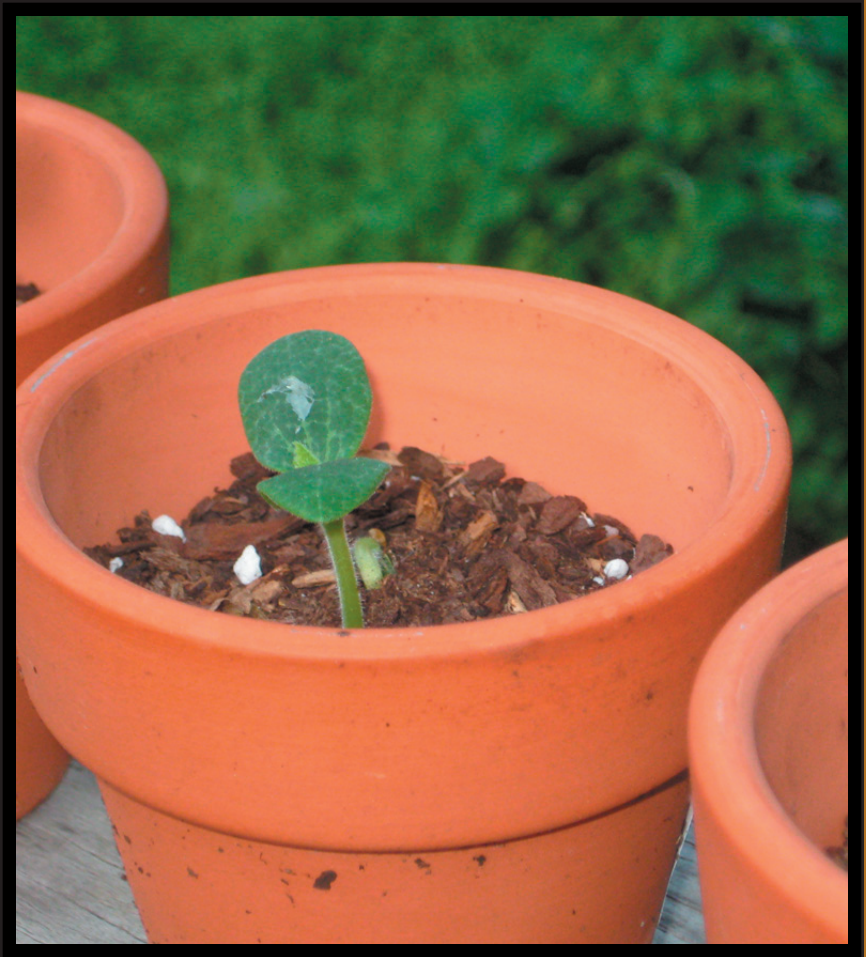


writing our hope

a 'zine of creative nonfiction by teenagers
on themes of hope, tolerance and equality



Spring 2008
Numero Dos

Writing Our Hope is a publication of
Booker T. Washington Magnet High School
in Montgomery, Alabama.
Issues are produced in the Fall and Spring.

For submission guidelines,
visit www.writingourhope.org
Only high school students may submit.

© 2008 by the authors
No work in *Writing Our Hope*
may be reproduced
without express written consent
of the author and/or editor.

For more information, contact:
Foster Dickson
Booker T. Washington Magnet High School
632. S Union Street, Montgomery, AL 36104
334-269-3617
foster.dickson@mps.k12.al.us

The Staff

Editor: Madison Clark
Assistant Editors: Rhiannon Johns, Rachel Lewis
Faculty Adviser: Foster Dickson

Contents

Foster Dickson	
A Note on Editorial Decisions	4
Madison Clark	
Editor's Introduction	5
Lynanne Rueda	
The Choice of Tolerance	6
Monica Sheinin	
Racial Profiling	8
Kyle Graef	
Tolerant Comedy?	9
Shani Walker	
to be junior	11
The Writing Our Hope Poetry Contest	
And the Winner Is . . .	15

A Note on Editorial Decisions

With respect to some sensitive issues of language, the student editors and I have discussed the matter of racial epithets and other slurs, which will inevitably appear in some writings on these themes of tolerance and equality. We decided that it was preferable to include the authors' own words, especially when he/she is describing real-life episodes that he/she has witnessed and chosen to describe. We will put such words in quotation marks. It is a sad fact that these derogatory terms exist, but reacting to them (and the ideas behind them) is a part of what we are doing with this publication. Therefore, we have chosen not to excise slurs for the purpose of political correctness or censorship. We have chosen not to deny the existence of such words, but to call them (and the people who use them) out into the open to be scrutinized. We truly hope that our honest treatment of this real matter will be respected and regarded as we intend.

Similarly, linguists and other scholars have not yet agreed upon whether to capitalize the commonly used racial terms like "white" or "black" when referring to Caucasians or African Americans. Editorially, we have chosen to capitalize all such terms: White, Black, Hispanic and Asian. We regard these terms as proper nouns referring to specific groups and will capitalize them as such, in the same way that regions of America like the South or the Northeast are capitalized.

