

“[When I was] a young child, my mother would repeatedly refer to me as an endangered species. What did she mean by this? I was going to grow up to be an intelligent, successful, and respectful Black man. The percentage of Black men in jail is considerably higher than the percentage of Black men in institutions of higher education. So she called me an endangered species because there are not that many intelligent, successful, and respectful Black men left in our community.”

– excerpted from “An Endangered Species,” by *Mychael Fields*, Southfield Lathrup High School '07

“You may see her as the quiet Asian, but don't see her too quickly, she might surprise you.”

– *Nou Lee*, Osborn High School '07

My Dreams ARE NOT A SECRET



Teenagers in Metropolitan Detroit Speak Out

My Dreams
ARE NOT A SECRET

Teenagers in Metropolitan Detroit Speak Out

DEDICATION

*This book is dedicated to young people who speak their minds,
even if their voice shakes.*

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You can learn more about Youth Dialogues on Race and Ethnicity
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Youth Dialogues on Race and Ethnicity
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Check out What Kids Can Do, Inc. and Next Generation Press
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SILENCE IS POLITICAL. When young people—who are conditioned to be silent—speak for themselves, it transforms them and also the communities of which they are part. If only a fraction of young people in the world were willing to do so, the changes would be profound.

This book is written by thirteen young people of diverse backgrounds who live in and around Detroit, the nation's most segregated metropolitan area. These writers are young people of African, Asian, European, Middle Eastern, and Latin American descent.

In these pages, they write about their own cultures, racism, sexism, freedom, learning, the past and the future. They explore growing up in segregated social worlds and living on the borders of change. In particular, they examine how their lives and visions of social justice form a bridge. The mission of this anthology is to reach across the racial and ethnic boundaries and build bridges with other youth.

Each of the writers also participates in Youth Dialogues on Race and Ethnicity in Metropolitan Detroit. In this program, they discuss their own identities, their similarities and differences, and policy issues about which they are passionate. They take a metropolitan tour, live and work together in a residential retreat, and plan action projects to create change. The program enables them to break their silence, use their voices in a new community, and discuss ideas they usually keep to themselves. In so doing, they grow into leaders.

The Detroit Youth Writers Project emerged from a partnership between the Youth Dialogues on Race and Ethnicity in Metropolitan Detroit and What Kids Can Do / Next Generation Press.

Introduction

Youth Dialogues on Race and Ethnicity in Metropolitan Detroit is a collaboration of the Skillman Foundation and the University of Michigan, whose financial support made this work possible.

We also acknowledge Blue Cross Blue Shield of Michigan for support of this publication.

Barbara Cervone of What Kids Can Do (WKCD) saw the promise of this work from the outset. Abe Louise Young, a writer and poet who works with WKCD, designed and facilitated the writing workshop, while U. of Michigan graduate students Ciara Smalls and D'Anne Witkowski coached the youth during the revision process.

Roger Fisher, Joanne Waszczak, Brandon Colbert, and Katie Richards-Schuster are Youth Dialogues group leaders who together feel the excitement as we guide this work. These writers are exceptional. If their words motivate others to add to the writing wherever they are, our purpose will be fulfilled.

Barry Checkoway
University of Michigan

AT 8:30 ON A WINDY SATURDAY MORNING in Michigan, a circle of teenagers from across the Detroit area convened. They were half an hour early, and sleepy, but ready. Some had worked until the wee hours the night before; some would head to jobs after the all-day workshop. But they were there, awake and half an hour early.

Hmong, African-American, Hispanic, white and multiracial youth – public school students, all – sat around a large wooden table. They were there to write and read their words aloud – to listen to each other and themselves.

The graduate student assistants and I had come prepared with poems from many cultural traditions, with lesson plans and discussion questions. But none of those educational maneuvers were appropriate. Only one thing was called for: to ask the young people what the issues were; to write them on a board everyone could see; and to say: Go, write, now. Yes!

Writing together has a strange magic. It is ceremony and solitude at once. Wounds we never knew we had can heal. Wisdom we did not know we had can surface. People we saw in simple stereotypes will reveal their inner conflicts, and we will empathize.

In a city like Detroit – the most racially segregated urban area in America – opportunities for direct, honest communication about racial identity are so rare as to be outrageous, precious.

It was a great honor to be with these young people as they spent the weekend formalizing their courage as truth-tellers. May you be inspired by their words, and even more inspired by their commitments to action.

For all our relations,
Abe Louise Young
What Kids Can Do, Inc / Next Generation Press

Acknowledgments

Youth Dialogues on Race and Ethnicity in Metropolitan Detroit is a collaboration of the Skillman Foundation and the University of Michigan.

Next Generation Press honors the power of youth as social documenters and knowledge creators. It works with youth to create powerful publications that represent the truths of their lives.

Carol Goss and Tonya Allen of the Skillman Foundation and Lester Monts at the University of Michigan made this book possible. The Blue Cross Blue Shield of Michigan provided support for printing and publication.

Roger Fisher, Joanne Waszczak, Brandon Colbert, and Katie Richards-Schuster, all Youth Dialogues group leaders, worked together to guide this remarkable writing group.

An Endangered Species

MYCHAEL FIELDS

AS A YOUNG CHILD, my mother would repeatedly refer to me as an endangered species. What did she actually mean by this? I was never completely sure but I figured it held a metaphorical meaning.

My mom finally explained its significance to me later on in my life. She stated that I was going to be an endangered species because I was going to grow up to be an intelligent, successful, and respectful Black man. In today's society, the percentage of Black men in jail is considerably higher than the percentage of Black men in institutions of higher education. So by analyzing the scenario, I was able to understand that she called me an endangered species because there are not that many intelligent, successful, and respectful Black men left in our community.

It's terrible that Black men have earned such a horrific reputation, but I blame it on the lack of respectable role models. However, don't hold the latest star athlete or rapper accountable for this tragedy; rather criticize the lack of Black fathers being present within the household.

Lost, unguided, and undirected are the adjectives that truly represent our young Black generation of men. Many people feel as if young Black men are unable to be helped at this point in time. One may ask how we can solve this situation. Well it begins with Black fathers being present. As the person that helped create this young being, it is his duty to be around and serve as a positive role model to his boys. This is why I always have, and always will, look upon my father as the person to model myself after.

Born as an immature, helpless, young, ghetto boy, my father Christopher Fields grew into the epitome of what a Black father should be. Born as a hardened and rough city boy, my father Christopher Fields became a loving and positive presence in my family. If it takes working 12-hour shifts, cleaning the house and cooking dinner, or simply talking to me about life, my father

is what a Black man should be. Christopher Fields always says that he will never leave his boys because he never wants us to grow up like he did. But what makes him different from any other man is his ability to change me as a person without him knowing it. He shaped his boys into strong, responsible men, still, without knowing it. My ability to simply look upon him for guidance and security has helped me to be the person I am today.

“Walk with your chest out.”

“Stand tall.”

“Look me in my eye and firmly shake my hand.”

These few commands throughout my childhood served as building blocks to mold me into the current Mychael Fields. As a current college student at the University of Michigan, my capability to present myself in a strong yet professional manner has allowed me to increasingly progress in maturity. This quality is something that I directly attribute to the guidance performed by my father. Having a strong father figure in my life, however, is something that I definitely do not take for granted. I have been exceedingly blessed, thus I feel as if it is my duty to give back to others.

Upon obtaining a professional position as a physician in the future, I aspire to create a group that provides guidance to young men. I want to use the knowledge I have attained from my father in order to aid in the development of numerous young men, which will ultimately enhance our community.

Throughout the Black community, it is true that to be a man, one must see a man. For me to see my father is something that will forever make me an endangered species.

She Is Indeed an Asian, But Who Is She?

NOU LEE

SHE'S THE ONE WHO GREW UP IN A LARGE FAMILY, with parents who barely speak English. She's not Chinese, Japanese, or Korean. She's the one who grew up under the regulations of a Hmong household. She is a 17-year-old girl who is trapped in between her generation and her parents'. She goes to school, studies hard, and loves to have fun. Her parents want their daughter to only focus on education, how to cook and clean, and marriage.

Her parents often tell her to translate for them. With parents who barely speak English, it becomes a problem. Just because she knows how to speak her language doesn't mean that translating English to Hmong is easy. She stutters or explains it to the extent that she can, but they can't comprehend it.

Her family lacks communication. Most of the time the conversation leads into a big argument. So being with her friends makes her feel at ease. It makes her feel like herself and be herself. But she makes sure to watch what she does in order not to ruin her or her parents' reputations.

