



WILEY UNIVERSITY | FROM THE DESK OF
THE PRESIDENT

Elon Musk Isn't as Dangerous as you are...

COMMEMORATION

On November 2, 1983, President Ronald Reagan signed the King Holiday Bill into law, designating the third Monday in January as a federal holiday in observance of civil rights leader Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. The late Congressman John Lewis, who fought alongside King in the Civil Rights Movement, proposed the initiative of making King's holiday "a day on, not a day off" in 1994. Today, we commemorate Dr. King's life and legacy and acknowledge his tremendous contributions and the countless others who went toe-to-toe against white supremacy. Since the signing of this bill, so much has changed, while so much has remained the same - in fact, some would argue the pace we have devolved seemingly hints at a desire for some to wipe out all the gains made by Dr. King and the unsung heroes and heroines of the movement. In the past, I have written a *Letter to Dr. King* around this time of the year, but I depart from that practice to speak directly to you, the *Scholars, Leaders, Activists, Debaters, Vocalists, and Athletes* of Wiley University.

OUR CURRENT CLIMATE

On January 12, 2024, Elon Musk, one of the most bigoted billionaires of our time and founder of TESLA, Inc., retweeted io@eyeshasho:

"The average IQ of USAF pilots is about 120, and the figures I've seen for major airline pilots range from 115 to 130. By contrast, the mean IQ of grads from two of those United Airline HBCU "partners" is about 85 to 90, based on the average SATs at those schools. (The SAT correlates reasonably well with IQ.) To put this into context, the HBCU IQ averages are within 10 points of the threshold for what is considered "borderline intellectual impairment," while the pilots IQ averages are within 10 points of what is considered "intellectually gifted. I'll add that IQ is a well-studied and well-known predictor of job performance, especially for quick-processing and mentally-demanding occupations like major airline pilot."

To which Elon Musk responded, “It will take an airplane crashing and killing hundreds of people for them to change this crazy policy of DIE.”

Their point is that the students and graduates of HBCUs are inferior. Both Dr. King and Congressman Lewis were HBCU grads (Morehouse College and Fisk University, respectively) who consistently served as exemplars of the capacity developed, harnessed, and launched through an HBCU education. And yet, on this day commemorating the life and legacy of Dr. King, people like Elon Musk turn to their white supremacy to attack the efforts of Affirmative Action/Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion, which were designed to right the wrongs of systemic racism experienced by generations.

I find the timing of Musk's latest offense coinciding with the nation's celebration of Dr. King to be both serendipitous and a reminder of what our fore-parents and grandparents sagaciously admonished us to do; “be twice as good to get half as much.” At this moment, 60 years after the *March on Washington*, I am also keenly aware that *some* things have changed in race relations, and for that, I am grateful for the activists who have risked it all for the life I enjoy today. It's also a painful reminder that on this day, that honors a man whom the federal government once tried to destroy and who was excoriated by the general populous of the United States, we still are in discussion about the brilliance of Black people.

HBCUs: WHERE OPPORTUNITY AND CAPACITY COLLIDE TO CREATE *MAGIC*

I strongly support killing this tool (Affirmative Action), even though it was born out of necessity because of the pervasive pattern and practice of exclusion. I can agree with Mr. Musk in part- DEI should DIE, but ONLY if equity and respect for your *magic* doesn't require enforcement by the highest court in the land. To be clear, the inability to value the *magic* produced by HBCUs like Wiley University should “DIE”! However, the current state of affairs in this country dictates that said *magic* continues to be discredited, denied, and systematically suppressed, even given the known outcome when your God-given right is celebrated, *magic* happens, and Musk and others know this. They are acutely aware of the danger HBCU graduates pose, so they wish to discredit you and dismantle any tool created to showcase what I believe happens when capacity and opportunity collide, *magic*.