We're proud of this second issue of *Writing Our Hope* and would like to dedicate it to the memory of Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. who preached at Dexter Avenue Baptist Church, which is located about six blocks from our school, and who died forty years ago this month while working for equality for all people.

Madison Clark

Editor's Introduction

An important ingredient in creating the *Writing Our Hope* project deals with the matter of diversity, hoping not to receive identical topics and submissions from high school students. But this project reflects how multicultural America truly is. With the launching of a second issue of *Writing our Hope*, diversity was displayed significantly in the works. A quaint collection described the entertainment world, as well as the teenage world and its general viewpoint on tolerance in our day.

It is our continued hope that this project goes on to promote the value and importance of realizing we live in a new world, one stained with a past convinced of ignorant ideas about appropriate conduct. Yet, through the voices of our future that can be seen in this issue, further improvement in social tolerance will be achieved.

Lynanne Rueda

The Choice of Tolerance

For the past two years that I have attended high school at Essex High School, we have had an assembly that is supposed to encourage tolerance and equality. When I first came to school here, I thought that it would be a great experience, and so I was excited to pile into the gym with my peers and celebrate diversity. But if I thought that the diversity assembly was going to be one in which my peers would act and speak maturely, with respect for others, and therefore lovingly, I was very mistaken.

Unlike the Diversity Day assemblies that I had attended in the past at my previous school, Torrington High School, which were fun, lively, and respectful, this assembly was astoundingly distasteful in nearly all respects. For one thing, many of my peers didn't even want to be there because they thought it was a waste of time. *Nobody cares anyway, so what's the point in going? We might as well go home.* I didn't know what to say to that. I also didn't know whether or not I should take them seriously. When about a third of my approximately 400-member class didn't show up, I realized that they were completely serious. At this point I was more than puzzled; what was so bad about having an assembly that encouraged tolerance?

It didn't take me long to find out what was so bad about having an assembly that encouraged tolerance. As I shifted uncomfortably in my seat – or, more accurately, tried to shift without injuring the person next to me – I quickly became aware of skyrocketing rudeness levels. Not only were people booing others' responses to questions prompted them, but they were also taking that disrespectfulness up a notch by expressing their less-than-friendly opinions about the previous speaker(s) on the microphones. The worst part was that people didn't even stop there, but

kept going after the assembly had ended, ranting about how this or that person deserves to go here, or do this, etc. There might have been one or two positive comments about the speakers and the assembly in general that I happened to overhear. Other than that, I didn't hear anything but gossip and slander.

Sadly, it turned out that those who originally didn't want to attend the assembly were right. Most people apparently didn't care, as demonstrated by their speech and actions. The supposedly tolerance-based assemblies were essentially a failure in that they were unable to promote tolerance, because the student body lacked it and didn't care about gaining it, which leads me to express my own lack of understanding. How is this possible? Many of my peers have expressed sentiments that our generation is much more tolerant than previous generations, yet we don't even have the common courtesy of allowing someone else to voice their opinions without booing and slandering them. How is it, then, that this generation is more tolerant? These actions have not illustrated tolerance, but hatefulness.

I may not agree with everything that is spoken by those who express their sentiments about "hot topics" like civil unions, racism, and derogatory terminology usage, but that doesn't mean that I should react in a hateful manner. I could, but just because I have the ability to do so doesn't mean that I should. Likewise, just because I have the ability to do so doesn't make it right. God has given us a sound mind to make the right choice. What will you choose?

Lynanne Rueda attends Essex High School in Essex Junction, Vermont.

Monica Sheinin

Racial Profiling

Racial profiling is an issue that has been prevalent in recent years. When a man with a turban walks into the airport and he is searched extensively, he is subjected to racial profiling due to his appearance. Although such behavior is a precaution, it is degrading and humiliating to the people subjected to it. In our society, a person's outward appearance reflects where they come from. If an African American walks around with baggy jeans and a large sweatshirt in a primarily white area, he is immediately assumed a criminal. Such behavior reflects human nature and how our society is prejudiced against those who look different.

Many people of African descent are subjected to unwarranted searches by police officials. Based on their wardrobe or the vehicle they drive, even the color of their skin, they are stopped based on their appearance. This behavior is wrong, and is a form of stereotyping. Such behavior is controversial in our society but it takes place everyday. If our society was more tolerant, then we would live in a more peaceful world.

Many people in our society need to be more tolerant. But with the negative portrayal of Muslims and African Americans in movies and on the news, it is only human nature for the public to react negatively to those groups of people. If the media's portrayal of minorities would change, then many will be more accepting of other religions and ethnicities. If racial profiling didn't exist, then our world would be more peaceful.

Monica Sheinin is a student at Northern Valley Regional High School in Demarest, New Jersey.

Kyle Graef

Tolerant Comedy?