She can't go anywhere with her friends—not even with her blood brothers. The only chance for Mai to be with her friends is to skip class. Since she has a part-time job she often makes up the excuse that she is going out to eat, but in actuality, she hangs out with her friends.

You may see her as the quiet Asian, but don't see her too quickly; she might surprise you. She's the one who would walk around her peers with a personality similar to a boy's. She finds chocolate as her savior on a horrible day. She's the one who doesn't break down for people to see, but will silently weep in her room. She loves to read because it takes her imagination exploring. She likes to observe her surroundings and help her peers by listening.

She is someone who will walk out of life being a successful woman, helping others in need. She's the one who is trapped in a lady's body but with a kid's heart. She loves to do things that she can't do. That she is me.

Can You See Me?

A COLLABORATIVE POEM BY THE DETROIT YOUTH WRITERS

Don't call me mojada (wetback), because I am
an educated person of honesty.

Don't call me a thug, or incompetent.

Don't call me stupid.

Don't call me a nigga, nigger, jungle-baby, darkie, monkey,
negro, colored, rapper, boy, atheist, gay, homo.

Don't call me a child. Not even as in, "Oh child, please..."

Don't call me stupid. Don't call me a dumb blond, a b****,
a skank . . . and don't call me after 9 pm
or my parents will get really mad.

Don't call me "Baby," and don't call me "Sexy."
That makes me feel disgusting.

Don't call me when I'm isolating myself.

Don't call me a terrorist when you don't know me;
I might look tan and have a beard,
but don't tell me, "Look what your uncle did."

Can you see my struggle?

It hurts me when someone doesn't believe
in me or themselves.

Can you see my inner beauty?

It hurts me when I try to make people like me.

Can you see my devotion to the rights of all people?

It hurts me when I have something important to say
but I don't say it.

Can you see my beauty even when I'm scared?

Can you see how much love I have to give?

Do you see how strong I am even when I'm nervous?

It hurts me when people say goodbye to me.

It hurts me when people use the N-word, smoke,
abuse women, and when people die for no reason.

It hurts me when police brutality occurs in urban neighborhoods.

It hurts me when adults place a stereotype on the youth:
that they are all young, dumb, and lack respect and ambition.

This can seriously hinder a perfectly ambitious kid's attitude.

Can you see my crooked teeth?

Or the scar over my eyebrow?

Can you see my elegant raiment and unique swag?

Can you see my birthmark, sarcasm,
attitude, intelligence, underwear?

Can you see my faith, talents, love, thoughts, dreams, or insecurities?

A Real Feminist

SARAH YU

“Why did the woman cross the road?”

“That’s not the point; why did she leave the kitchen?”

In a random conversation, Aaron told me that I was sexist.

“Me? Sexist? Impossible! You’re talking to the girl who’s a self-declared feminist, a person who prides herself in saying that she wants social equality for both men and women! . . . Okay, maybe I’m slightly sexist.”

But I do support equality of the sexes. I call myself a feminist because there’s a lack of a better term for a person who subscribes to the aforementioned belief, not because I’m a radical, bra-burning hippie who has unresolved contempt for the male-dominated society that has brought centuries of oppression her fellow sisters have faced.

I just want to be able to say that women are just as capable as men (if not more) and not be laughed at in the face for it. Is that so hard in a society where the Speaker of the House, the Secretary of State, and the most powerful person in the entertainment industry are all female? The whole idea that female is the inferior sex is certainly not reinforced by the statistic that there are more women enrolled in college than men, and one cannot doubt why when one looks at a typical high school setting: student council, student congress, National Honor Society, and many other clubs are composed of primarily young women in leadership positions.

“Women are just as capable as men.” I can live with the possibility that others don’t believe this statement (those male chauvinist pigs) because I have statistics and evidence to back up my beliefs. What I have a difficult time reconciling are the romantic preconceptions that I’ve lived with my entire life and my feminist principles of independence and self-reliance. In other words, my romantic ideals and my realistic actions are duking it out, and I feel like a major hypocrite.



Now, I can blame Disney for creating happily-ever-after movies about princes rescuing princesses and then marketing them in such a genius way, but I’ve always been optimistic when thinking about love and finding that special someone. He would be tall and handsome, with strong arms and wide shoulders to protect me from danger. Above all, he would be a perfect gentleman. Chivalry may be dying, but it’s not completely dead (yet). My romantic side can’t help but sigh when guys hold doors open for girls, stand up when a woman graces the room with her presence, or walk on the farthest side of the street when with a woman. I swoon when a guy gives a girl his jacket because she’s cold, rescues her from danger, or duels to defend her honor. Is it so bad to want men to do these things for women? Aaron told me that I’m being sexist towards men because I have these expectations.

It’s not that I’ll shun all guys who don’t act “gentlemanly”; it’s because those are nice gestures to remind us that there are still people in this cynical and depressing world that put others before themselves. Besides, there are some universal manners that I believe everyone should have, regardless of sex, such as holding the doors open for people walking behind. It’s just that I’m more

of a traditionalist when it comes to relationships with the opposite sex. I would very much prefer the guy to make the first move, propose, and protect.

Although I want my very own knight in shining armor, I refuse to be the traditional damsel in distress. After a century of fighting for equal rights, women finally have at least semi-equal opportunities that can put us on the same playing field as men. Even though our political and economic power is not as strong when compared to men's, we have considerable influence over important issues. A strong, independent woman is admirable. Her happiness does not depend on a man, and if she is in a relationship, she is not the clingy, jealous type. A modern woman is emotionally, financially, and politically independent. Men don't choose for the modern woman; she, in her own right, is a capable human being who is able to act and think for herself.

I look up to this conception of the modern woman and I strive to be one. I am a self-reliant, strong human being who does not depend on others for my happiness. I've proved to myself and others that I am just as smart and have just as much ability as the smartest man. Yet deep down inside, I am still waiting for my prince. He doesn't necessarily have to save me – he can be there just to reassure me that all women can find their dream guy. It's okay to want to be protected from harm. Ever since infancy, we seek the warmth and comfort of other human beings because we like security.

I've realized that it's okay to have conceptions of the ideal relationship as long as I keep in mind the realities of living in the 21st century. Shows like *Grey's Anatomy* and *Ally McBeal* exaggerate the insecurity of women. They make us out to be over-dependent girlfriends who, despite intelligence and natural beauty, are still unconfident that we would be able to change the world. While my views may not seem to make sense to anyone else, they ring clear and true to me. I am not afraid to argue for my beliefs, to have a backbone, to express my opinions. In essence, that's what a true feminist is.

My Girlfriend

DEVIN POLASKI

HIGH SCHOOL RELATIONSHIPS are often looked upon with a lack of seriousness. This is expected, since the relationships are often short-lived, and are meant for individuals to explore and learn about finding what kind of person they would enjoy being with in an intimate relationship.

My relationship with my girlfriend, however, is very unique. It has been in existence for almost four years now, ever since freshman year of high school. It feels as deep and mature as that of a happily married couple. Some might say that we are too young to know that, or that a lot of people young and in love feel the same way.

All of that may be true, but our love for each other continues to grow. We have taught each other a great deal about who we are through our relationship and through the countless experiences we've shared together. We accept everything about the other, both the good and the bad. We know where we stand with each other now, we know each other's past, and we want our future to be together.

When we have a disagreement or hurt each other's feelings, we are open and listen to absolutely everything the other has to say. Our ability to understand the other has always been something that we're proud of. We've realized that our relationship, like marriage, is something that we constantly have to work towards. We support each other to the fullest. When she falls, she knows I'll be there to catch her, and the same applies to me. We never feel insecure about having feelings for someone else; we are assured in our feelings for each other and no one else. I take care of her, and she takes care of me.

I am blessed to have someone as amazing as her come into my life, and for her to appear so early. We have been able to build a relationship so solid that it is sometimes hard to believe. No relationships are perfect, ours included, but I say as sincerely and maturely as possible: my relationship with Noelle is as nearly perfect as I can imagine.

Memories

BY CHONG LOR

1. | *Belle Isle*

Belle Isle, Detroit brings back memories. The family was perfectly fine. Everything was perfect. Five years later, my mother had a brain tumor and was blind. Then my siblings and I felt very useless and worthless not being able to translate or help my father in the hospital. The language barrier was a problem. These were the struggles in my life that make me get up on my two feet and be helpful. My childhood wasn't so good. Always seeing my mother in the hospital, and not knowing what to do....

2. | *Detroit Asian Youth Project*

Chonburi Xiong, a Hmong 18-year-old teenager, died from 27 shots from the police. That morning the police came in without a search warrant and shot Xiong 27 times. Supposedly, Xiong was asleep.

