

## We Need More Dreamers

By Shawnta S. Barnes – January 15, 2018



On Sunday, December 17, 2017, my pastor Darryl K. Webster said, “Our community is dying because kids don’t dream and kids won’t dream because the adults in front of them stopped dreaming.” During his famous “I Have a Dream” speech, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr said, “I have a dream today,” but many people, including our youth, don’t have a dream; they lack aspirations. They are hopeless and surrounded by despair.

Last November, I interviewed and wrote about my father for Veterans Day. My father enlisted in the Marine Corps and fought in Vietnam. My parents are married and they both raised me and even though my father has been part of my life, we never had any in-depth conversation about why he enlisted and his experience in Vietnam. When I asked my father

why he enlisted, his response surprised me.

*I decided to join the military because Martin Luther King was just assassinated. Black people were depressed and losing hope, but I wanted to attend Lane Technical Institute to study drafting. It cost \$2,000 for the program. I dropped out of Tech High School and enlisted because Mama didn't have that kind of money to send me.*

He said he joined *because* MLK was assassinated. Even though this was a terrible tragedy, instead of giving up hope, my father decided this was the time more than ever to pursue his dream. Throughout the rest of the interview, my dad shared other instances of racism and injustice he had to endure while in the military and as he pursued his education.

It seems like every day we wake up to disheartening and troubling news: racist remarks by politicians, inequalities in schools and violence in our communities. We are stuck. All we are doing is reacting and complaining; that will get us nowhere. Yes, we need to voice our opinions and call out those who are wrong, but we also need to dream of a better future and create a plan to make that better future come to life.

When I share my dreams and aspirations for myself, my children and for our society, at times, family and friends will tell me I need to get rooted back into reality. They're wrong; I can't stay rooted in this reality and if great leaders like Dr. King stayed rooted and accepted their society, a change would not have occurred. I can't willfully accept this reality nor will I choose to be satisfied with the status quo. My hopes have to be rooted in a new and better reality for myself, my family and my community, so my current reality can become a thing of the past.

Last March, we took a family vacation to Washington D.C. My boys learned about Dr. King in school and they wanted to view the statue of him at the Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Memorial. After we walked around the memorial and I read some of Dr. King's quotes written on the memorial walls, I asked them, "What is your dream for your life? What do you want to do when you are an adult?" They had recently turned six and didn't know what they wanted to be when they grew up, but they both said they wanted to be happy. They will be

seven, in a little over a month. Yesterday, I asked them the same question and they had a more concrete response:

***JB:** I don't know what you call it, but I want to be the person who studies rocks and minerals.*

***JJ:** I want to be a scientist. I'm not sure what type of scientist yet because I'm still learning about all of the different types of science.*

Adults need to openly dream in front of their children and youth they know. If they don't see us dreaming and working towards goals, they won't dream. If they don't see us standing up against injustice and fighting for what we want, they won't know how to fight for a better future for all.

For me, a better future means:

- We won't have to disaggregate data to look at scores based on race or free and reduced lunch because all students will attend good schools.
- My black sons won't have to have 'the talk' with their children about enduring racism and potential violence.
- People from all backgrounds will love themselves and their culture and not be ashamed of their heritage.
- Black Americans will overcome the systemic poverty caused by slavery and Native People will overcome poverty caused by the genocide of their people and the theft of their lands.

Those are just *some* of my dreams. They might seem impossible, but not working towards a better future is a guaranteed way to ensure failure, so we should at least try.

Click here to [read](#) my MLK piece from 2017.

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["Our Work is More Important Than Ever Before"](#) by Barato Britt

“Teaching the Way Martin Luther King Would” by Andrew Pillow

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