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All Campus Essay Contest Winner: 'Erasing the Color Line'

By **Keisha Powell-Young**, OU senior education major

What is the color line? How long and wide is it? Most importantly, where can the color line be found?

A color line is a very destructive force that is naively invisible and silent to some while others see and hear its harmful screams and warnings. These lines can span states and can circle the globe. They can be found in our schools, churches, communities, workplace, government or any other place where there is more than one person.

Many people over hundreds of years have pondered and attempted to erase the color line between the races. Organizations have been formed to enlighten and promote a merging of people in hope that they would discover that their only differences were the color of their skin. Sometimes, many discoveries were made that did not necessarily involve a solution to erasing the color line. Discoveries of talents or intellect or basic things that all races have in common, including their hopes, desires and dreams, have basically nothing to do with the color of your skin. Do we all not want to be healthy? Do we not all strive to be happy and successful? Of course these are all things that all people wish for, but does it mean that some of us aren't entitled to these things because we are of a certain race or ethnic background?

Before we can discuss breaking down the color line between races, we must first start within ourselves. If your own people can't accept you for who you are, how can you possibly expect someone of a different background to accept and understand the things you may be going through, or, just open up to you like everything is okay? Color lines within a race or ethnic group are more detrimental than the lines that exist between the races. If we as a race could accept and embrace our diversity within ourselves, we would be ready to put forth the required efforts to remove the color line between the races.

As a fourth year student at Oakland University, I have felt the strains of the color line on an almost daily basis. Upon entering this university, I already knew how uneven the racial statistics were, but I guess you never really know something unless you experience it in everyday life. Take, for instance, being the only black person in many of my classes, and seeing all of the strange looks and stares I receive upon entering the room. Or even some of my classmates saying they were afraid to make certain comments because they didn't want to offend or upset me in any way. To some this would be a very uneasy situation to have to face, but me being the person I am, I took it in stride. I have always been taught to keep an open and level head with anyone in any situation.

The one thing that I did find disturbing was when I was taking a class in African-American literature; almost half of my class (that weren't of African-American descent) had no clue of some of the prominent black leaders that have paved the way for myself and other African-Americans to gain success. What was so sad about this is that not only could they not recollect any of the names, they had never even been exposed to such names as Bessie Coleman, Paul Laurence Dunbar, or Garrett Morgan – men and women who have accomplished so much on many different levels that have benefited this world. It's almost like all of their hard work was done in vain if people have gone through the majority of their lives not even knowing that they even existed. These students didn't learn of these great accomplishments during Black History Month at any of their schools. The one month that is supposed to be dedicated to the celebration of African-American people everywhere was just being bypassed as a regular curricular month throughout the year. Sure, they had heard of names like Rosa Parks, Malcolm X and Martin Luther King Jr., but who hasn't? Their names have been plastered everywhere all over everything. Yes, they too have played a major part in establishing a name in black history, but there are so many more who also have contributed.

I find it really hard to understand how these students, the future leaders of tomorrow, could have gone their entire lives not knowing anything about the African-American culture. People wonder why our country is so divided. How can we expect someone to embrace someone of another race or ethnic background when they know nothing about it? Yes, we should all be more open minded and more accepting of one another, but if your mind and your world have been closed for so long, you can't just change it overnight.

As an Oakland University student, I plan to take my course of study to help resolve the problem of the color line in the 21st century. I am earning my degree in education, and upon graduation I plan to teach in an area that is not predominantly black, and teach not only about my wonderful culture, but every angle, side and corner of all cultures, so that with exposure to this knowledge maybe the children of tomorrow won't be so sheltered. I know I am just one person, but I hope to make such an

impact on my students that they will want to go forth into the world and teach others of the wonderful things that they have learned. Maybe in the 22nd century my children or their children won't have to deal with such problems like the color line, and people will finally live in harmony.

SUMMARY

Keisha Powell-Young, a senior education major, took first prize in the sixth annual All Campus Contest in commemoration of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. with her essay, "Erasing the Color Line."

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