Twenty-seven times is too much. We wanted to demand "justice." As a group, Detroit Asian Youth Project, we stood and organized a memorial event for Xiong. We performed workshops promoting awareness about police brutality. Now, with the youth to facilitate demonstrations and language translations, we still fight with the family for justice.

I feel proud, helpful, and comfortable that I am able to accomplish so much helping with the language barrier and connecting to the Hmong community. I'm a leader!

3. | *I Am from Laughter*

I am from mixed match rugs beneath my feet to colorful sofas and one crowded room.

I am from riding Toyotas from Waltham to Hoover, looking out in despair, breathing in air.

I am from fresh pork with green veggies to candies and cookies.

I am from laughter to pictures to the 13th of every month.

My father gave me the mouth to talk.

My mother gave me the eyes and cheeks for beauty.

My sisters gave me the hand to be competitive.

My brother gave me the muscle for safety.

My boyfriend gave me the moves that will make you lose.

My friends gave me the backbone to stand up.

My haters gave me the feet to keep walking.

My teachers gave me the brain to be smart.

Walk Across Me

JACQUELINE ROBINSON

WALK ACROSS ME. I may only be 5'4" but walking across my bridge can take you miles away from where you are. Each of my limbs connects worlds that would most likely never cross each other. My feet represent Home and Youth Dialogues. They have become the two things I stand on. The two things that keep me grounded. My hands hold on to both Detroit and Southfield. Both of them represent a part of my heritage that I do not want to let go. All of these things weigh me down. Some weigh heavier than others, but if I were to stumble or lose my grip, those four worlds may never learn from each other. Walk across me. Each part of me tells a story. Some of struggles and others of triumph, but all of them represent something so much bigger than I am. Stories of racism, sexism, and blatant hate.

Home came first. My parents never really accepted others' cultures. They were not comfortable with change. I was always their little activist. I was the one who enjoyed change. I learned a lot of things at home. Even though my parents and I are often at odds, they taught me a great deal about life in general. It's sad because, at times, they taught me how ignorant the world could be. "White people are crazy!" my mom still says to this day. "They are the only ones who can go into the building and shoot everyone. See, Blacks, they only kill the person that they are mad at." I have to admit that, at the time, her words were amusing. Now I know that her words do not help the struggle between those two different cultures.

As a child I remember walking the streets of downtown Detroit with my grandfather. The huge buildings seemed as though they would tumble over onto me. Detroit is a beautiful place. I learned so much just by walking with him. He would tell me old stories about the buildings that we would pass by. He was so knowledgeable because he had been a UPS truck driver downtown. He was eager to tell the history of Detroit. My Papa was from

Arkansas. He came to Detroit in the 1950s. Back then Detroit was the spot, and I'd like to think that it still is. If it weren't for him I would have never known about the People Mover or Comerica Park. If it weren't for him I would have been just as ignorant as any other kid or adult. Growing up in Detroit I was not fearful or disappointed in my city. I embraced all of the cultures that I had been introduced to. He was determined to show me something magnificent. He wanted me to know more than just the neighborhood I grew up in.

My grandfather was the one part of my family that actually encouraged me to be different. He didn't mind my eccentricities: my shyness, my anxiety, my anger – he embraced them all. He didn't know that what he was doing had affected me in a very great way, but his attention was comforting. He allowed me to grow.

I believe that all anything needs is attention. If people paid more attention to Detroit we would be far better off. If people paid attention to Detroit they would see what my city has to offer and they would see all the potential in the world. Everything has potential. It's up to people to decide if they will use that potential in a positive or negative way. My grandfather saw potential in me. He saw something positive, and as a result he paid attention.

Don't we all wish for a "Promised Land?" Throughout history people have traveled hundreds of miles just to get to a place that they thought was a utopia. In Biblical days these places were based on miracles. In colonial days these places were based on religion. Today these places are based on race. For a while I didn't understand that concept. Why would people be fearful of the color of someone's skin? Why would people be fearful of their own skin color?

Some people think that when blacks move to the suburbs they are running from themselves. When we moved to Southfield we were running, but we were running towards a brighter future. A bright future is what everyone wants for themselves. Southfield offered more opportunities and, at the same time, allowed my parents to stay connected to their community. Southfield is a black suburb. Southfield was our utopia. It is the place where my parents' comfort level is at its peak.

It was scary when we first moved here. When you think of “suburbia,” you think of rich, white folks. That was not the case in Southfield. We were greeted by an array of faces. It was comforting to know that I, and we, had somebody to relate to. I immediately fit in at school, unlike back in Detroit where I was made fun of because of my light skin. Here I felt like being different was okay. That moment is important to me. To know that it is okay to be different can change the outcome of someone’s life. Being different gives you strength.

Part of my confusion came from the fact that I didn’t know what race I was. People assumed that I understood race. Even though I was living in a world where people didn’t discuss race, they ridiculed it and they ridiculed those who understood it also. I was white for the first six years of my life. My yellow skin and my cousin’s comments played tricks with my mind. I assumed that because I was the lightest in my family, had the curliest hair, and had been told so, that I was white. A rude awakening is what I had when I moved to Southfield. The white people here talked funny. The blacks here talked funny too, and there were a lot of white people here who looked like me. Just about everybody was a different color. “What’s a Chaldean?” “What! Africa is not a country?” “What’s a light skin?” All of these questions ran through my head. I had met so many different people in such a short amount of time. My head was spinning. I truly had a culture shock.



Breaking the Mold

ERIKA VIVYAN

YES, I’M A TEENAGER, but don’t look at me that way. I’m a lot more than what your silly little stereotypes might make of me. I’m not who you think I am. I’m not stupid. I’m not superficial. I’m not corrupt. I’m not careless. I am who I am, and I am here to break your mold.

Don’t look at me like I’m naïve. “Young” is not synonymous with “stupid.” Wisdom does not come simply from time, but from experiences (and if you don’t believe I’ve experienced enough, walk a mile in my shoes). So call me anything but dumb. If you need to teach me something, please don’t dismiss me as hopeless. I’m not. I want to learn. Just teach. Yes, I’m a teenager, but my mind is always open.

Don’t look at me like I’m a fake. Just because I try to “fit in” with my peers doesn’t mean I’m trying to be something I’m not. I’m not like the others who put their friends down, and I don’t strive to be the “leader of the pack.” I don’t judge a person by their looks. I could care less about social status or wealth. So call me anything but a snob. I’m not stuck up, and I’m not superficial. I am who I am, and I try my best to not let anything else get in the way of that. Yes, I’m a teenager, but this is no façade.

Don’t look at me like I’m corrupt. Just because the people around me make some bad decisions doesn’t mean that I will follow them. It’s true that the people you spend time with most can affect you in many ways, but there are certain decisions I will always make on my own. I don’t smoke and I don’t drink. I won’t steal, cheat, or tell a lie. Fighting and backstabbing just aren’t fun to me. So call me anything but weak. My morals and my beliefs will stand up to almost anything. (I say almost because no one is perfect, and yes, I’m a teenager, but I’m trying my best to be a good person.)

Don’t look at me like I don’t care. I’m not blind to the fact that the world is quickly becoming a place of fear and doubt, but I am one who is willing to

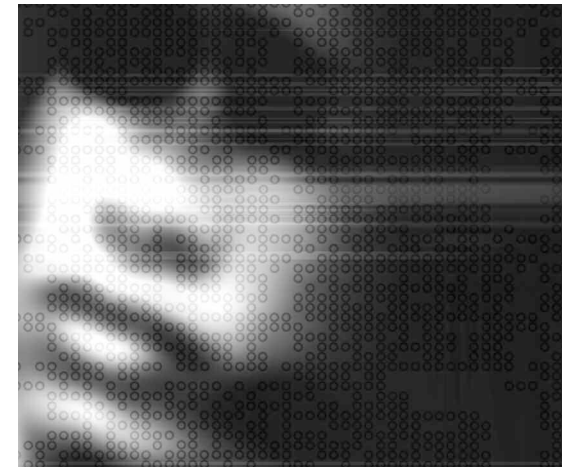
change all that. The media needs to be kept under control, and people's minds need to be changed. Everyone could use a little reality check and some education on the issues around us. I'm working right now for social change to better our society. So call me anything but careless. I will be a leader in the changes I want to see, because I will have to deal with the consequences of the actions of my peers.

