

Nov. 5, 2019

The Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., once said, "Our lives begin to end the day we become silent about things that matter."

This is not the day. I can not be silent.

It matters to me that an appropriate street be named in honor of Dr. King.

Contrary to popular belief, the facts, resolutions and ordinances show that the Jonesboro City Council has unanimously renamed streets throughout the years. Granted, some of them have been in the Industrial Park but some have not been there.

Let's start with Young Road. In 1977 its name was changed to Stadium Drive. In 2013, a portion of Stadium was renamed Red Wolf Blvd.

In 1988 a portion of Parker Street was unanimously renamed CW Post Drive.

In 2003 Rogers Chapel Road unanimously was renamed Nestle Road. And in 2005, a portion of Nestle Road was renamed Rogers Chapel Road.

In 2008, with 10 council members present and a voice vote, Haworth was renamed Nice Pak Road.

In 2009 Cook Road was renamed Nordex Drive and in 2014 Nordex Drive was changed to Trinity Drive.

In 2014 Dustin Drive was changed by an 11-0 vote to Cedar Creek Lane.

And you can even go as far back as 1949 to see such changes as Park, Melrose, Strawn, Chestnut, Wilmar Circle, Lotus, Edgewood, James, Donald, Nettle Road, West Lake, Highland, 63 and Joe Martin Expressway.

So, renaming a street in Jonesboro has been unanimously approved by the Jonesboro City Council countless times as far back as 1949 and probably earlier.

And this is why I can't be silent. This is why this hurts me to my very core.

Five days ago I visited the Martin Luther King Jr. Memorial near Washington, D.C. and I wept.

I wept standing at the base of that massive monument honoring the slain civil rights activist because in Jonesboro, Arkansas, the clansmen won't even allow the renaming of an existing city street after Dr. King.

I wept because the 159-pink granite block tribute to Dr. King is unmovable, while the Jonesboro clansmen also are unmovable because renaming an existing street will upset a clan of business people, university alumni, rental property owners and former officials threatening a recall election if a street is renamed.

I wept looking up at the detailed profile of Dr. King, knowing that in Jonesboro, Arkansas, clansmen erroneously hold tight to a resolution, which is not a law, about not renaming a street in the city even though one main street is on its third name.

I wept at the King Memorial knowing that some Jonesboro officials had hoodwinked residents into thinking that they were in favor of becoming a city with a street named after Dr. King when in actuality they were going through the motions to quiet the pro-King street residents.

I wept for my city of 11 years which finally and unapologetically has told me that the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., and I are not wanted and are not valued here.

I wept and I wept.

I wept because a street named after the man with a U.S. postage stamp and a federal holiday matters to me. I can't keep silent.

I wept for Jonesboro, Arkansas, at the national monument ^{honoring} for the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and now I speak in the city of Jonesboro asking that the right thing be done – rename an existing street, a real street, ^{for Dr. Martin Luther King}

Thank you.

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Jr.