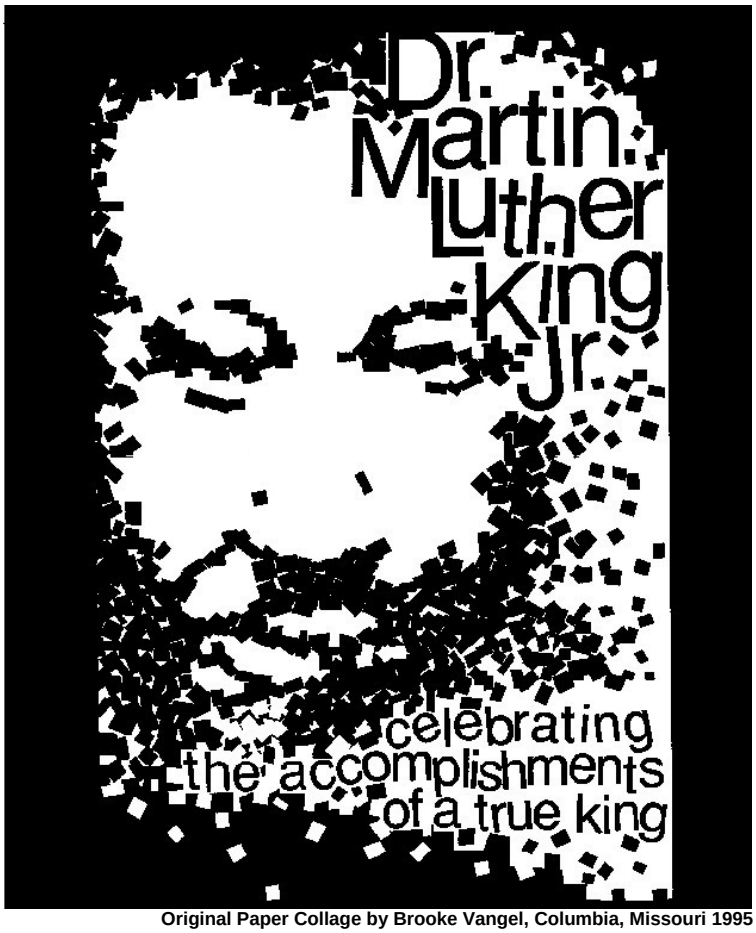
Sit-ins, Freedom Riders and Marches for Equality

What Moves You to Celebrate Diversity?



Original Paper Collage by Brooke Vangel, Columbia, Missouri 1995

Essays by Columbia Students

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COLUMBIA VALUES DIVERSITY CELEBRATION

Thursday, January 12, 2006

My Mouth
Dedicated to Bernice Johnson Reagon
By Caraleena Jones

My mouth is an instrument
An instrument that plays
Without a bow to engage it
Or hand to pluck it
Or a finger to press it
Or a palm to beat it.
All I need is the truth to sing.

My mouth is an instrument
An instrument that plays
Without hatred to cover it
Or violence to put it down
Or pain suffered from the violence to disrupt it.
All I need is the hope to raise my voice.

My mouth is an instrument
An instrument that plays
With my voice to let freedom ring
My courage to conceal my fears
And pride in my race to change the future.

West Boulevard Elementary
5th Grade, Ms. Jonette Ford

Wednesday Icy
By Kameth Corley

It has been proven that during the 1960s African-Americans were being judged by the color of their skin. But in my neighborhood, I had a chance to defend my friend. When the problem was turned around, I had the power to defend.

When I was in third grade I had a friend named Jak, not the coolest, but my friend, white, and all. Some African-Americans were choosing to pick on Jak, only for the color of his skin, and they didn't even know him. At first, it seemed like he could hold his own, but the more aggressive they got, the more he lost his courage. I had to get them to bug off. Since I could not do anything, I got my uncle and eventually they left.

During that period in time I had the power to defend my friend.

The power to protect.

Gentry Middle School
6th Grade, Neal Blackburn

What Moves You to Celebrate Diversity?

By Huston Perry Snell

As I look at the essay questions, I see the words “how *would* you feel” and “what *would* you do” if treated differently. As a young black man in today’s society, I do not have to imagine those scenarios. I have already experienced them.

Those who come from a disenfranchised group see and feel a variety of experiences to the point that some seem almost minor. The one most hurtful situation was when I was in junior high and my mother and I had gone to a local discount store that was closing. When the bell at the door signaled someone might be leaving with an unpaid item, the white man was allowed to leave because he said he had paid for the item. I had nothing as I was just coming into the store. In front of everyone, I was frisked then let go. It was so humiliating!

My mother and I talked a lot about what to do. We considered filing a human rights complaint, but believed that this may reflect on me in the future in dealing with the police department while driving, etc. You have to consider that when you weigh options as a black male.

I have already been active in attending Human Rights Commission meetings, church anti-racism meetings, etc. After this incident, we decided to further increase my knowledge and to be even more proud of the person I am, while learning about what others’ differences contribute to this “melody” of life. I attended Anytown – a youth leadership conference of the National Conference of Community and Justice. We spent the whole week exploring our differences, ways we are all alike, how to deal with situations that make us uncomfortable, all the “isms” and specifically oppression.

Because of that conference, all that I had been taught as a child, all my experiences, and what I had learned from the history of the Civil Rights Movement started coming together for me. I cannot stand back and let others be ridiculed for who they are. I educate when the opportunity presents itself in classes.

So many have worked so hard in the Civil Rights Movement; we cannot let that be in vain. In the conference, I recognized what we can still do for those who suffer due to gender, race, religion, gender identity, etc. I saw things in myself to change. We have so many beautiful things about us. I referred earlier to the “melody” of life. Many ideas are used to describe each person’s contributions to our society – from melting pot to salad to tapestry. Because I am a musician, I see each person is a singular note in the ongoing melody of life. Without each note, the melody would sound less beautiful.