Whether you believe all this is up to you, but I'm telling you that there are millions of people out there, just like me, breaking your mold. We will be heard, and if you won't listen, we will get frustrated, but we won't give up. Every day, teenagers are trying to break free of the stereotypes placed upon us. We are not all the same. We are the next generation, and we will change your mind, if you give us the chance.

We are here to lead the world in the direction we want it led: towards an inevitable change for the better. As we grow older (and this too is inevitable), we all want to see certain things melt away. Stereotypes are just one of these obstacles. So I'm telling you that, in time, you will see who I am. Yes, I'm a teenager, but I am also a person, just like you.

The African American Role Model

RYAN NELOMS



I BELIEVE THE AFRICAN AMERICAN ROLE MODEL has become a tainted, unreal, grotesque image. Blacks have gone from striving to becoming intelligent innovators and entrepreneurs, to glorifying pimps, drug dealers, and rappers with very little substance and content to their lyrics. This is a problem that has affected my family and friends head on.

A good example of how negative role models have impacted today's society is the different paths my cousin and I have chosen. My cousin and I have basically been like brothers our whole lives. I always wanted to be an entrepreneur while he wanted to become a successful lawyer, but somewhere along our path to achievement his dreams got deferred because of the influence of negative role models in his life.

Hip Hop was and is a tremendous influence in both of our lives, but our taste in rappers was always different. I was into the more positive conscious rap with a meaning, while he enjoyed songs that focused on selling drugs,

stealing, getting high, and other topics that are obstacles to actually becoming successful in life. The taste of music that appealed to my cousin poisoned him and caused him to lose his dreams and aspirations of becoming the next Johnny Cochran. The music he listened to caused him to lose hope, and since he had no other male role model besides the rappers he looked up to, he became consumed with the fast-paced street life.

My cousin attended college for one semester and quickly dropped out to sell drugs because he was seeing no gratification. On the streets he instantly achieved gratification. At this point in his life he does not understand the meaning of delayed satisfaction. He wants to achieve success fast, but just as fast as he achieves that success, the faster it will diminish. He has chosen a life of anguish that will consist of him constantly looking behind him and watching his every step.

As I got older I realized that I had to approach life from a realistic viewpoint. I understood that rappers were not doing the illegal things that they were writing about—it was just entertainment. Because of the wisdom I had, I made a legitimate plan to finish college and go into business for myself. My journey to success is not a fast one, but it will last longer. I will not have to worry about my safety from day to day or be harassed by cops. I hope that my life decision will motivate young African American men and women, and kill this image of a beast that has become a role model for us.

A Smell I Love

A COLLABORATIVE POEM BY THE DETROIT YOUTH WRITERS

In my neighborhood there are old people, fresh-cut grass,
well-lit streets, deer, nice houses—
mainly African Americans with expensive cars.
A smell I love is Southern magnolia flowers,
their tart lemony sweetness,
as precise as the sting of a bee.

In my neighborhood you can find beautiful houses
and a mixture between Blacks and Arabs.
You can also find the sound of gunshots at night
and emergency sirens piercing the air.

A smell I love is my dog's breath. It comforts me.
In my neighborhood many kids claim there is nothing to do,
when in reality there are wonderful opportunities all around them.
In my neighborhood a murderer was found hiding
in a shed on my street.
That's what it took for a lot of us
to come out of our houses and meet each other.

Once, our babysitter was accused
of kidnapping when he walked a baby stroller
down the sidewalk, because he was a black male,
and the baby was white.

Smells that I love are AXE, Calvin Klein, and baby lotion.
In my neighborhood, it's ghetto, diverse, and loud.
In my neighborhood there is nothing really to do
but hang with your friends—
that's why I need a job.

Smells I love are gasoline at the gas station,
people drying clothes, fresh flowers, cinnamon, cherries,
Bed, Bath, & Beyond, and chocolate chip cookies.
In my neighborhood, everyone is trying to leave.

A smell I love is John Paul cologne and a fresh pair of sneakers.
A smell I love is my mama's pound cake.
A smell I love is the scent of my girlfriend.

In my neighborhood there is a man that goes around selling
paletas and hellados.

In my neighborhood everything is very peaceful.
The only sounds I hear are the birds chirping,
and sometimes our neighbor's baby crying.
A smell I love is warm vanilla sugar.

Clairborn

DEVIN POLASKI

MY TOWN OF ST. CLAIR IS 97 PERCENT CAUCASIAN. Its inhabitants hardly ever think seriously about race. In a way, why should they? Everyone around them is one race. Everyone they know is one color. Now, of course, this is a bit of an over-generalization; but when it comes down to it, the people of St. Clair are only exposed to people of other racial backgrounds from TV, movies, the radio, and the media in general.

This, of course, is a recipe for disaster. The media is plagued with endless stereotypes and misrepresentations of other races, which, in turn, poisons the minds of the viewers. But ask yourself this: how can they avoid it? How can they know otherwise? There are no people of different ethnic backgrounds to compare the stereotype to the reality. There's virtually no diversity, so that means there's no need to be racially sensitive.

In my opinion, you can't really blame the people of St. Clair, or any town like it, for being racially insensitive. Even I wouldn't have known one way from the other if it weren't for Youth Dialogues. I was sheltered, segregated, uninformed, blind, and deaf. Without that activating force, I would be the same as everyone else in my town.

An hour's drive and I'm in Detroit. I'm not alone; I'm with some close friends and acquaintances from my home in St. Clair. Not that I necessarily need them to feel safe; I'm more curious and excited than I am nervous, but it's still nice that they're by my side. The look on their faces, their wide eyes staring at the city, their half-smiling, half-uncertain expression, lets me know they feel the same way I do.

The new experience we're about to dive into is called Youth Dialogues, a program that provides different groups of teens of varying racial backgrounds the chance to openly discuss problems and issues that are affecting them:

segregation, discrimination, and racism. These discussions are not debates or arguments or lectures. They're dialogues: positive, open, honest, and safe discussions.

My friends and I had no idea that once we entered the Detroit Center, the main base of operations for Youth Dialogues, we were about to transform into a rare breed of racially conscious bridge-makers. We were about to be awakened to a whole new world, one we didn't even know existed.

A program like Youth Dialogues isn't for everyone. It's for the open-armed, the energetic, and the hopeful: the Youth. We, my friends and I, marching into the Detroit Center, were just a few of the movers and shapers. Upon walking in we saw people of many different backgrounds together, a major contrast from the familiar all-white crowd we were used to at our school. We weren't intimidated necessarily, but we weren't social butterflies at first either.

We soon met with the group from Dearborn, an all Arab-American group, the group we'd be meeting with once a week for eight weeks. We were quiet and said hardly anything to each other. No one was sure how this was going to turn out. I can guarantee none of us expected how everything turned out in the end.

And so the weeks went on and the dialogues began. The Dearborn group related stories that intrigued and interested us from the St. Clair group. At the same time we related how contrasted our lives are in comparison, and how genuinely curious we were to hear the other side.

To be honest, some of the Dearborn group was skeptical of the St. Clair group. They were even more surprised. "You mean you actually want to know how we think it is?" they would say, or, "You're not just saying that?" They were a bit taken back by how we didn't believe everything we heard in the media, and actually found a lot of it to be bogus over-exaggeration and misrepresentation. They were touched by our honesty and curiosity.

On the other perspective, the St. Clair group was also a bit skeptical, but in a different way. You might say the lot of us had "white guilt." We were skeptical of whether the Dearborn group was truly going to accept and trust us.

On both sides there was surprise and enlightenment. We quickly built up a solid foundation of trust, communication, and a comfortable atmosphere. After only about three or four weeks we were all talking like old chums. We had started joking around with each other and even hanging out for a while after the dialogues sessions had ended. It felt no different than hanging out with a friend from St. Clair.

This new atmosphere of comfort between us all enabled us to move forward with the "mini-community service project" in the program. Youth Dialogues has the goal of not only providing an atmosphere for teens to dialogue about important topics, but also for teens to use what they have learned from the dialogues to create projects that will influence positive change in their communities.

I had the idea that we make a movie that had something to do with racial stereotypes. Since my best friend in the program and I are quite fluent in our filmmaking skills, and since we all were working very comfortably together, the idea of a movie seemed perfect. Eventually I developed a rough plotline and script, and everyone else developed their characters.

