



By Christopher Bracey  
Contributor

It was just last Monday, Jan. 21, the day that white folks ask us to remember one of the greatest leaders ever to grace the planet Earth — Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. — that a young white instructor said something that brought fire to my eyes. I was taking a prep course for the LSAT that evening in Durham, and one of the passages was about the civil rights movement. My esteemed instructor, with all of her knowledge, stood with a broad smile on her face and remarked, "This passage is so fitting since today is King's birthday. Happy birthday!"

I double-checked the date in my calendar to see if it was in fact the 21st. I looked at this woman smiling down on me and I wondered if she even realized that King's birthday was the previous week, on Jan. 15. I said, "Excuse me, you mean Happy *belated* birthday."

Her smile vanished. She gave me the most curious look and replied, "Oh."

I shook my head in disbelief. A law school graduate stood before me, her mind overflowing with knowledge from the classroom and experience from life, and she did not even know that the man whose efforts made possible my very presence in her classroom was born on Jan. 15. A man whose magnitude and perseverance initiated the transformation of a nation. A man who, when called to lead a movement, did not crouch in fear but

stood tall, answering in astounding fashion. While African Americans sing praise to this man, for he died so we all could be free, this supposedly educated white woman smiles in blissful ignorance, wishing her little "happy birthday" to such a great man seven days late.

I am annoyed at my instructor, because she has been miseducated into thinking that King's birthday is actually the same day as the white American token observance day. I am angry at the schools and universities that continue to miseducate students on American history and the essential role of African Americans in American history. I am irritated by the parents who perpetuate racism by instilling into their children the same outdated, ethnocentric, intolerant values they received from their parents. I am furious at the members of our generation, both black and white, whose apathy chokes the life from "the dream" and open us all up for a decade of violence. Needless to say, this whole situation has upset me.

African Americans have played a prominent role in the location (notice I did not say *discovery* — it is awful hard to discover a land that was already inhabited), settlement and development of these United States. From the bellies of the slave ships to the apogees of the spaceships, from the cultivation of rice to the first successful surgical heart transplant, from the courage of Harriet Tubman to the dream of Martin Luther King, African Americans have made

significant historical contributions. Yet schools and universities continue to ignore these significant contributions, miseducating the masses with a white-washed version of *our* American history. Maybe that is why we, as African Americans, are so confused. Maybe this is why little black girls almost always say their white Barbie doll is prettier and better than their black Barbie doll. Maybe this is why little black boys grow up to be angry men, ignorant of themselves and their rich culture, wearing an African pendant and beads purchased from some Korean vendor on the street corner. Or worse yet, these beautiful black girls and boys grow up learning and believing this "Eurocentric hogwash," becoming tomorrow's Uncle Tom and Aunt Tomasina. You simply cannot understand American history unless you understand African American history. And even if you make some sense out of it, the lesson remains dreadfully incomplete. How can you speak about the amendments to the Constitution and not speak about slavery, lynching and grandfather clauses? How can you discuss Abraham Lincoln and the Civil War without mentioning the reason for the Emancipation Proclamation, Frederick Douglass or the Massachusetts 54th Regiment? How can you speak about the labor movement without mentioning A. Philip Randolph and the Pullman Porters? I could go on and on, but I think you get the point.

The influence of a parent on a

developing child cannot be denied. The influence is not only strong but is also consistent in its application. One comes in regular contact with one's parents, and it is inevitable that one absorbs their values. But what about the parent who tells his white child that black children have a disease and if you let a black child touch him, then his skin will turn black too? Or the parent who walks around the house talking about "Those damn niggers are at it again!" What do you do when a child has been condi-

by uncontested. With the recent attempt to destroy the character of Dr. King by painting "National Plagiarism Day: MLK fought for the right of everyone to plagiarize regardless of color" on the advertising cubes on North and South Campus during MLK Week, we see how racial incidents have steadily increased in occurrence. In an institution of higher learning, we can also see higher forms of ignorance. But Carolina is not alone in that respect. Across the country, waves of hate crimes are

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tioned, like a rat in some psychology experiment, to hate an entire race of people simply because they have darker skin? This is a difficult situation to deal with — one that reveals no immediate answers. We can only hope that those White parents who are teaching their children to love all humankind outnumber those who teach only to love a certain kind. They say children are the future, but if children reflect their parents' racist values, then what does the future have in store for us?

Apathy has been referred to as the root of ignorance, but more importantly, it gives silent approval for actions working to take away all that has been given to us by our forefathers. For example, a white male writes the newspaper, basically asking black college students to quit being so sensitive to the offensive statues still in front of Davis Library. As evidence to how off-base college students are these days, he seeks the counsel of a 11-year-old black boy from what he calls "the slums of Chapel Hill." When the kid says he likes the statue of the "studying Harlem Globetrotter" because it shows how a black college student has to read and study to stay in school long enough for him to go to the NBA, the silly white male quotes him as the voice of reason. Maybe the little boy and the silly white male do not realize that besides NBA hopefuls in college, there are M.B.A., J.D., M.D., Ph.D., B.S., M.A., and B.A. aspirants as well. In addition, I wonder why this White male relates so much better to a 11-year-old black boy than a man his age? Maybe he feels intimidated by his contemporaries. But because no one in the black or white communities spoke out against him, his comments went

occurring on predominantly white college campuses as black students' apathy slowly gives way to their oppression.

What am I getting at, you ask? Well, on Martin Luther King Jr.'s birthday, Jan. 15, America was on the brink of war. While many of us were asleep, happy that classes were cancelled, our brothers and sisters overseas prepared to fight for a country that systematically denies us of our heritage and rich history. They fight to preserve the interests of many who teach their children not to be interested in us. And all the while, there were still those among us who simply did not give a damn. You see, we are losing our grip on "the dream." Instead of sitting on our rear ends watching television or lying in the bed asleep, we need to go outside and see what is happening to us as a people. We as black people need to re-affirm our commitment to "the dream," or at least make an attempt to keep the ground which our ancestors fought so hard to gain. But it seems as if each year everything just keeps getting worse and worse. Things do not look to good in the future for black America. But I refuse to let this world get the best of us. I will not let "the dream" die. As Henry David Thoreau wrote in *Civil Disobedience*, "I was not meant to be forced. I will breathe in my own fashion. We'll see who is the stronger." white America, the strength of this great nation resides in the strength of the great people who built it. You can try to destroy the African American, but remember that he has taken your best and survived thus far, his head held high, his soul unconquered. Stand firm, Black America. "The dream" shall live on.