I am so moved about being a part of this melody that I seek out diversity in all places, just to learn how differently the melody might sound. A song made of identical notes would be quite boring. We all have a place in the song that makes life so unique. What would I do if I were denied a seat at a lunch counter? What would I do if I saw someone else refused service at a store? I would remember those students before me who made a difference by standing up for what is right and just. I would be moved to make a difference, and to celebrate diversity.

Rock Bridge High School
11th Grade, Ms. Smith

Moving from Silence
By Connie Cho

No one has ever made me sit in the back of the bus or leave from a building because I am a different race. Yet there are times I have felt that I wasn't welcome. Dislike is much more subtle these days, but the impact is just the same. The infamous story of Rosa Parks standing her ground – sitting her ground – is an example of courage promoting equality and diversity. I've never started a civil rights movement that changed our entire nation and the world. But I have felt that awful feeling of being unwelcome.

On my first bus, I was tripped and laughed at, but when I turned away the tormentors lost their interest and silence ensued. Silence was almost as unbearable as the ridicule. Bus rides were the worst in that way. People I had seen in the halls or even some in my class would sit next to me because there were no other seats. They never acknowledged me or spoke to me. I got the distinct feeling that they didn't want me to be there and it was expressed by absolute silence.

I never did anything about the silence. I did try to start conversation a few times, but the others would suddenly remember the book they had in their backpack or the ceiling suddenly became very interesting to them. I may not have done anything at that moment, but I learned to find the people who would accept me. With the help of my friends, I no longer felt excluded or unwelcome. I have learned from the past and moved on from the discrimination and into diversity.

West Junior High School
9th Grade, Mrs. Sherry Dobbs

Like Rosa Parks
By Mahogany Thomas

Giving up my seat is something
I would never do,
I'd stand up like Rosa Parks
And kindly refuse.
It would make me upset, mad and
Disappointed,
To sit in the back of the bus
Because of my
Color, religion, and gender.
We're all equal I would say
So why can't we do the same thing?

Mary Paxton Keeley Elementary
5th Grade, Mrs. Cassity

Martin Luther Writing Prompt
By Barry Geibel

He was hungry. Tired, too, but his stomach wouldn't let him rest until it had something in it. He had been awake for 15 hours and hadn't had anything but coffee for 12. It was somewhere in the middle of Wyoming that he felt he couldn't continue any longer without nourishment. He was sent by his church to pick up some new Bibles in Idaho; the ones they had were wearing out after years of being used. He had a trunk full of the Word of God now and was anxious to get back to Salt Lake City, but the church could wait, his stomach was grumbling louder than the old Ford Pinto he was driving. Very impressive if you've ever driven a Pinto.

He'd been looking for a restaurant for the past hour, but for some odd reason, no one had the novel idea of building a café in the middle of nowhere. He was starting to consider eating some of the Bibles when he spotted a sign in the distance.

"'Roadside Café.' Doesn't sound very classy, but it'll have to do," he said, his mood improving at the prospect of food.

"Gurgle." His stomach agreed. He pulled off on exit 243 and headed towards salvation.

This quaint little restaurant he had found looked more like a trailer than a café, and actually had a hitch on the front, rusted to a nice red-brown. He pulled in and parked his Pinto next to an old Chevy truck in the gravel parking lot. There were several other cars parked as well, none of them looking much better than his 80's relic. He climbed out of the car and smoothed back his hair, having always liked to look his best, especially in front of strangers. He wore a white button down shirt with a black tie and black slacks with a pair of leather dress shoes to top, or bottom, it off.

As he opened the door, an older couple came out.

"Good afternoon," he said politely, smiling. They answered him by throwing him a mean-looking glare. "Maybe they didn't like their food," he thought to himself, the people in his city always having a sunny disposition. He shrugged it off as the void in his belly reminded him why he was here.

The inside of the café didn't look any better than the outside. There was a counter on one side of the narrow building with cramped looking booths on the opposite side. The counter and tables were the only clean surfaces in the whole place, the rest covered in a nice brown gunk. An overweight woman who appeared to be in her middle years stood behind the counter. Her fingernails were grimy with the same mysterious substance that covered everything else in the place, and she was busy wiping the counter with a dirty dishcloth, although this only succeeded in spreading a layer of dirty dishwater over the counter. She didn't seem to notice him come in, and even as he sat down, didn't acknowledge him. He waited for some time before he tried to get her attention. He'd thought she was looking at him once and he tried to order some coffee, but he realized she was taking care of an itch on her backside and still hadn't noticed him. He finally spoke up.

"Excuse me, ma'am? Could I have a cup of coffee and, hmm, let's see…how about some apple pie?" She leaned on the counter and stared at him, her face looking like he'd just shot her dog.

"That your car out there?" She pointed to the Pinto. "The one with the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints bumper sticker on it?" She asked this in such a tone that he thought he actually might have shot her dog. He figured maybe she was in a bad mood for some reason

besides the real one and mistook this for a compliment. People in Salt Lake City were always doing that.

“Why yes ma’am, it is,” he answered proudly, holding his head a little higher as he said it. “Are you a member?”

“We don’t serve your kind here, boy.” He was flabbergasted. He might have thought she was joking, had there not been such hatred in her voice when she said it.

“Pardon?” he asked in a weak tone of voice.

“You Mormon types. Don’t like ‘em. You an’ all your wives, strutin’ around like you’s better ‘an everybody else.”

Her words bit into him like a dog he’d just tried to shoot. He wasn’t even married to one woman. “Well, now, I don’t think that’s very fair of you to say. I’m certainly not like that.” He was starting to raise his voice now; was it too much to ask to get some pie? “I’m sorry you feel that way, and I apologize for my fellow Mormons, but may I please get some pie? Ma’am?” He added the “ma’am” in a softer voice, hoping she would just give him some food.