The movie is a satire on how the media's portrayal of racial minorities is very stereotypical, and how reality shows are completely false and silly. The plot of the movie is as follows:

A TV show director is interested in creating a reality show that focuses on different groups of different racial backgrounds coming together and showing the world that they get along as well as groups of the same racial backgrounds (which sort of parallels the Youth Dialogues program). Right when the show was about to be underway, the director's boss, named The Media (for the sake of simplicity and symbolism), decides that the show will be too boring, and thinks the ratings would be much better if the two groups were arguing and acted very stereotypical according to their race. Reluctantly, everyone agrees. However, after the first episode, the cast starts arguing both as their characters and as themselves. Despite the high ratings, the cast decides that sacrificing a good message for more money is not worth it, and the movie ends with their brainstorming to create the show that the director had in mind in the first place.

The movie includes the first episode of the reality show. Although this portion of the movie is supposed to be comical, it also contains a lot of serious messages. Everyone had a blast creating the film. The Dearborn group drove out to my house for three days in a row for the sake of the film, which was truly impressive considering the two-hour-long drive both ways. Without it, and without everyone else's great enthusiasm and dedication, the movie wouldn't have been made. Once the movie was done, however, we were eager to show it at the Youth Dialogues retreat, which unfortunately was one day away.

For about fourteen hours straight I edited the movie as fast and efficiently as I could, never stopping to cut corners or to make things easier. As a result, the end product was outstanding. I was extremely proud of all of our efforts, and considered the work to be the best I had ever done with film.

At the retreat the movie was received with high praise. Those who managed to see it found the comical section to be very funny and even were quoting many of the lines after their first viewing. Many individuals were impressed by the professionalism of the film. The main facilitator of Youth Dialogues, Barry, was also very impressed, and he even presented me the opportunity to create a documentary about how racism, segregation, and discrimination still exist in Michigan, and how Youth Dialogues is trying to bring about positive change in those sectors.

As for the St. Clair and Dearborn group, we were all very proud of the movie, and it even brought us even closer. Eventually, this led to us casting off our St. Clair and Dearborn labels, and we formed a united group: Clairborn.

My consciousness of racism, discrimination, and segregation in the world has never faded; I think about it now every day. The movie is something all of us will have forever. The entire experience had a deep impact on all our lives. It is something that can never be erased. It helped us grow and change for the better, both as a group and individually.

We must now take what we have learned and allow our communities to grow and change for the better. We must utilize the experiences from Clairborn and pour them into the places of the world that need it most. Such a task is quite difficult, sometimes seemingly impossible. But after my experiences with Clairborn, anything seems possible.

Bridging Society

GALLAL ALBANEH



THE WORLD WAS CREATED ROUND FOR MAN so he wouldn't have lines or boundaries. Ever since man has touched the ground, the lines have become thicker than countries. Bridging between places, people, and yourself can be a very challenging obstacle. Society is divided by its social problems, and we want to subtract the issues by their reciprocal.

I have found myself in the midst of all these problems. I started small and then went big; I started with my friends and then to a stranger. I told my friend about my time spent in the Youth Dialogues. We gathered ideas, and sat down and thought, until one idea stood out and we caught it. The idea was to have a school exchange. We all agreed but adults told us it was out of our range. So we set off on our own, trying to make this dream very known. The two schools involved were Edsel Ford and St. Clair High. When the two schools finally met we all were like "my, oh my."

Five-on-five was the transactions of students from St. Clair and Edsel Ford. The students from Edsel Ford were Arabic and the students from St. Clair were White. We had a lot of fun. We learned a lot about each other as we compared and contrasted the two schools. Overall, the entire project was cool.

I bridge between people all the time, it doesn't cost much, just a dime. I have White friends and Black friends, Arabic friends and Asian friends. To me friendship is not about color, because I cannot see it. I cannot see the color of a person, just their character and their type of emotion. My friends call me superman because I try to stop bad guys who terrorize friendships by telling a lot of lies. They lie, cheat, and steal, and I have taken it upon myself to keep it real. They lie by making stereotypes about people, they cheat by lying to impress people, and they steal friendships by telling lies to ruin people. I have taken it upon myself to bridge people because nobody around me has assumed the responsibility. Either they don't want change or they are too afraid to make their voice heard, but not me. I am not afraid and I want to see change.

I bridge myself by bridging between people around me. If I bridge enough people close to me, then we together as a team can bridge society. That's how I bridge, how do you?

Goal Setting

GABRIEL DAVIS

A LOT OF PEOPLE DON'T HAVE THEIR PARENTS LIVING WITH THEM; nowadays it's uncommon. A lot of people feel hopeless because they don't have parents, especially father figures and role models. And most adults don't realize that some young people feel like they have no one to talk to.

Not having a father can be unfulfilling. I don't know what I would do if I didn't have my dad around. I wouldn't know the responsibilities of being an adult male and I wouldn't know how to take care of a family. Searching to find out who you are is the most difficult thing to try to answer. The answer to that will probably take an eternity. There's no advantage or technique to try to answer that question, just you and the people around you.

I want to tell you about my house I live in. It is crazy, fun, exuberating, stressful, and loud. Most of the time when I come home from school, I say, "good afternoon" to whoever is in the house, and then I make something to eat. But if my mother is there I usually get asked the question, "How was your day?" I simply reply, "It was okay," as I say every day even though I might have gotten into it with one of my teachers.

Entrepreneurship is one thing that interests me. I want to know how the world works. Making important decisions can have a huge impact on your life. I think I can be a business pioneer someday, hopefully in a few more years. Then I could possibly be someone's motivation to do better. I want to earn my degree in business management so I can run my own clothing business. When this becomes a success I will branch off to smaller businesses so I can help them out. After people watch me succeed they will strive to do their best at whatever they do.

Setting goals is very important. I know when I was younger I remember setting goals even if they were small. For example, at my youth basketball

games I would tell myself that I would try to score as many buckets as I can so at the end of the game I can have the most points and my team will win the game. I think if you don't set goals for yourself right now you should start. If I just chose to be in the game just because, I wouldn't have an impact on my team. That is exactly how I look at life.

You have to set goals for yourself, because if you don't you are not going to have an impact and anything to strive for. There are plenty of goals you can set for yourself, long-term, short-term, or career-related. If you do not have goals, you should try to figure out what you like to do and what career you want to have. Then you must figure out what you want to accomplish, tomorrow, next week, the next six months, the next year and so on. You're better off making a plan and following it than not following anything at all. I say that because you do not want to be a person who regrets the mistakes they made in the past instead of a person who has learned from their mistakes and is learning how to prevent future mistakes.

People make mistakes every day. But when a person calls me a mistake, I say I am here for a reason. That reason is to change the world and change the way the media portrays us as teenagers. I am not rude. I am not fake. I am not a thug. These types of stereotypes make me think about other teenagers that are facing these problems every day. Although I am a teenager, I am still a human being.

The N-Word

MALCOLM X. HIGGINS



WHEN DID IT BECOME ACCEPTABLE and a norm for people, particularly black people, to use the N-word? “We’ve taken something negative and turned it into something positive,” some people say. Or, “It’s a term of endearment.”

Who wants to take on the identity so many of our ancestral freedom fighters fought and died for us not to become? The word is a sign of ignorance and is only holding black people, and people in general, back from advancing into a better race of people.

Rap music may have played a part, and sometimes it’s too much, but I can’t really condemn artists for exercising their rights. Some say, “People have the option of not listening.” That may be true, but no one has the right to disrespect people of African descent in that way.

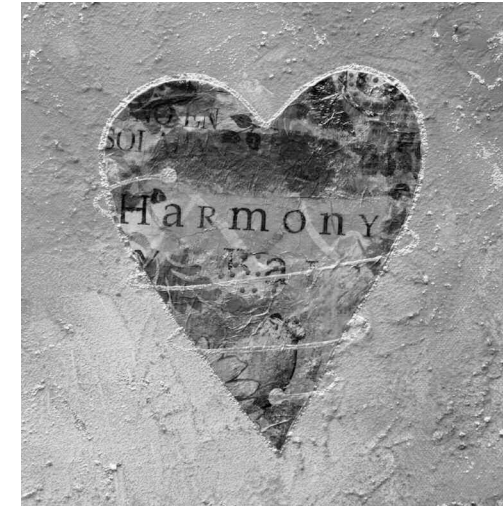
For example, consider the phrases in recent news: “Those sure are some nappy-headed hoes.” “I’m talking about the hoes in the street that are out trying to get nigga’s money.” I feel the word should be abolished because it continues to tie my people to the horrific past we want to move from.

