

*Emma Agnew*

Although I am the president of the local branch of the NAACP, I am speaking for myself and not on behalf of the NAACP.

Having worked for the City of Jonesboro for a few years, I have had the pleasure of at least a brief conversation with most of you; and in-depth conversations with some of you. And I know you to be good, decent, hard-working men and lady; and those who have supported this effort thus far, I say 'Thank You'. And I pray and trust you do not waiver from that support.

Dr. King fought for the freedom of all People. But if you were born free; his legacy does not and submit CANNOT mean as much to you as it does to me and those of us who happened to be born black.

I was born in 1952, the daughter of the ancestors of slaves. I had no more to do with being born black than you did being born white. And while I had great parents, I had nothing to do with who my parents were any more than you had to do with choosing who your parents are/were.

When I grew up during the 50's and 60's change had NOT come to America. I remember the outright, blatant voter suppression, I remember separate and "unequal" schools, I remember not being able to use the restroom or get a drink of water because all that was available was for "White Only". Black people had to go to the back door of a restaurant to get food, and in many instances, restaurants, just simply would not serve black people. Less pay for the same work; having to sit in the back of the bus, fire hoses turned on kids, dogs let loose, and yes, lynchings. I can go on and on about how painful it was for a little girl to suffer this for no other reason than she was born black. While it is not discussed often, we live with the memory of this every day. If you think it goes away after a few years, I am here to tell you – it doesn't.

I remember, Council, transferring to a predominantly white school when I was in the tenth grade, and being spat at for walking down the hall! I remember white boys dumping buckets of water on the heads of black girls. I remember the 'N' Word being hurled at the 5 or 6 of us like it was our actual names!

So, I hope you at least begin to see that for your black residents, this is about so much more than naming a street. It is about a man who gave hope and the idea of inclusion; and that we were just as good as anybody!

I have two things to say to those who ask If we think Dr. King would want this kind of division and confusion— First of all, If you have to ask this question, then you don't understand who he was; and if you don't think he would want this, then stop opposing it! If you believe, as you say, that Dr. King is certainly worthy of honor for the legacy he has left. And secondly, Dr. King was a non-violent man, but let me be clear, he was a warrior! He was eloquent, passionate, and deeply troubled by what was happening in the country. If Dr. King believed that an international icon was deserving of a certain honor because of his legacy, then YES! He would fight even harder for that individual than we are fighting. And 'yes' there was way more confusion and division during the civil rights movement!

I will close with this: Dr. King fought for equal rights and freedom for all people. However, if you have always had equal rights, if you have always been free; you probably don't understand how much his legacy means to those of us who have not had that privilege.

For us, your black community, his legacy is life to us. Dr. King is largely, in part, the reason we are where we are today.

An overpass won't do, a memorial highway won't do, and while I am not opposed to a trail, a trail alone will not satisfy. I implore you gentlemen and gentlelady, lets rename Commerce Dr. and future additions in honor of the Rev. Dr. ML King, and move this city forward, together!