“What don’t you get, boy – YOU AIN’T GETTING’ NO PIE!” She practically yelled that last part.

They were starting to attract the attention of the other customers, who, judging by their expressions, all felt the same way about Mormons as the waitress. They all glared at this stranger that was disturbing their meal. A few of them muttered hateful things toward the Mormon.

The shock turned into an emptiness that changed his hunger for food into a hunger for acceptance. How could someone be so hateful to him when he hadn’t done more than ask politely for some pie? This feeling was worse than anything he’d ever felt. He couldn’t change this woman’s opinion of him, couldn’t change this blind and unjustified hate for his religion. What was he supposed to do now? He felt he should do something to make these people think differently, but this hatred couldn’t be reasoned with.

The woman stood straight up again and pointed at the door. “Get out, before I call the police.” The look on her face erased any hope that he could rectify the church; he couldn’t break through this wall he saw in her. He stood there for a minute, trying not to show his feelings that would give this woman satisfaction. He looked around the café once more, hoping someone might feel some sympathy for him and tell this woman she was out of line. The faces he saw were all unfriendly, though, regarding him as if he weren’t human but some animal. He turned and walked out of the shabby café, although it felt just as bad as if he’d gotten kicked out of a five star restaurant. He climbed into the Pinto and was just about to pull onto the road when he broke down and cried. Later, his minister, parents and friends would console him, but he would always remember clearly that cold feeling inside him.

Rock Bridge High School
12th Grade, JB Cone

My Soul
By Myria Key

You deprive me of my everyday life because my skin color is different from yours. It seems like you look only though my skin and you have no idea what my soul has in store for you. I am capable of doing everything that you do. I can read, write, walk and breathe just as you. And still, you look at me as if I was a hideous monster, making me want to flee the face of the earth with no looking back. Everywhere I go, I only see two different colors. My colored people are the ones that suffer for no reason at all. You say we are different, but look at the person next to you – they are different from you, too. No resemblance to each of your faces. Yet you bind me down for something that I cannot help. Making my life a misery really isn't going to stop my skin color from being this dark. All I want is to live my life with no strings attached.

Oakland Junior High School
8th Grade, Ms. Sanders

When Your Hand is in Mine
By Reshma Khanna

When your hand is in mine,
We have nothing to fear.

When your hand is in mine,
Hatred caused by the color of one's skin
Shall be crushed to dust.

When your hand is in mine,
The world's different races and religions
Will be seen as an array of jewels.

When your hand is in mine,
We shall all laugh and cry together
Rather than be segregated.

When your hand is in mine,
We have nothing to fear,
We will only have joy.

Gentry Middle School
7th Grade, Mrs. Bergman

My Chocolate Brown
By Secily Devese

My parents say I'm hated, because of my chocolate brown
And when I think about it, it gets me sort of down
They say fight for what's right, keep your feet upon the ground
They say I can't be rid it, this crippling Chocolate Brown.

We fight in tactful ways, no violence with no sound
We march, we sit, we ride, we circle cities round
We surely work our hardest, to keep alive this noun
But still I can't get rid of, this gruesome Chocolate Brown.

These people all fight for it, they gather in great mounds
The whites they just can't stand us, towards us they taunt and hound
In this unwelcome body, I find that I am bound
A thing that can't be given, this dubious Chocolate Brown.

Well now the news is out, it mostly paints the town
The pride I have inside, shows through like king and crown
I realize true meaning, this secret I have found
It's why I just can't help but love this, precious Chocolate Brown.

Hickman High School
11th Grade, Mrs. Symone Thomas

My Friend Tom
By Tyler Hill

It was a blazing day in summer, and me and my friend Tom from India were playing catch with a football. Nothing could make this day better or worse. But just as I threw a bullet of a pass at Tom, one of the two bullies ran over and snatched the ball away and threw it down the street.

They said, "Hey look! It's Chief Indian Pants. Will you get me some rabbit with you all's mesquite bow and arrow? I don't think he even knows what it is – that's how smart Indians are."

I wanted to stand up to the bullies, but they are five years older than me! But when I saw the sadness, fear and rage on his face, it gave me the courage to say "STOP" and go get help from my parent right by us.

When those bullies saw my dad, they were terrified and ran off like two scared deer. Me and him both know they won't be back.

Rock Bridge Elementary School
5th Grade, Diller

Bus Ride
By Chrissie Merideth

Sitting still and silently, alone and on my own,
Minding my own business; Patiently waiting the bus ride home.
Why do they all look at me as though it's not my place to ask?
Why must they all act as though it's no doubt I'm lower class?
The woman sitting close to front corners me with her eyes.
"What?" "I'm going to have to ask you to move.." she replies.
Make me move to the back of the bus? But I'm a person too!
Just because I'm a little different doesn't mean I'm lower than you.
No look of guilt outlines her eyes, she cares not of what she demands.
Acting as though I'm dirt under her shoes.. I'm no one to reprimand.
Slowly and calmly, I pick myself up, I'm even with her face…
"I will move…" I start to say, "but your words have little grace."

Hickman High School
10th Grade, Janda and Brooks

Denial or Ignorance
By Kate Dranginis

When you are asked to leave a place where you have done nothing wrong and were well-behaved, and the only reason they ask you to leave is because you may have red hair and green eyes, you feel mad, sad and angry at something you think may never change. Although it's unfair and wrong for someone to judge you on your looks, that may be what always happens. People think they have to stay with those who look and believe in the same things they do. Well, I discovered this the other day when I walked into a church down the street from me called "All God's Children". I thought it was a nice place and I had just moved here from Ireland and it had been awhile since I had been to church, so I gave it a shot. Though when I sat down and started to pray, I got tapped on the shoulder by a big, tall, brown-haired man and was asked to leave before I started a ruckus.