Within a Girl's Heart

MALCOLM X. HIGGINS

If rappers are so lyrically talented, why not change their topics and educate their listeners to become better and aware of what's really going on in society? If we want change to occur, then we don't need to have a society in which people make money not only degrading others, but themselves as well. To show that I'm not hypocritical, I may listen to lyrically explicit music, but I understand what is being said and I can exercise maturity in not saying the negative words and phrases. Here are some lyrics I wrote to express this:

From the plantation to the streets
Our people have come through the struggle
To uplift each other in hopes of ending
Our tussle within a white society where
Life is designed for you to fail to
End up in the streets with your head
Bleeding from a shell from the ignorance
Gun clip compromised of metal from
The mind state in the ghetto set
Up by those in power to make sure
We shower those with money while
Our people die in poverty



I WANT TO TELL YOU ABOUT THE WAY to finding that special place within a girl's heart, based on my experiences. Sometimes meeting a female can be challenging for most males. The process of building a relationship is even harder. But the process of maintaining the relationship is the hardest. Females are sensitive people who require attention, emotion, and care. They like it when you are able to show your feelings to them without feeling uncomfortable around them. I've found that you don't always need to sound cool or smooth about what you do or say around females. As long as you're honest and trusting in the information you give or what you do, she'll always respect you. This applies in all situations. The care and attention comes from your emotions for her and what you do is sometimes a reflection of how you truly feel about her.

I Am a Person

ALICIA RAQUEL ROMERO DOMINGUEZ

I AM A PERSON, A YOUNG SOPHISTICATED LADY, a Latina. I respect my mind, soul and body. I see many young girls with great potential but not all of them fulfill it. Young ladies that have the potential to be doctors, governors, psychologists, lawyers, architects, fashion designers, movie directors, engineers, technicians, etc. waste it. Now they are changing diapers, cleaning the house/apartment, not going to school, going to a dead-end job, and struggling to make ends meet. These same girls are my age—15 or younger!

Many of these ladies become early “mothers” or I would call it “big sisters.” I say big sister because usually in the cases where the teenage girls gets pregnant, her mother takes care of the baby while the “mother” is out of the house most hours of the day and isn’t the one who does the hard stuff. All the “mother” does is play with the baby, which is what a normal big sister would do. When the child gets older the “mother” will feel she has no right to enforce a discipline to the child on sex—and the cycle of teenage motherhood begins again.

By the 6th grade, many of my friends were already in the “I love you” stage of their one-hour-long relationship. People were making out in the bathrooms and hallways and some went farther. Still, they wonder “how could this happen?” I remind you this is maybe two-and-half months out of elementary school! This is a time when we are literally kids!

In sixth grade, girls were wearing make-up, huge hoop earrings that came to the shoulder, tight clothes; even with a uniform dress code they still managed to look like drag queens! For some apparent reason, I wanted to be one of them. I wanted to be popular but not “she’s been around” popular. I wanted to be pretty but not “working at the corner off Michigan Avenue” hooker-ish. I wanted to be liked by a boy but not “I am a slut so you can have your way with me” liked. I am, and wanted to remain, classy.

Since an early age I knew what I wanted to be: a doctor. I didn’t know what kind of doctor, but I knew I wanted to cure people like my mom. I now know that I want to be a heart surgeon and study diabetes. I want to open a hospital and clinic with state-of-the-art technology and medicine, where no patient would be rejected because of money – and it would be all in Mexico.

I want a husband whom I love with all my heart and who loves me back with the same intensity, so that later we can have a family. The point is that I want to be and do lots of things. Nowhere in there are the words “pregnant at 15, no job, in debt, not married, and still living at my parent’s house” mentioned.

So, I gave up those stupid ridiculous goals of popularity, looks, and being liked by boys. I have new goals now: financial freedom, a career as a surgeon, a family with my husband, and finally growing old in my house with my husband at my side and our grandchildren playing in our back yard.

I want a family. I want to have as many children as I feel I want but I am going to stay celibate until I am married. I can’t think of anything more beautiful than to know that I have been with no other man than but the man I married and the man I said my vows at the altar. My friends say “never say never because you never know,” but I say “I control my legs and when I say no it’s no!”

“Having a child should be a blessing and when you are ready...you feel it,” my mom says to me with eyes of joy. She is completely right on that because even though I think I want one, I know I am nowhere near ready for that responsibility. I am a child still, not afraid to say it. My mom still cooks food for me and does all the little things some think I am too old to be doing. I can’t even take care of myself yet, so how can I take care of an innocent little baby? I can’t, so I can only act and make sure I do not end up tainting its future with shame. “Everyone makes mistakes” is what people say when they have done something wrong, but a child shouldn’t ever be labeled a mistake or a bastard.

When I had spoken to my friends about sex, they all told me either they already had it or they are going to wait until they are older or when they feel like it, but they turn to me and begin to laugh. I said, “I may not be beautiful

but I respect myself and my family too much than to give the biggest gift God gave me as a child, my innocence. I will save myself for the man of my life with a ring on my finger and a paper in my hands that says we are married!" "What if you don't end up getting married?" they ask me. "Then I will die a virgin, simple as that," I reply.

The words loser, nun, liar, and "you just wait until you get a boyfriend" are thrown at me. I hold my head high and say, "I'd rather be a nun and loser than to have a job like yours at the corner." Some of them were "popular," if you catch my drift, so I am proud to say I am no longer their friend.

Every woman and child came into this world pristine as water, pure as life, and innocent, without sin. No matter what "mistakes" the parents have made, I think we are all here to learn and try to do better. It is the actions that one takes after knowing right from wrong that speak for us when the doors are shut and whispers emerge from the crowd. I believe that whether we want to be or not, we are all natural-born leaders. It is the path that we lead that makes a difference.

I am a Latina, a leader. I am nowhere near perfect, but I have principles that I believe to be moral. I don't think respecting my body is a crime; I can only control my body and no one else's. I will stay pure or die before I let any man stain my soul, reputation, body, self-respect, and the respect of others with his sweat upon my body.

I have goals that will be met and dreams that will come true. To complicate them with a child as a teen is not fair to my family, the child, or me. Maybe if I show resistance toward the growing number of early mothers in America, others will follow. I hope and pray that it will come true.

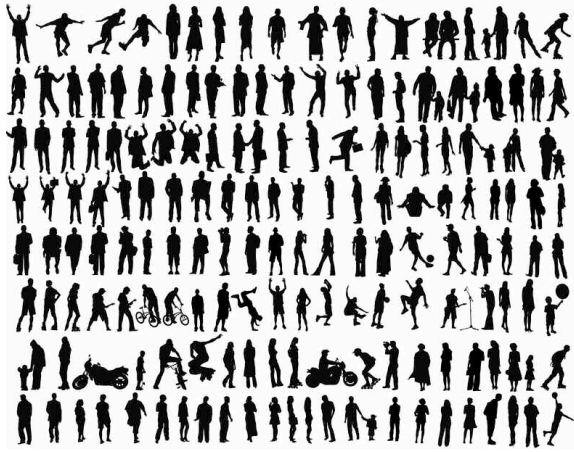
What Can I Do To Help?

DEVIN POLASKI

THIS PIECE IS A TRIBUTE TO YOUTH DIALOGUES, a program where teens come together to talk about problems concerning racism, segregation, discrimination, and any other problems facing us. This is also a tribute to the members of Youth Dialogues, and to all those involved who try very hard to set things right in this world.

I've never been subject to racism. I've never felt unsafe or treated unfairly. I may have felt misrepresented, but no obstacles have been in my way as a result. I live in a world where one color reigns. I know of other worlds where injustice reigns. But knowing of something doesn't mean I've been through it firsthand. At times I have deep passion to set things right; but that driving passion can run thin without the Youth Dialogues atmosphere acting as the fuel for my flame. I listen to people and I listen well. I hear things that are sincerely shocking, often painful to hear. And that's all I can do: listen. I wish that were enough. What can I do to help?

Listening is said to be a better skill than speaking, something I believe to be true. While I am confident in my ability to listen, I wonder if everyone as clueless as me possesses the same ability. But I fear the greater problem is blindness rather than a failure to listen. People like me are just flat-out clueless to the problems that reign, and except in the case of rare miracles, such as Youth Dialogues, there's almost no way for people like me to become more aware. There is an invisible wall, shielding my world's eyes. Everyone around me is one color. The media clandestinely poisons my world's minds. Diversity is absent. Hate crimes are nonexistent, but are replaced by ignorance and simple yet dangerous jests and mockery. These are the bricks that construct the wall. All this in my way, and I am just one man with few companions with the same intent of tearing this wall down. But intentions alone don't tear down walls. What can I do to help?



It becomes clearer with more thought what it is I can do to help. I can't relate to the people of my world the harsh experiences of racism, but I can show them where to go and who to listen to. I can't make them feel the suffering, but I can let them know that it's happening. I can't speak on behalf of the worlds I know of, but I can bridge my two worlds together. There it is, goal set. But now come the plans, processes and procedures, and now I'm lost again. That wall is so strong and secure. How am I going to help?

