

YOUR VOICE

Support a culture of learning in our community

By Damaris Taylor

I often feel like I am a voice for young people in Greenville. As a 20-year old, I have seen and experienced the growth and the amazing opportunities for success in Greenville. However, sometimes I question how sustainable our progression truly can be without a broad and courageous community commitment to prioritizing learning.

Learning prepares individuals to battle their circumstances and rise above social and economic adversities.

An appreciation for learning provides the ability to overcome challenges because it equips one with the tools to do so, to almost think their way out of a difficult circumstance.

Learning offers many perspectives that allow one to look at, over and beyond a situation or circumstance. From this discovery one can begin to imagine something better. A fantasy or dream world can be created within the mind when learning becomes a priority.

Learning makes an enhanced aptness to be creative possible. Creativity can take the fantasy and make it the reality.

To many readers, this may seem like the ranting of a idealistic, naïve young man. And maybe so, but for me this is exactly how it happened.

My mother gave birth to me at 15-years old while still in high school. My grandfather at the time was the pastor of a church. It goes without

saying that my mother's round belly was a social taboo, and possibly even embarrassing to the family.

Thankfully, my family supported her through her pregnancy.

Today I'm the oldest of five children with a great Mom and a loving Dad. Overall, my family is wonderful. We also happen to live in a low-income household. I come from what many would consider a challenging environment.

However, I am an anomaly.

I am an anomaly because I graduated in the top 3 percent of my class. I was student body president at Greenville High School. I attend Harvard University.

To be blunt and give adequate attention to the

statistical feat that I am, by the grace of God, I must proudly acknowledge that I am a black American. Low-income black males born to teenage mothers in South Carolina do not always attend Ivy League universities, not to mention graduate from high school.

Thus, I draw attention to the fact that I am breaking the trend and claim to be an anomaly because a love for learning is what got me here.

More anomalies can happen if we as a community of diverse ideas and thoughts commit to creating a culture that values learning. I have been able to succeed despite living in circumstances that are known for killing dreams and potential.

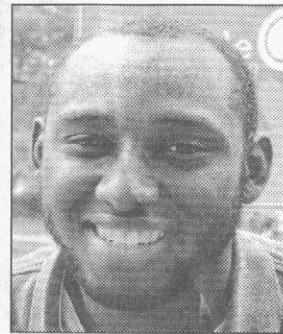
What made the difference in my life was the strong support from my family and teachers. Support in prioritizing learning and education, teachers who believed in me, and an incredible group of people who pushed me to achieve.

But, I should not be an anomaly. I should be the rule. And developing a community that supports learning is the first step.

To all of you, bring what you can to the table and lend your talents and skills to the efforts that are already being made to encourage a strong community commitment to prioritizing and valuing learning.

My love of learning has opened my doors of success. It has made me who I am.

GUEST COLUMN



Damaris Taylor is an intern with Greenville Forward, the organization in Greenville responsible for shepherding Vision 2025. In August he will return as a junior to Harvard University as a comparative study of religion and American government major. His e-mail is damaristaylor1@gmail.com.