I was appalled. How can someone ask you to leave the house of God?

Though it was very rude for the man to ask me that, I very nicely stood up and walked out. Everyone saw but no one did anything to help me. As I was walking home, I kept thinking about the people who were staring at me, they made me feel like I was an outcast, a loner, and like I was some kind of leper. As I thought more and more about it, I realized that though the people were rude, they didn't know what they were doing. They were raised to think that people who are different shouldn't belong and that's why they were so rude to me. I did not fit into their little utopia of brunettes. So as I prayed there in the street instead of in the warm church, I forgave all the people that were raised to believe in hate and the opposite of God's teachings. Those people would of course have children and make them believe the racial things they believe and those children will have more children and the cycle will keep repeating itself. Until someone realizes it's wrong to judge people on looks. Then maybe people will stop hating and discriminating and then people will just get along and everyone can go to the same church like God always wanted.

West Junior High School
8th Grade, Ms. Botkin

To Elizabeth Eckford
By Dyran Hill

Her eyes showed fear
But she was not shaking.
Going to school
White school.
She knows going in will be hard
She will be lucky to get out alive.
Hearing the violent noise behind her.
But going to school to learn
Not caring what they were saying.
Scared to be dead
But trying to make something happen for
Herself
Family
Black folks
Freedom.

West Boulevard Elementary
5th Grade, Jonette Ford

I Will Be Kind
By Ahmad Rashidi

I was once practicing soccer with my team
When I was hurt in my self-esteem.
One teammate asked me where I was from;
When I answered him, he thought I was dumb.

He frowned and made an ugly face
So I felt like burning in a fireplace.
I also felt like telling the coach,
But I did not want then to broach.

When my mom came to pick me up,
I was just about to blow up.
I went to my room and shut the door
To think about it more and more.

The next soccer practice I told the coach;
I then decided I should broach.
He told the kid not to do it again
And kept watching him now and then.

He told him that this was racism
And not an act of heroism.
He added, “This is totally unfair.
I wonder how you would dare!”

The teammate looked down in shame
And knew he was the one to blame.
He said, “Sorry, I will be kind.
I should be nice to all mankind.”

Islamic School of Columbia
5th Grade, Najwa Rashidi

A Lesson in Diversity
By Daniel Lopez

During my sophomore year I attended a summer camp for the last three weeks of June, a camp that was allegedly for less than the top one percent of all Missouri 10th graders, or about 330 sophomores.

My friends at the camp were all brilliant, multitalented, surprisingly philosophical, and extremely tolerant of diversity. Perhaps because we all had quite a few little quirks of our own, we were all extremely careful to treat each other fairly and kindly. Even today, above all else, what still stands out to me about my fellow scholars was not their intelligence, but their deep-rooted kindness and tolerance of each other.

You can imagine my surprise, then, when one day during camp I inexplicably witnessed my closest friends transform in but a few seconds from caring, compassionate teenagers to vindictive, sadistic Nazis.

A few of my friends and I decided to try out one of the teacher-sponsored activities, and so we ambled off to the Geology building where we'd heard there was an "interesting" activity scheduled to take place that was supposed to teach us about the effects of racism and discrimination.

Right off the bat we realized that we were not in for another of our popular round-table discussions that seemed to spring up everywhere – in laundry rooms, cafes, on the basketball court, etc.

The hour-and-a-half activity passed quickly. When we were finally *allowed* to leave, we stayed only the barest time required for our "debriefing" and then bolted away to dinner, eager to distract ourselves from what we had seen and felt and done.

It had begun suddenly. One of our teacher friends had wordlessly walked up to each of us in turn and slapped a label of a peculiar symbol on our shirt.

Next, the teachers moved among us, whispering instructions to a few students. Those with similar symbols instinctively began to cluster together; when I found that I had subconsciously moved to join my "fellows", I learned that we had been told nothing and were completely in the dark about what was going on.

We were then wordlessly herded onto a big flat sheet of paper, and told that that paper represented our town, and that each group represented a collective that had its own land and money to do with as they pleased.

As we instinctively began to check out the surroundings and those in the other groups, we realized that certain groups were far better off than others. One group possessed the vast majority of land of the town and had nearly limitless monetary resources.

Then we were left alone and allowed to develop our lives and our section of town as we saw fit.

Things began to go downhill quickly. We were introduced to the police, who threw members of our group into jail when they accidentally trespassed by stepping onto others' land.

Members from the larger majority group were almost never punished, and as time ran on, and as they began to realize their degree of power over the others, dark changes began to take place within those I had thought to be my friends. As a "joke", they built walls confining the minority groups into their respective areas, and then as a "humorous afterthought", decided to petition the city board to allow them to annex parts of the others' land – which included ours.

Our attempts to protest were met with laughter and annoyance and even downright cruelty. More than one of our group members was sent to prison for "disrespecting" a police officer or member of the city board, and then later, after the majority group was granted permission to take over portions of our territory, we lost over half our group to the jail simply because it proved impossibly for us to fit on our tiny lot of land.

We tried joking with our "friends" in the minority group, cracking jokes about how we were being slowly squashed like sardines. Our friends, showing a last veneer of their humanity, at least had the decency to appear slightly self-conscious as they laughed.

When the activity ended, I could've counted the number of minority persons left on the town on my hands. I was one of the ten, out of a group that had been nearly thirty.

The majority group's territory, which had expanded to cover all but a few square feet of the town, had been rimmed with "guard towers" and "machine gun emplacements". Using money that had been confiscated from my group and others, "pools" and "country clubs" had been built.

Our area of the map boasted but a single apartment and a restaurant.

In the far corner of the majority group's lands were buildings with German names. A friend in our group who spoke German informed us that the buildings were named after prominent structures from Nazi headquarters and concentration camps of World War II.