I possess powers of being able to create and display. I am a decent writer as far as high school experience goes. I have much knowledge and experience in music. My passion and credibility for filmmaking is high. I have the tools at my fingertips. I have the knowledge within reach. I have the support of others. What's holding me back?

The things I've learned from Youth Dialogues never leave my mind. Every day, the knowledge and experiences I've gained from Youth Dialogues influences my everyday thoughts and observations. Being in the Youth Dialogues world, it is easy to both think and act. But being away from that world, back in my home world, it is still quite easy to think, but it is quite hard now to act. I am still full of good intentions but I am also distracted by the things in my own world, lulled once again into a distracted and slightly unmotivated state. My involvement in activities in my world deepens, and my time and energy is consumed. And at the end of the day it becomes a deeper realiza-

tion that it is sometimes simply too much to juggle everything. How can I push myself to resume what I've begun?

The people of Youth Dialogues have never forgotten me. They still contact me between long periods of not meeting or talking. They still invite me to new events and meetings. They still believe in me. Why do I stop believing in myself?

There's only one factor holding me back, one person slowing me down: myself. Cliché, perhaps, but it is a fact that must not be taken for granted in anyone. If there's a lesson to be learned in this, it's that thinking and listening are great steps towards change. But they are only tiny steps, first steps. Because it's great if you start thinking about racism, segregation, discrimination, diversity, racial jokes, history, the present, the future. But what's truly amazing is if you get everyone around you to start doing the same kind of thinking, and that you are the one to inspire, motivate, and fuel the fire of revolution. But, how do I get everyone to help?

I know now what I must do. I am thinking great things. Now is the time to push these thoughts into action. No one ever changed the world by only imagining how perfect it could be if something were different. They must, like artists, illustrate their remedies onto the fallen states of the world, add their own shades of color into the sections of their world that have faded. On my palette lie many beautiful colors: the colors of film, music, writing, Youth Dialogues, and the people I've met there. All that is left is to pick up the brush.

Racial Diversity: Through My Eyes, My Experience

MALCOLM X. HIGGINS

I AM A JUNIOR AT SOUTHFIELD HIGH SCHOOL and have lived in Southfield for the last six years. Since I lived in Detroit for the first ten years of my life, I have experienced the similarities and differences of both Detroit (Wayne County) and Southfield (Oakland County).

Before attending Southfield High School, both the elementary and middle school I attended were African-centered. I grew up in Detroit and lived my first ten years where all the people were of African descent like myself. It wasn't a matter of choice not to associate with different people.

At home and in school I was always taught to be open minded. I was taught African history and learned about other races and cultures. I was taught not to discriminate against people for who they were or their customs. I knew about racial and cultural problems but also understood that others didn't and wouldn't always see the Black community or things as I did.

When I received the opportunity to participate in the first University of Michigan Youth Race Dialogues session, I was involved with the Detroit Youth Foundation KYDS Program (Kellogg Youth Development Seminars), and the DYG Grant Making Committee. I am still a member of the grant making committee. I felt the U. of M. opportunity would be a good way to meet new people, experience new things, and increase my leadership potential.

Before my participation in the University of Michigan program began, I decided I would keep an open mind. Still, I wasn't sure how I would react if someone said something that made me angry or uncomfortable. However, I knew that it might not be their fault because they probably wouldn't have been exposed to or learned things as I had.

Over a six-week period, a group of African-American youth from DYF-Youthville met with a group of Caucasian youth from West Bloomfield High

School. We talked about various things such as stereotypes, religion, and other issues that each race faced. After the six weeks, we participated in a three-day retreat on the University of Michigan campus. In addition to the African American and Caucasian youth, other groups that had participated in the race dialogues joined us. Having the Arab, Hispanic, and Asian youth groups at the retreat allowed us to meet new people and participate in activities that not only built friendships, but also taught us all lessons. I was a little hesitant to interact with some races, but once I found people I could connect with it was easy.

After my experience in the dialogues, I had the opportunity to participate on the U. of M. Youth Leadership and Evaluation Team to evaluate our progress and develop new events for the next session of U. of M. dialogues the following summer. I gained a lot by participating and was able to see old friends and make new ones.

Sometimes planning was a difficult experience, because everyone had good ideas and it was hard to decide on which projects to follow through on. We had to base our decisions on what we experienced the previous summer and use that to create new ideas.

I learned that with group planning, everyone must have an active role in the projects, and the group should have an easily accessible meeting spot. Although the concept of meeting at different sites to experience each other's neighborhoods was good, it created a problem for some participants and parents who had to transport them.

Also I participated on the University of Michigan's Public Policy Team. Our job was to create our own set of dialogues within our neighborhoods and to talk and spread awareness of the issues of race relations that we face in society today. It was also to talk from the perspective of an issue that we believed was personal but was actually a policy issue. Some of these issues included hate crimes, media influences, and segregated schools. Being at the Youth Summit showed that other youth shared my passion for equality, and we will be among our leaders of the future.

Next year I will be old enough to work for the first time, and I am looking for a summer internship or employment that will allow me to experience

the corporate world. I am currently taking AP classes and am planning for an undergraduate major in Business Administration or Political Science before attending law school.

After I expressed an interest in Florida A & M, Morehouse, Howard, and Clark-Atlanta, my father introduced me to graduates and professors at these schools. He and I recently attended a college fair to learn more about scholarship, financial aid, and curricula of these and other schools that I might consider attending.

Before my involvement in both of these programs, I didn't have a lot of first-hand knowledge about the hardships other races face on a daily basis. Now I am able to relate and share the knowledge I acquired directly from other races and cultures to help others become more culturally aware.

I am more comfortable interacting with other than my own race, talking about racism and other forms of discrimination. I am also sure these experiences will help in my higher education, developing more interpersonal relationship skills, and attaining goals for my future business ambitions.

I learned that every race has its own set of problems to deal with on a daily basis. I am motivated to be successful as an African American in a society where I am statistically expected to fail. I will not allow myself to be associated with the negative stereotypes that effect African Americans and African American youth. I believe that I am being a role model and an example of the type of leadership we will require in the future, because I am already doing my part in creating a better society.

Minority in College

KOYONNE MIMS

WHEN I CAME TO COLLEGE FRESHMAN YEAR, I had to decide what classes I was going to take. English: check, Math: (ugh) check, and Spanish: yes. I thought those were the only classes I was going to take. However, somewhere along the way, I learned that I had signed up for another class and I didn't even know it. I signed up for MIC (Minority in College) 001. This class had no books, no final exams, and no written essays. It was based solely on experiences throughout my college career. Just when I thought my class schedule was full, MIC was about to kick my ass.

In MIC, I learned different things. I found out that there were different degrees of being black, and whether I liked it or not, I would be put in one of these categories. Who puts you in these categories, you ask? Well, plenty of people. Friends, enemies, whites and blacks – you name it. If I spoke out about anything, I could be the militant black who is angry at the world. If I had a lot of white friends, I could be the token black who probably doesn't realize what being black even is. Or I could be your run-of-the-mill black person—a lil' angry, but not angry enough to do anything, and cool with the whites, but not "too" cool. Ya know, you don't want people to get the wrong impression, so you have to keep your distance. I think I have been put into all these categories, some more than others.

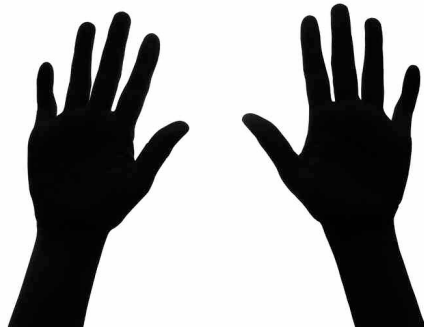
Sometimes this class was harder than all the rest, and I wanted to drop, but here's the thing—you can't drop the class. You have to take it. Every day you attend, even if you don't want to, and even if you thought you didn't. There will always be that person who reminds you that you are in that class.

One day I sat down to do my reading for my philosophy class. Every week we discussed a different moral issue. This week the topic was affirmative action. Great! Just my luck! I did my readings; one was pro affirmative action, and one was con. I read both, took detailed notes, and I even did a

little more research because I knew I would have to be prepared for what would take place in class.

The next day I went to class ready for the battle. The class consisted of about twenty students. Out of the twenty, my friend and I were the only two African Americans. We were also the only underrepresented minorities. The professor opened the class up for comments, and immediately hands went up. All the comments were con affirmative action. At that moment, I looked at my friend, and she was already looking at me. We gave each other the look, and I instantly knew what that meant.

