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Black in Physics

Juneteenth Essay Contest

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Black in Physics Juneteenth Essay: Morgane König

Imagine a world where there was no difference between being black or white. Where opportunity is available to everyone who seeks it, no matter their skin color. In my school, I am among a handful of black students in seventh grade — especially in honors classes. In my algebra class, for example, there are only two of us.

While life presents challenges for everyone, only those who are determined to persevere will see these challenges as opportunities. Morgane König, a postdoctoral fellow at Dartmouth College and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), is a great example of a person whose tenacity and dedication changed her life.

Born and raised in Paris, France, König grew up studying piano and ballet. Like her, I practiced ballet and a classical instrument, transcending societal norms that suggest that sports and certain music are for blacks and classical dance and music is for whites. Where do science, mathematics, and physics fit in? Are those fields only for a chosen few? I believe science and math do not see color. They celebrate the human intellect and curiosity. To partake in these studies, your skin color or gender should not matter. They are for anyone and everyone who wants to join in on the dance.

As a young girl, I always sought to become a doctor; I believed I belonged in medicine. I never even considered any other opportunities that could be just as impactful as practicing medicine. But now, learning about these inspiring African American women who have achieved the impossible, standing up for themselves and making way for the new generation, I've realized the significance of poise and fortitude. I strive to grow into someone as noble, as proud, as confident as them. To make discoveries that impact the future, to help save the world, that would be the ultimate goal of my life. These black physicists have surpassed society's pressures; they are the true heroines of the modern age.

König always had an interest in physics, but she thought she was incapable of becoming a physicist because of her race. Yet, when she finally decided to try and apply for a university in order to start her physics future, she was accepted by numerous universities, including the University Pierre and Marie Curie, Paris, and the University of California, Davis in California. In 2021, she graduated from UC Davis with her PhD degree, making her the first black student in UC Davis to earn a PhD degree and the 9th black woman in the United States to earn one. König specializes in cosmology, theories of gravity, and particle physics. One of the coolest things she studies is ways to detect dark matter in the universe (ways to potentially unravel the nature of Dark Matter). With her astounding achievements, König has shown me that, whether you are black or white, you can amount to greatness if you persevere and push yourself as far as you can.

Oftentimes, black and African American children, adolescents, and young adults (typically in poverty-stricken cities) are raised watching the famous, "successful" rappers, dancers, etc. who boast their wealth and "success" in life. They are raised aspiring to become those famed people, to be "successful" like them, but for the wrong reasons. They don't realize the greatness that can

come from within. But I want to help guide the ones misled so they can reach their potential. It doesn't just have to be athletic potential — it can be scholarly potential too.

There are countless exemplary Black and African American scholars who prospered in science, technology, engineering, and math, showing the importance of pushing through the hard times; looking forward to your goals in order to achieve them. König might not be the most famous Black physicist, but she still can teach society a great lesson that she definitely taught me: with the right amount of determination and drive, you can do more than just reach for the stars; you can discover them.

Works Cited:

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