When asked whether we had enjoyed the activity, all of us in the minority group replied NO. the first 15 minutes had been puzzlement. The next 45 had been interesting. The last half-hour had been boring, annoying and uncomfortable.

Those in the majority group had nothing to complain about, save what weighed on their consciences. They had passed the time building guard towers and playing tic-tac-toe while we stood like sardines.

Discrimination, racism and hatred are horrible things. But they occur very easily, even in the hearts of good, decent people. The problem lies within us, not without, and can only be solved through diligent education, introspection and patience.

Having known what it's like to be discriminated against for only ninety minutes has given me a new outlook on life. If I didn't before, I will always forevermore treat others as I would like to be treated.

Because I've known a tiny glimpse into what it's like to be discriminated against. And it's a terrible thing.

Rock Bridge High School
12th Grade, JB Cone

No Shirt, No Shoes, No Equality
By Ben Turner

It was a beautiful afternoon you see,
Here I was, feeling light, airy and free.
I walked into the diner, blissfully unaware
That embarrassment and discrimination lay in there.
I purchased a Twinkie, that's all
But it would prove my social downfall.
I sat down at the counter, the Twinkie at my side
When a waitress came up and shattered my pride.
Two simple words, "Get out!"
Hence I was in the alley, with naught to do but pout.
It was so simple, an everyday luxury at best
To have privileges and to sit with the rest.
I was denied my freedom, my right, my pride
Just so I wouldn't have white people at my side.
They were too good, too smug
To see the trouble they would cause, the thugs.
It was a simple thing, that stool
But soon it multiplied, segregation at the pool.
It came to school, it came to fountains.
The divide separated us like mountains.
The Constitution promised unalienable rights
But try as we did, with all our mights
We couldn't make the white men see
That we are all together, black and white, a family.

West Junior High School
8th Grade, Mrs. Botkin

It Was Just a Seat
By Rachael Starr

Have you ever been denied a seat because of the color of your skin? Well, I have. Most people think only black people are denied, but that's not really true. I am white and many times I have been denied. Racism can happen to anyone, anywhere, at any time.

It all happened simply over a seat. I went to a mainly colored school and at lunch one day, sat down with some of my colored friends. A girl got up and told me to get my white self out of there. When I first heard that I was stunned and froze, then I decided to ignore her.

I just sat there for a minute and then I started talking to some of the other girls. At first, they didn't know whether to talk to me or ignore me and gang up, and then we slowly began a conversation.

The girl looked around, now being ignored, and sat down. She eventually gave in and started talking to me. That just shows that racism can happen to anyone. It doesn't matter how big or small the person, they all will eventually give in if you have the right attitude. You just have to bring them to the light, that's all. If you slowly help others, then eventually you can change the world.

Smithton Middle School
6th Grade, Ms. McCarty

My Religion
By Belquis Elhadi

Have you ever experienced those sideway glances that make you question "Do I belong here?" I have. My religion is what defines me and it hurts to see that people can't accept that. I am an American Muslim and ever since September 11th, I have gotten these looks almost every day.

One night I couldn't sleep, so I got out of bed in search of my parents. I finally found them; they were in my dad's room watching TV. When I looked over to where my mom was, I saw streaks from where her tears had been coming down.

"Mama, what's wrong?" I asked.

"Just go back to sleep," she said. The next day I came back to school with my head full of questions. What had happened? Why was my mom crying? Little did I know that these questions would soon be answered. My teacher explained it all. I didn't understand it, but I was pretty sure the rest of the other class didn't either. But I had a feeling that from that day on I would be treated differently. I was right. The year after, my two friends came up to me and said "We don't want to be friends anymore."

"Why not?" I asked.

"Because you're Muslim."

In fifth grade I started to wear a hijab to represent that I was a Muslim girl. Now that I wear it all the time, people see me and give me the "hairy eyeball", or evil look. It brings me down even on my very best days. I feel like people can't accept the fact that I'm different from them. But I just accept it and get on with whatever I'm doing.

Martin Luther King, Jr. has a big impact on me and on the African-American people. He helped free the black people and brought equality and justice to them. I just hope hat one day someone will stand up for the rights of everyone, every color, race and religion. And hey, maybe that person will be me!

Islamic School of Columbia
(grade unknown) Najwa Rashidi

Make a Difference
By Tahura Lodhi

On August 28, 1963, during a rally, Martin Luther King delivered his famous “I Have a Dream” speech. The rally was to protest black American’s who were denied their rights. I have been in a situation where a black American was denied his rights and I was lucky enough to be able to give him back some rights and even earn him some extras.

I was in second grade and there was a new kid in our class. His name was Jake and he was nice, but he was quiet and shy. This kid was African-American. We decided to play “Red Rover”. Jake turned out to be on my line. There was an awkward moment when no one wanted to hold Jake’s hand. That made me feel really angry. How could they do this to him? I could see he was beginning to feel uncomfortable, so I held his hand and my friend grabbed his other hand. Now we had two lines formed. The first person to try and break through Jake’s and my hands was a guy named John. He was pretty big so he usually broke the hands apart. When he tried Jake’s hand and my hand however, he could not get through. It came as a surprise to most, but I knew Jake would keep strong. The others had thought that just because he was African-American he couldn’t play as well or that he would cheat. After Jake was the same as everyone else. That was a day that Dr. Martin Luther King would have been proud, for his dream had come true. He had said “I have a dream that one day whites and blacks will be treated equally” and that day they were.

In conclusion, even though I was only in second grade, I felt strongly about equal rights. I made a difference in someone’s life and I believe that if you take a stand, so can you!

