

Education and the Legacy of Dr. King

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NNPA Columnist

As he labored for social, civil and economic justice, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. was extremely concerned both about the educational inequities that were a function of segregation, and about the purpose and quality of education. As early as 1947, as a Morehouse College student, he wrote an article, The Purpose of Education, for the Maroon Tiger, the college newspaper. His article is as relevant today as it was then.

Today, much of the focus of education is on passing standardized tests; and while educational measurement is important, Dr. King suggests that these measures are insufficient. In his article, he pondered the meaning and purpose of education. He wrote that



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“Education must enable a (person) to become more efficient, to achieve with increasing facility the legitimate goals of his life.”

King was critical of the results of specific aspects of education when he wrote, “education must also train one for quick, resolute and effective thinking. To think, incisively and to think for one’s self is very difficult. We are prone to let our mental life become invaded by legions of half-truths, prejudices, and propaganda. A great majority of the so-called educated people does not think logically and sci-

entifically. Even the press, the classroom, the platform, and the pulpit in many instances do not give us objective and unbiased truths.”

True in 1947, but even more so today with 3-minute commentary passing for news, and some classrooms

the site of propaganda delivery. Some Southerners still believe that the South won the Civil War, and they fly the confederate flags to honor it, and teach this falsity in their classrooms. A friend who lives in Georgia said nearly half of her junior high school-age daughter’s U.S. history curriculum covered aspects of the Civil

War.

From that perspective, young King was quite critical of segregationist, their intelligence, and their prejudice. “The late Eugene Talmadge, in my opinion, possessed one of the better minds in Georgia, or even America. Moreover, he wore the Phi Beta Kappa key. By all measuring rods,

Mr. Talmadge could think critically and intensively yet he contends that I am an inferior being. Are these the types of men we call educated?”

King said that intelligence is not enough. He said, “Intelligence plus character

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“Everybody can be great ... because anybody can serve.”

— Martin Luther King Jr.

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