For those of you who don't know "the look," let me break it down for you. The look is a signal that lets you communicate without even saying one word. The look can mean many different things, but at this time, the look meant that we were the only black people in this class, and we were about to speak up. We raised our hands high at the same time. We could not let this one-sided discussion go on.



Found in Translation

SARAH YU

SHE STOOD ON THE STAGE. Head up, mic close to her mouth. Everyone was watching her. Although the auditorium was only half full of elderly Chinese Americans, she began to feel butterflies in her stomach. "Oh no," she thought, "why did I even volunteer for this?" The teacher began to speak. She was supposed to translate his speech into Chinese, her mother tongue that seemed so foreign to her at the moment. He had given her the main points in his speech so she could translate them with the help of her father beforehand, but he didn't stick to them. "How do I say 'Chinese American'?' How do I say 'register to vote'?" Thoughts were spinning out of control in her mind. It was the most embarrassing moment of her life.

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Nine months after that traumatic evening, she was on top of the world. As an incoming sophomore, she had been elected treasurer of the Asian-Pacific American Club, her new family. The workshops and discussions that the club had held for the past year had opened a whole set of doors for her. This summer, in addition to her psychology class, she would be participating in the Summer Youth Dialogues program and volunteering as a camp counselor for the Association of Chinese Americans Summer Camp. Fully immersed into these activities, she was ready to be an active participant of the minority community, more specifically, the Asian American community.

She was afraid of one thing that summer, though. She was afraid of her age and inexperience. She was afraid that no one would respect and listen to her opinions. So she did the only thing she knew how to do: read and learn. That summer, in addition to the articles that her teacher gave her to ponder, she read all the books about the Asian American community that she could get her hands on: *Accidental Asian*, *Asian American Dreams*, and many more.

Junior year comes, and she unexpectedly finds herself as co-president of the dear club. It's time to step up to the plate, to plan a cultural show. All year she's been thinking about this day. From the summer before when she had filled out the form to book the auditorium, to the numerous dance practices for the past two months, to the sleepless nights during rehearsal week, she had sacrificed everything: her health, her family, her grades, just for this one night of perfection, one night to show the world what APAC is.

The auditorium dimmed, and a spotlight shone on her. She was back on the stage, three years older and all the more wise. This time she knew exactly what she was going to say. And she said it from the heart, with the same passion and devotion she put into the club. For although she helped to define the club, the club defined her into the confident, inquisitive Asian American woman that she is today.



My Dreams Are Not a Secret

A COLLABORATIVE POEM BY THE DETROIT YOUTH WRITERS

A secret in my life is that I love to go up on the roof
(even though my mother thinks it's dangerous)
and look up at the heavens and write.

My dreams are making something of myself, helping young black men,
and making a change in the city of Detroit.

If I could do anything, I would make films for a living, which would truly
change people's minds, all the while living a home life and having a family.

In the future I will be a role for all black males, be a leader, be an attorney,
be successful, married, and a DJ, and create a major impact.

If I could do anything, I would travel. I would see the world, see the four
corners of the Earth, and see the world that man wants to destroy.

In the future I want to be treated fairly.

My dreams are to create a world where race and ethnicity do not matter.

In the future I want to be happy with my life. I'm happy now, but in the
future the things that make me happy will change.

If I could do anything, I would become wealthy, and take care of my whole
family. I would also build my city, Detroit, up.

My dreams are surreal, faraway, foolish, and probably near impossible,
but they are mine.

My dreams are to empower voices that society wants to silence.

My dreams are like vibrantly colored dots everywhere.

It hurts me that people talk negatively about my race, and that people want
to leave Detroit instead of staying and giving back to their roots.

Youth Biographies

It hurts me when I can't accept the truth and I'm confused about it.

Then I cry!

In the future we will worship trees and children will be in Congress.
Cars will be banned except for emergencies and war will be a fossil.

My dreams are funny, scary, insightful, big, professional, intellectual,
inspiring, metaphorical. My dreams are peaceful, soulful, vibrant, flashy,
and helpful.

If I could do anything, I'd reverse the effects of slavery, make the world safe,
make everyone equal, end discrimination, end poverty, create a livable
environment on other planets, and develop sources of energy.

If I could do anything, I would have learned to forgive at an earlier age.

My dreams have a heartbeat, and they are thousands of years old.

My dreams are shining bright on a movie screen. They lie within a woman's
heart and in a nice home. They are glowing with pride and bright with
promise. They will come true or I will die trying.



GALLAL ALBANEH, 16, is a senior at Edsel Ford High School. He lives in Dearborn, MI. Gallal was one of the organizers of a groundbreaking Youth Dialogues Action Project, a school exchange between Edsel Ford and St. Clair High Schools.

GABRIEL DAVIS, 17, is a senior at Henry Ford Academy. He lives in Brightmoor, MI. He is a member of Rosedale Park Baptist Church and is interested in Detroit Public Schools funding.

MYCHAEAL FIELDS, 18, is a freshman at the University of Michigan. He graduated from Southfield Lathrup High School and lives in Southfield, MI. Mychael worked with other members of the Southfield YAC to revitalize and push through plans for a teen center.

MALCOLM X HIGGINS, 16, is a senior at Southfield High School. Southfield is a suburban community located in south-eastern Oakland County and metropolitan Detroit. It has a population of 78,296. He writes, "I participated in Youth Dialogues in 2005 while I was also a member of the Detroit Youth Foundation Youth Leadership Development and Youth Grant Making Committee. I also participated in the evaluation of both public policy and youth dialogues."

NOU LEE, 18, is a first-year college student at Oakland University. She graduated from Osborn High School in Detroit and is a member of DAY (Detroit Asian Youth) Project. Co-author Chong Lor invited Nou to participate in the writing workshop. Nou volunteers her time working with children at a local hospital.

CHONG LOR, 17, attends Osborn High School. Chong works on community organizing projects with young people and adults in Osborn. She organized a memorial for Chonburi Xiong, a Hmong teenager who was shot and killed by Warren police, and presented a workshop at the University of Michigan A/PIA (Asian Pacific Islander American) High School Conference about police brutality.

KOYONNE MIMS, 22, is a University of Michigan Ann Arbor alumna. She is entering University of Detroit Mercy as a first year PhD student and lives in north-west Detroit. She has been a facilitator for Rosedale Park Baptist Church and Mosaic Youth Theatre and was recipient of the 2006 Patricia Gurin Certificate of Merit in Intergroup Relations.

RYAN NELOMS, 18, is entering Grand Valley State University. He graduated from Renaissance High School and lived on the west side of Detroit in a predominantly black community. Ryan attended Rosedale Park Baptist Church and is interested in countering racial stereotypes perpetuated by the mass media.

DEVIN POLASKI, 18, graduated from St. Clair High School and is entering Grand Valley State University. Devin is the producer/director of two short films for the Youth Dialogues program (a travel show about St. Clair, which premiered on the Metro Bus Tour 2006, and a reality TV show about "Clairborn," featuring Youth Dialogues participants from St. Clair and Dearborn, which premiered at the Retreat 2006).

JACQUELINE ROBINSON, 18, graduated from Southfield High School and is entering Grand Valley State University as a first-year college student. She grew up in the Southfield community and was recruited to the Youth Dialogues by the Southfield Youth Advisory Committee. She is interested in Detroit Public Schools funding and high-stakes testing.

ALICIA ROMERO, 15, is a sophomore at Cass Technical High School in southwest Detroit. She is active in LA SED (Latin Americans for Social & Economic Development). For her Youth Dialogues Action Project, Alicia planned and implemented a community health fair. In her role as a community service project leader for Hermanitas, Alicia is expanding upon her action project. Alicia is also participating in the University of Michigan's M-REACH program (Michigan Ross School of Business Enriching Academics in Collaboration with High Schools), which includes four years of action-based learning experiences.

ERIKA VIVYAN, 16, is a junior at Harrison High School. She lives in the community of Farmington Hills and was a part of the Mayor's Youth Council of Farmington and Farmington Hills. She is interested in affirmative action.

SARAH YU is a 17-year-old senior at Plymouth High School in Canton, Michigan. In 2005, she was part of the Youth Council of the Association of Chinese Americans (YCACA), an Asian American group participating in the pilot program of the Summer Youth Dialogues. Since then, Sarah has worked closely with the Youth Dialogues program as a member of the Youth Leadership Team, facilitating dialogues on affirmative action, and as a youth evaluator.