Gentry Middle School
6th Grade, Neal Blackburn

Staying in the Club
By Loren Archibegu

Silence has spoken for and will continue to aid minorities in their struggle for equality. For four black students in Greensboro, their silence not only modeled their commitment to getting equal treatment, but also politely demonstrated the respect that every human should be given. The simple order of their meal showed the courage and confidence they had in themselves as African-Americans. Acts of discrimination, which have been a limiting factor in our community, are an occurrence every day. People have been held accountable for their religion, gender, race, or disability which restricts their freedom. For me, being a participant in MAC Scholars has led me through this experience by the remarks of my fellow MAC Scholars. Although my experiences have not been as profound as a world-changing event, they are of equal importance in the fight for equality.

MAC Scholars is a club organized by sponsors and students to encourage minority achievements in school. This committee helps students with grades, test scores, scholarship opportunities and it prepares them for life after high school. This club looked appealing to me, and as a Hispanic, I represented one minority in my high school. I did not know that being invited to MAC Scholars would change the way I think about race.

After my first meeting as a MAC Scholar, I saw its many benefits and I felt encouraged to invite other eligible students. In doing so, I encountered racial discrimination that was not threatening, but has changed me as a person. Remarks from students such as, “You’re in MAC Scholars?” or “You’re not black” or “Why are you in it?” were made to me. I explained that MAC Scholars was a club for any minority. Surprisingly, comments from other MAC Scholars were also directed to me. For one member, I remember him saying that he had told at least two other minority students not to attend the meetings. After these comments, a few times I questioned whether or not I should continue attending the club. Then I knew that I would not let their “discomfort” exclude me. I knew that I could ignore the students that laughed at or discouraged

my attending those meetings. Many times, the sponsors refer to only African-American culture or issues inside my high school. By my decision to remain in the club, I hope to really change the way students think of MAC Scholars. It is a beneficial club that acts as an advantage for struggling students and it acts as a reward for the students who excel.

My decision, like the four African-Americans who ordered their lunch in the “reserved for Whites” seats, has changed me. No, MAC Scholars is not just for African-Americans. By not attending this club, I would have shown failure. Giving up would have made each comment to me okay. My action has made me more confident in my Hispanic culture. It has surprised and even changed the outlook of confidence for the minorities at Hickman High School.

Hickman High School
10th Grade, Mrs. Thomas

We Will Stay
By Nathalia Mello

From Washington, D.C.
To Montgomery, Alabama
We will make a
difference
We will not move from
This *seat*
We have the
same equality
Of *freedom* as
Any other United States Citizen
They *will* tell us to
move
And they *will* tell us we
Are *foolish*
To get out
To *leave*
We *will* stand our ground
And stay
put
We have our
Own beliefs
The law *will*
Be *changed*
Segregation is
gone.

West Junior High School
8th Grade, Mrs. Botkin

Bernice Johnson Reagon
By Darnell Samuels

Deep down within her eyes,
Her happy soul revealed,
Rejoicing with hope and joy,
Though in her smile she looks sad,
Knowing that she wasn't protected
The Declaration of Independence
Did not apply to her
No freedoms
No rights
No choices
With her band Sweet Honey in the Rock
She supported the Civil Rights Movement
Her voice from God
Was raised for change.

West Boulevard Elementary
5th Grade, Jonette Ford

Diversity in the Community
By Brandon Wulff

Diversity is one person or a group of people differing from another. I personally have never been in a situation when I have felt uncomfortable or not wanted. But I have witnessed many of these situations. Some of these situations have been with complete strangers and others have been with my own family. My mom's parents come from racist families and they have grown up with that and they are somewhat racist still today. My aunt's boyfriend is African-American and they have been dating for many years, they have been over to our house many times and we have spent quality time together. They will come over on New Year's and we will watch TV, eat food and just talk about stuff that's been going on in our lives, and the whole time it is very relaxed and comfortable. You can say what you want and don't have to worry about people being offended by what you say.

On Thanksgiving, my aunt, my mom's parents and my dad's parents will all come over to our house and we will watch football and eat turkey, we will laugh and have a good time. On occasion, my aunt's boyfriend will stop by to say hello and wish us all a happy Thanksgiving. The moment he walks in the door, the entire atmosphere and attitude in the house changes. My mom's parents will say hello to him and then pretend he isn't even in the house. It is obvious that he is nervous and uncomfortable with the situation. I have been around him before and he talks a lot, but when my mom's parents are there, he is really shy and doesn't say much to anyone. It is very upsetting for me to sit there and see him be uncomfortable when I know that he's a really nice guy, but he has to feel uncomfortable just because he has a different color of skin than everyone else in the house. I try to talk to him a little more than everyone else, hoping that someone will get interested in the conversation and join in and talk to him and help make him feel a little more comfortable being there. He might start talking and my mom's parents might realize that it's not fair for them to judge and not like him just because he has a different color of skin than them.

Rock Bridge High School
11th Grade, Egan/Smith

My Birthday
By Dylan Linneman

It was a perfect Saturday morning. It was also my birthday. My mom and dad always let me pick a restaurant to eat at for my birthday. But of course, I knew what I wanted. As we drove into the best place ever, I sighed, “Fazoli’s.” As I waited for my parents, I actually fell asleep. But when I went in, in the dream the cashier said “Whites only,” as I was jumping up to sit at the counter.

“What do you mean?” I said, boiling up inside.

“No blacks, only whites at the counter,” said the cashier. But that’s not fair. That was my favorite place, I said.

“Come on Dylan,” said my mom.

“No!” I shouted. “It isn’t fair.”

“Dylan, come on or we won’t get a seat at all.”

“Fine,” I shot back as we traveled to our seat. “Mom, I want to sit at the counter. It’s not fair. I’m so mad.”

“I’m sorry Dylan, we can’t.”

“Well, too bad. I’ll do it my way. No matter what happens I’ll do it. It’s not fair. What’s the difference between blacks and whites?” I said as I stomped back up to the counter. “I want to sit here!” I yelled at the cashier.

