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Maine Campus_ Martin Luther King Holiday Revisited

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Editorial Page

• Column

For Whom Does the Bell Curve Toll?



Katy Brennan

Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. said he hoped that one day his children would not be judged by the color of their skin, but on the content of their character.

In the wake of his observed birthday, I felt it necessary to mention something that threatens the dream he died for. The book called "The Bell Curve" is striking up controversy and discussion as to whether our society will actually reach the equality King dreamed of.

Though I have not read the book myself, the information, which affected me enough to write about it, came from an October issue of Newsweek.

The bell curve applies to supposed evidence widening the black/white IQ gap. The authors of the book claim not only that the gap is substantial and blacks are on the lower end of the IQ scale, but it is a direct reflection of our failing society. It is also in direct opposition to affirmative action.

In fact, the authors state that a quarter of the black population on the scale are below 75, borderline retardation.

It's classic nature vs. nurture with a new racial kick. It is getting the attention of many intellectuals simply because the book is written by fellow intellectuals from Harvard. The funny thing is that white separatists have been preaching the author's views for years.

Violence? Blame it on blacks' IQ. Poverty? Blame it on blacks' IQ. Crime? Blame it on blacks' IQ.

The same authors that claim most of those in poverty today have no hope of ever escaping it because of genetics also claim no one should be affected by these results. They say genetically we are unequal and will never be equal, but this should not effect every day living. That seems unavoidable.

So, are all of our questions about society in 1995 answered?

What about those who exceed the normal IQ level? Will they simply be written off as exceptions?

Perhaps I am blowing this one book out of proportion, but over-generalized statements on any subject automatically gets my guard up. I get strange visions of the Red Scare and even Nazi Germany. Black or white, what if some day your kid doesn't make it between the normal 91-110 IQ? Will they be written off too?

First of all, if this information turns out to be true, what good does this do for our society? If it is meant to explain social wrongs it will only cause more. This is the kind of stuff white separatists and Ku Klux Klan members live for. Scientific information to back up their twisted views of supremacy.

What kind of hope are they giving to youth of any race or color? Will students, workers and people in general be prejudged on what kind of career and life they will be able to have simply because they do not make the curve.

Affirmative action is threatened too. If this book gets anymore hype, it might affect equality in the work place or financial help to hopeful college students.

To the credit of some intellectuals, IQ tests do not necessarily confirm differences in intelligence. Some people (thank God) are actually judging people on the content of their character.

King had a dream. I do not want to see that dream shattered by upperclass intellectuals in lab coats huddled around a strip of DNA with copies of IQ tests under their arms.



• EDITORIAL

Martin Luther King Holiday Revisited

Another Martin Luther King Jr. Day has come and gone, and again it has passed without widespread or official recognition at the Orono campus of the University of Maine.

While many students have expressed reproach at the idea of holding classes on this holiday, the editorial board at *the Maine Campus* does not agree that classes should be cancelled.

It was said by one Martin Luther King Jr. Day speaker that it was not so bad to have school on the holiday because if we didn't, there would be no one here to participate in the various activities planned for the occasion. For some students, if it were not for the fact that they needed to walk through the Memorial Union between classes, they would not know of any of the activities.

Martin Luther King Jr. fought for racial equality, and even with the accomplishments earned in that struggle equality is still hard to achieve for any group outside of the mainstream. Unfortunately Martin Luther King Jr. Day is seen as a black holiday — it is not. Equality is for everyone, and Martin Luther King Jr. Day holds a lesson for us all. As he said, no man is free as long as one man is not free.

King saw equality and freedom as being achieved peacefully. Knowledge is power — what better testament is there to this man's legacy than education itself?

But, in accordance with that logic, we should also be attending school during the rest of the federal holidays, including Columbus and Veteran's Day, in the same manner. On Veteran's Day (which is not officially observed by UMaine) veteran's groups hold ceremonies on the campus, and the same could be done for Columbus Day, if anyone cared.

While many university groups joined forces to set up a week-long schedule of events to celebrate the holiday, there was no strong initiative taken by the UMaine administration to celebrate or educate us about the efforts of King. Instead, we trudged to classes to dutifully collect our syllabi, heard short speeches as to what our courses entailed, and were sent on our merry way without mention of the man or the dream.

African Americans face many challenges today — why are blacks more likely to be followed when shopping in a store? Why does "The Bell Curve" say black people have lower IQs just because they are black? Why do a little girl in Dexter, Maine, and a housewife in South Carolina say it was black men that assaulted them? Maybe these are the issues we should all be addressing first, and not just the observance of a holiday.

Perhaps New Hampshire is right in calling the day Civil Rights Day. This is because individuals' reputations become tarnished. Perhaps all holidays should be named after the ideal that they are meant to perpetuate, not the person that perpetuated the ideal. We hear rumors about King, and Washington, and Lincoln, and Columbus. No matter what they say about King, he fought for equality and justice and freedom. Why are we not just pursuing those ideals? And why does it have to be confined to just one day?

Martin Luther King Day should be observed on the day it falls — and every day of the year. With the things he fought for being in so short supply even today, we need to live up to his ideals as best we can, not just honor the image of one particular person.

The Maine Campus

THE UNIVERSITY OF MAINE NEWSPAPER SINCE 1875

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The Maine Campus, a non-profit student publication, is printed at *The Ellsworth American*, Ellsworth, Maine. Its offices are located at Suite 7A, 5743 Lord Hall, UMaine, Orono, ME 04469-5743. Telephone numbers: Newsroom, 581-1269, 1270; Sports, 1268; Photo, 3059; Production, 1267; City Editor, 1270; Editor, 1271; News Editor, 1275; Business Manager (subscriptions/accounts), 1272; Advertising, 1273; Fax, 1274. All materials herein ©1994 The Maine Campus, unless otherwise noted. All rights reserved.

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