Elon Musk's bigoted response seemed to gather a slow response, many went on about their day, perhaps the limited response from HBCU graduates and students is out of our weariness. Nonetheless, we can not continue to ignore the increasingly unhinged individual who has a platform, as though we believe these things about ourselves. I can attest firsthand how exhaustive it is being a Black man in America. I can also attest to what happens when HBCUs

like Wiley University provide an intentional space for opportunity and capacity to collide. Again, *magic happens*. *My Dear Wildcats*, you are the producers of ***Magic!*** America has benefited from this ***magic***; Musk should know this. Musk's misguided need to enter the chat and offer his unsolicited opinion of an announcement by United Airlines in their quest to seek the best and brightest affirms that he is misinformed. Drawing from the eugenics movement quackery that uses a "study" to draw alarm is elementary. "For one, there's a mountain of evidence that demonstrates that the SAT mirrors and even encourages racial disparities in the United States. That has been true since the test's inception. Both the SAT and the IQ test were developed in part by eugenicists who were concerned that 'racial mixture' would lead to the decline of the U.S.," according to the National Educational Association.

The fear that being in partnership with the nation's 100 + HBCUs to strengthen the aviation industry will cause harm because of a belief of Black people's inferiority who attend and graduate HBCUs is ludicrous. Our institutions continue to serve as a breeding ground for billionaire businesswomen, military generals, researchers inventing vaccines, Nobel Prize winners, and the like.

I feel invested in encouraging a call to action and challenging Mr. Musk to the table with other HBCU presidents for a candid conversation. Frankly, I am inviting him to meet with us because I am intrigued by his theories of inferiority and his willingness to assert these claims. Since I am sure his willingness to engage is unlikely because people like him hide, hoping they will not be challenged, I offer this open letter to you and him. Perhaps Musk's agreement with the aforementioned belief is derived from his formative years, which were invariably shaped by the lingering vestiges of apartheid in South Africa; one could also conclude he and his family most likely benefited from it. As such, he and others like him are precluded from seeing the ***magic*** of those who suffered as a result of apartheid.

I believe it completely reasonable to have hoped, given his penchant for the exploration of outer space and the STEM sciences, that at some point, he would come across examples of brilliance that are represented by such genius as African-American women HBCU graduates, Katherine Johnson - West Virginia State University, Dorothy Vaughan - Wilberforce University and Mary Jackson - Hampton University, who served as the brains behind one of the greatest operations in history, the NASA launch of astronaut John Glenn into orbit, a stunning achievement that restored the nation's confidence, turned around the Space Race and galvanized the world. The wonderful film, *Hidden Figures*, summarizes the contributions of these HBCU graduates.

The film, *The Great Debaters* chronicles the ***magic*** of Wiley University students who defeated an "academically superior" institution while simultaneously going head to head with racism and

violence. Curiosity should have led a person of his caliber on a journey to validate his lazy presupposition. Surely with the usage of his satellites, he could use a Google or Wikipedia query from anywhere in the world to prove that students and alums of HBCUs are anything but “borderline intellectually impaired.” Someone should also inform Musk that Tesla has an internship partnership with Huston-Tillotson University, an HBCU in Austin, Texas.

Rather than continuing to regurgitate irrefutable facts about the necessity to create HBCUs or to enumerate the countless contributions to America of Wiley University, her alumni, and the alumni of the other 103 HBCUs, let us examine the pathology of racists and bigots like Musk, who use their belief in white intellectual supremacy to disguise their fear of your mere existence, your magic. He and those similarly situated in white supremacy cannot bring themselves to believe that *Wildcats* like you may well be intellectually superior to him and, at the very least, capable of matching their intellectual prowess. So he and others like him negate your intellect, despite our ancestors climbing out of four hundred years of enslavement, treated as 3/5ths of a human being, terrorized through the Jim Crow era, denied fair or equal education, housing, banking, medical care, employment and access to every imaginable piece instrumental in the pursuit of the “American Dream.”

Perhaps those who have watched Elon Musk constantly provide you with his bigoted perceptions of grandeur will resist the urge to boycott Musk. Instead of returning your Tesla and deleting X, maybe the answer is to occupy and own those spaces. Occupy, own, and figuratively topple through organized outrage that changes these organizations' financial trajectory. Perhaps you will finally be *sick and tired* enough to galvanize with people and figuratively march to interrupt this renewed sense of comfort in bigoted performances by white supremacists.

At some point, we will realize Elon Musk and others like him are only dangerous because we aren't. That we are free and don't have to tolerate the stream of bigotry as normal. As we celebrate the life and legacy of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., perhaps we should be reminded that we are the protectors of the future and that we can shape this future free from racism, but it will require us to be as dangerous as Elon Musk.

Inspirata Procedurant,

Herman J. Felton, Jr., Ph.D., J.D.

President & CEO, Wiley University