“Sorry, kid, whites only.”

“No!” I screeched. “I want to sit at the counter. It’s my birthday and I want to sit there,” I told the cashier.

“Okay, kid, I’ll only let you sit today.”

“Okay!” Yes sir, mom and dad came on and were changing seats!

“Dylan, Dylan, wake up. We’re going inside,” said my dad. Like that would happen – I’d never get a seat at the counter, thinking about my dream.

“What?” said Dad.

“Oh, nothing. Come on, I’m starving!”

Rock Bridge Elementary
5th Grade, Miss Diller

History of a New Generation
By Lori Turner

We walked in the restaurant as unwanted prey.
Knowing that things would be different after today.
Four little black dots, in a sea of angry white faces.
Clearly ready to show us where our place is.
Ignoring the sign that states “who is” only allowed.
That didn’t stop us from sitting down.
Loud shouts of our “Given Name” continued to roar through the air.
All this commotion and anger came from us sitting in these chairs.

The crowd we’ve drawn has become violent and the cops have arrived.
Our courageous sit-in lasted two hours and we are glad we survived.
Walking out in cuffs with smiles on our faces.
Knowing we made history here just by sitting down in these places.

Rock Bridge High School
11th Grade, Jodi Smith

Take a Seat for Justice
By Kelly Steinhaus

Take a seat for justice,
Sit down anywhere.
In a sit-in ***you*** decide.
Lower yourself into a chair.

Plant your bottom for equality,
Sit your rear right down.
In a sit-in you decide.
Bring peace to this town.

Join the protest,
Buy some eats,
Pull up a chair,
And take a seat.

Sit down where it's forbidden,
Tell them what you mean.
In a sit-in you decide.
Together, we will be seen.

So take a seat for justice,
And sit down anywhere.
In a sit-in you decide.
Lower yourself into a chair,
And raise your spirit high.

West Junior High School
8th Grade, Susan Botkin

Oppression: The Bigger Picture
By Justin Windett

It was individuals like Martin Luther King, Jr., Malcolm X, Rosa Parks and Gandhi who fought against one of the most powerful and prolific evils of mankind. That evil is racism. Racism is prejudice or discrimination based on race and usually stems from feelings of superiority over others of another race. It has been around for as long as mankind has inhabited this Earth. If we as a people, that is the human race, ever expect to eliminate this evil, then we must become educated about it. After all, ignorance is the cause of racism. Racism has much in common with other forms of oppression; such as sexism, homophobia, anti-Semitism, ableism and classism. By understanding oppression we can work to eliminate all of its forms.

It is of great importance that we understand exactly what causes oppression so that we may end it. The first oppression that everyone experiences is adultism. That is, the oppression of young people by any adult figure, especially their parents. Parents routinely present illogical and ignorant information to the child explained as "just the way it is." At an early age, children feel powerless and feel accustomed to accepting concepts with no support or backing. Already, the door has been opened for new forms of oppression. Confused and distressed, children are forced to succumb to fallacies. In time, the child will not hesitate to force the same ideas on others, just as their parents did to them. Those introduced to oppression early are more submissive to it than those who encounter it when they are able to make their own rational conclusions.

Most oppressors are not aware of their guilt because their beliefs have been instilled and rooted in them from an early age. They have been molded into their position as a result of an existing system. More than likely, the oppressor has a history of being oppressed. After “paying their dues” their role is manipulated as they are forced to give the same horrible treatment to others. The initial reaction from outsiders would be to shun these oppressors. However, what these people really need is attention and affection. By “reaching out” to them, we can see that they are human beings who have been molded by an oppressive society. Even mass murderers were humans!

Oftentimes, institutions are the culprits of oppression. But the most common and destructive form of oppression is internalized. This is manifested in self-hate, self-invalidations, and even attacks on one another of the oppressed group. If one hears that they are inferior enough, they may begin to believe it for themselves. Therefore, that person’s potential may never be realized because they don’t believe in themselves.

The oppression of the working class may be the root of all other forms of oppression. Classism is not just a part of society, it is society. Because of economic exploitation, there is a large, impoverished working class while an elite class reaps the benefits of these poor people. All other forms of oppression may in fact be a means of dividing the economically oppressed against each other; therefore inhibiting them from uniting against the common threat of classism.

Racism has plagued this planet long enough. The great man, Martin Luther King, Jr., brought it to the world’s attention. If we expect to eradicate racism, we must realize that each particular oppression has certain features in common with all other oppression. Through honest and diligent education we can overcome this oppressed society and live in peace and harmony with each other. Isn’t that what Martin Luther King, Jr.’s “I Have a Dream” speech was all about?

Rock Bridge High School
11th Grade, Smith/Egan

What it Means to Me to be Free
By Jordan Mills

When I was just a young lad in 1963
I didn’t realize the trouble that was coming after me
Because I was black, there were so many things that were not allowed
I protested, and tried to run with an all-white crowd.

There I was not accepted, but that was no surprise
All I needed to do was try again and reprise
This did not work for me, but I did not let down
I did not answer with violence, instead simply a frown

“When evil men plot, good men must plan.”
These words have led me to understand;
As I look back on this time in my life
I know that I must try and strive

To be like Martin Luther King Junior
And I knew my time would come sooner
Rather than later, rather than never
I shall treat his words like a lever

When in need, I will pull them out
And reconfirm any doubt
To me he is my ship’s mast
And I will always remember

“Free at last! Free at last! Thank God Almighty, we are free at last!”

