't let our future slip away from us. It's true that many doors of opportunities are opening for us and we can't stand at an open door, we must enter in.

And most of all, now is the time for us to pick up that black pride because we as blacks should be proud of our accomplishments. We must hold this pride up high as we travel the road towards freedom.