



## Monday's holiday — 'not just another day off'

### Minority students say prejudice still exists

**I have a dream that one day this nation will rise up and live out the true meaning of its creed: 'We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal ...' I have a dream that my four children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character.**

This is an excerpt from Martin Luther King Jr.'s "I Have a Dream" speech, which inspired civil rights legislation against segregation and inequality between America's black and white races in the 1960s.

On April 4, 1968, King was shot to death in Memphis, Tenn., hours before he was to lead a protest march in sympathy with striking garbage workers of that city.

Now, 39 years after King's assassination, the nation remembers the peace activist's birthday on Jan. 15 and his efforts to end prejudice.

Six students at Buffalo Academy of the Sacred Heart spoke to The Bee this past week on today's society and how, although some progress has been made, the world has a long way to go before tolerance of all takes hold.

Sophomore Siobhan Brady of Buffalo said that today people of different ethnic backgrounds have protection from racism, but the situation is not perfect.

"It's not just a day off from school," said senior Aminah Assabahi.

The Buffalo native added that people need to be more aware of what King did in terms of bringing races together.

"It's a movement for everyone, not just one group," said Lauren Mostillen, a junior from Buffalo. "He didn't just stand for blacks."

It was his efforts that allow people of all races to apply for jobs, and by law cannot be judged by the color of their skin, gender or disability, Mostillen added.

"It's the history behind his reasoning that we celebrate his goal today," Krystal Watson of Buffalo said.

The junior added that his message still applies to students and adults today.

Sophomore Darian Harvin said that 50 years ago, schools were segregated.

"That's not that long ago," the Williamsville resident said.

"A lot of people are really ignorant today," Watson added. "Even in this school. When Coretta Scott King and Rosa Parks died, people were like, who are they?"

Sophomore Christina Douglas said some

by JILL SCHMELZER  
Reporter



Siobhan Brady, Krystal Watson and Aminah Assabahi told The Bee about today's society and its continued struggle with prejudice and bigotry.



Lauren Mostillen, Darian Harvin and Christina Douglas gather in the hallway at Buffalo Academy of the Sacred Heart, 3860 Main St.

people don't even realize they are prejudiced. For instance, a person may not speak to another based on outer appearance. It's not on purpose; it's how people are brought up, she said.

Harvin said growing up in Williamsville — in a predominantly white neighborhood — she's had ignorant comments made to her.

"In grammar school, I was called the 'n' word. You say what you know," Harvin said. Assabahi added that the "cure" for racism is "getting to know a person, rather than judging them by what you see or hear."

The girls said it isn't just their peers who act or say prejudicial things, but it is teachers also.

Watson said she's been treated differently because of her race. For instance, she recalled a time she misplaced her homework and was given a zero, but another classmate did the same thing at a different time and was given an exception.

"People need to get out of that narrow mind-set," she said.

All six students are members of The National Conference for Community and Justice. Their mission is to educate their communities, both at home and in school, about different ethnicities, disabilities and religions.

Brady noted that people are different in

many ways — not just by race, but by religion and culture.

"I have had experiences where people were prejudiced against each other," said Douglas, a Clarence resident. "I think it's unfair. It comes out of ignorance. I want to send the message we're all equal."

Watson said, "You can't change the whole world — only what's in front of you."

The youth leaders educate their fellow classmates and raise awareness of each other's backgrounds throughout the school year.

"Buffalo is one of the most segregated cities I have ever been to," Mostillen said. "You have the whites in the north, Polish in the south, African-Americans in the east and Irish in the west. It's sad and heart-breaking."

She noted that people should be addressed as African-Americans because it shows them honor.

"If a white person called a black person the 'n' word, they'd get really upset," she said. "But when a black person calls another black person the 'n' word, it's OK. I think it's really foolish."

Mostillen said it is the way people are raised, and many times they are offensive without even knowing it.

"Buffalo will change," said Harvin. "And when it does, I want to play a part in it ... I am an action-taker."

The students noticed that segregation still occurs within the walls of schools.

At lunch, for instance, Watson said African-Americans occupy one table, and whites segregate themselves based on cliques — for instance, athletes or National Honor Society members.

"I can go sit down anywhere and they would smile and say hi," Watson said about being allowed to sit with another clique.

The students observed that people relate to each other based on their religion, race and interests, and that is why cliques form.

African-Americans generally know more about King than other people, said Assabahi. She then compared the situation to Mahatma Gandhi, stating that the Indian culture probably knows more about Gandhi than do people of other cultures.

Books by and about King and Gandhi should be required reading, Watson said.

"We learn about famous writers in literature," she added. "We've been taught two pages about Martin Luther King and Gandhi."

Douglas countered by saying she went to Catholic grammar and middle schools, and she learned a lot more about the two peace activists there than she did in her high school classes. She said that might be due to an assumption that students have already learned about the two influential people.

Douglas added that she believes students at the high school level should be taught in-depth about King's life.

Members of the Buffalo Academy of the Sacred Heart NCCJ group will be educating their peers on African-Americans during the month of February, which is Black History Month.