West Junior High School
8th Grade, Mrs. Botkin

The Dream
By Evan Kleekamp

The creator of dream,
The protector of the weak,
Standing up for the silenced,
Calling forth the oppressed,
To stand up for their rights and beliefs.
He could see no difference
In color, in pigment,
In gender, in race,
For he knew that all man was equal,
And that they share the same face.
He denounced hatred
And he denounced separation
With words of great fury
Told of peace and love.
In the dreams he weaved
Were the hopes of the future
And the beginning of a revolution.
And bellows of let me be free came from the heart of courage
From the one and only Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

West Junior High School
8th Grade, Mrs. Botkin

The Only One
By Stephanie O’Brian

Sitting in a room where you feel unwelcome is never pleasant. It is not only intimidating, but often quite frightening and very awkward. When you are the minority, and all alone in a place full of people who are similar to one another, it’s tough. You often find your eyes focusing on the ground, with your hands clasped together and close to your body, with sweat forming at your brows and on your warming forehead. It’s not only mentally uncomfortable, but physically exhausting as well.

I know this feeling and I know it well. I have been the one in the room who was all alone. It was awful. Usually, I am one of the majority and it is once in a blue moon where I am in a room and the only white person, or the only girl, or the only Christian. Yet there is one time, I remember, when I was about 13 years old that stands out in my mind when I was the only girl, as well as the only white child.

It was a beautiful summer day in St. Louis, my family and I had been to a Cardinal’s game in the afternoon, and out to a wonderful dinner downtown. We had also done a little shopping at Union Station and it had been a marvelous day. Everyone was pretty exhausted, except me. I was ready to have some more fun, so when we went back to our hotel, I asked if I could go swimming. After a lot of begging, my parents agreed and I went to the pool which was right down the hall from my family’s suite. I walked in, and at the time, I was all alone.

I splashed around in the water and swam back and forth in laps in the pool, and did summersaults under the surface. I was really enjoying myself until I was under water and felt this weight just crash down on my back and I sprung up out of the water. An African-American teenager had cannon-balled into the pool and landed on me under the water. I looked up and saw that the pool area was filled with African-American boys, with the ages ranging from around 10 to probably 18.

I suddenly felt scared. I don’t know why, but I did. I was in a room filled with people who were different from me, people who I didn’t know. They didn’t say anything or do anything that should have made me scared, yet I was. I was alone, I could feel myself sweating in the pool, with a nauseating feeling growing within me that comes only from fear. I did not feel welcome.

For awhile, I got out of the pool and pretended to be preoccupied with my swimsuit. I didn't want to leave because I had been having fun, but then again, I didn't really want to stay and be all alone. I decided that I had been there first, so I got back in the pool. There were a lot of boys and finding room in the pool was a little difficult; however, I managed to get myself a nice little space in the corner. There, I went back to doing my summersaults underneath the water and seeing how long I could hold my breath.

I did this for quite some time, long enough for my fingers and toes to look lie prunes. After awhile, I began to realize that these boys were just having fun like I was doing, but they were having fun with one another. They appeared to be playing a game, so I asked one of those boys, who seemed to be a little younger than I was, what they were playing. He seemed perfectly nice and said that they were playing Marco-Polo. I was invited to join, so I did.

I must say, I had a lot of fun. And what began as an awkward and a little frightening experience turned into a fun one. It just took that effort to ask a question, or make some kind of communication, to break the discomfort between us.

Rock Bridge High School
12th Grade, JB Cone

Take a Seat
By Erin Heath

White frost crunching in the grass
My footsteps swaying through bitter numbness
A bottomless pit aching with hunger inside of me,
The doors were closed and cold
But the food inside is bliss.

I could see my black face in the reflection.
Overcome with warmth from the lunchroom
Not shunning from the white-skins any longer
Our ideas could turn us face-to-face with doom.
At this point,
All I could feel was doubt.

The pale ladies at the counter gave us bizarre looks.
I felt uncomfortable and oddly alone.
I wandered to find a delightful meal
With my chocolate hands
I was tightly grasping food in my right hand
And the change to give the white people profit in my left
I felt like a teddy bear in the middle of a field of snowmen.

The cashiers moved farther away with caution on their faces.
I laid my change in her silky off-white hand with a shudder.
It is far too awkward between our two races.

The calendar posted on the wall informs us that today is the day
Of February 1, 1960, a day of change.
Take a seat, take a seat, that was the main plan
Just take a seat in that "*black-forbidden*' land
The territory of whites
It's not that we think ourselves higher,
To say we are not equal
Would be making myself a liar,
But why must black be forced to stand,
Stand by the vacant lunch counters because of the skin they were born with?

The waitress in uniform asked us to stand
I flooded myself with anxiety
My three “Brothers” and I stayed put with a calm hand.
No need for violence
I gently explained to her politely
Though feeling **fear** in my head.
“We’ve bought your items and paid with correct change,
as have the others. We should be allowed to ***take a seat.”***

We all wanted to take a stand, let our intelligence be heard
Let our ideas be learned,
I yearned to scream and let out my frustrations.
I could never have done that, though.
So I spoke calmly and told of how we live in common ground
Nobody owns anything but themselves and their rights
So where are ours?
We don’t want to be their superior but we want to be
Their acquaintances, friends, and equals.
Is it unreasonable to ask for a seat after giving towards your causes?

With that said, I *took a seat.*

We spoke peacefully and used no violence.
Maybe it was inequality we were beginning to beat.
Now everyday I am informed of similar protests across the country.

People can see now the injustice of discrimination and segregation
I’ve seen that lunch counter downtown
In Greensboro from time to time
There’s a message sent to my body
And I fill up with a sense of pride.
My walk gets a little taller, and my strides a little longer
When the frost covers the grass
And each step crunches underneath my black skinned feet.

West Junior High School
8th Grade, Ms. Botkin

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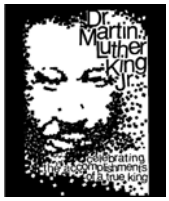

Columbia Values Diversity Celebration
Planning Committee Members
Myra Drummond-Lewis, Monica Naylor
Lee Radtke, and Katie Young