Is there a line that goes too far in racial comedy? What happens to be too much and what happens to be too little? The answer varies from the person to the color of their skin. Dave Chappelle, for example, used to cross onto that racist line many times in his comedy; though he really was not a racist, people thought that he was.

I started getting into “The Chappelle’s Show” on Comedy Central a few years back. In my opinion, it is probably one of the best of its kind, using humor to make fun of racial and sexual stereotypes. What I like about Dave Chappelle is that he is not just an African-American making fun of his own race, but that he also jokes around about Whites, Hispanics, and Asians, as well. He is a comedian on all levels, one could say. He could be offensive to one ethnic group, and the next minute be dogging on another race.

Chappelle rose to stardom starting in small clubs like the Apollo Theater in Harlem. Eventually his charisma and quirky spin on racism made him a worldwide icon. After making it big, Dave started his own show, “Chappelle’s Show.” His skits became wickedly popular and the release of the first season was the greatest selling in Comedy Central history, though it eventually led to a “moral dilemma.”

Chappelle wrote his comedy to make fun of stereotypes and racial labels, for example, the black Klansman. After the first two seasons, Chappelle started to feel eaten up inside. He began to consider his comedy a failure, because people took his comedy in the wrong context. Racists and conservatives took his comedy at face value. In other words he felt he was playing into the stereotypes. Chappelle appeared on the Oprah show to explain his

sudden absence from work, and more so to talk about his “moral dilemma” and the “black pixie skit.” In his own words he described the skit as the, “visual personification of the ‘N’ word.”¹ For those reasons Chappelle left his own hit show and vowed never to return to Comedy Central. The message he left was one of disappointment: “I don’t want black people to be disappointed in me for putting that [message] out there . . . It’s a complete moral dilemma.”²

Dave Chappelle really is a tolerant man. Hopefully viewers, racists, conservatives, and the rest of the world will truly understand Chappelle for the person that he is and not what he portrayed on television.

Kyle Graef attends Lake Travis High School in Austin, Texas.

1. This quote is excerpted from Chappelle’s appearance on the “Oprah Winfrey Show.” It can be referenced at www.oprah.com in “Chappelle’s Story.”

2. This quote is also from his appearance on the “Oprah Winfrey Show.” It also appears in “Still Keepin’ It Real!” by Jessica Cacciola in *Imprint* magazine.

Shani Walker

to be junior

To be black. To be white. Male, female, Hispanic, or Chinese. Labels. That is what this world has come to. Labeling the “populars,” “geeks,” “outcasts,” “crazies,” “homosexuals” . . . The list is endless.

And the insults! Oh, how the offensive words are integrated into everyday language. All ages use these slurs, too! But, how many really know the level of torment through which these words can put someone?

The hazy “dos” and “don’ts” of society let kids think it is appropriate to casually use “gay” as a synonym for stupid. “Fag” is now a common insult heard much too often. And yet, no one even flinches. Does anyone care? The pained care.

There is an extensive number of those who are constantly stricken by these mere *words*, but only a few of us are brave enough to stand up to the users of these comments. Sure, that makes us easier and known targets soon after: but just a single act of expressing discomfort from the commodity of these brands is enough to inspire others to stand up for themselves as well as others who have yet to find their voices.

Think about the meaning of your words, and what trouble they can cause. We sometimes lose sight of the implications of our choices. Choosing your boyfriend or your girlfriend over your best friend impacts your best friend. We don’t always see the slight flash of the feeling of betrayal in our friends’ eyes. Choosing to insult your siblings when they really need a compliment brings them down to a level no one wants to experience. Choosing to use what once was a commonly used racial slur as a reference to those with that particular ethnic background just allows the public to forget the torture it once put generations through.

Still highly offensive, these labels could possibly break down a target. Being called numerous names can destroy hope and lead to feelings of inferiority. As a mixed girl, I can attest to the brutality of others' statements. Some of the names can throw a person out of their comfort level and into vulnerability as well as possible temporary destruction, as I have experienced myself.

Even with this knowledge, few think about the consequences. I know what it is like to be a target. I know what it is like to hear people refer to me as a "bitch" just because I am a woman. I know how painful it is to hear someone greet me with a "What's up, my nigga?" I know how hard it is to recover when someone calls me a "dyke." And I am also aware of the mass of others facing this every day.

But what can we do? How can we find the strength to stand up for complete strangers? How can we help our friends? But the biggest question is: how can we help ourselves? We will achieve nothing if we can't even achieve self-assurance from our own lives. I am fully aware of the pressure put on teenagers to fit in with the "cool crowd." But why does the initiation have to be so drastic, and potentially harmless to others. I mean, there are countless "populars" who have dropped their best friends for a chance to be illuminated in the social limelight. And the requirements for maintaining the spot in the limelight are just as harmful to others.

But what is even worse is those who don't do anything to help, not comfortable enough with themselves to be brave and take a stand. As Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. once said, "The greatest sin of our time is not the few who have destroyed, but the vast majority who sat idly by."³ Words I know too well.

I pride myself in the fact that I know that I stand up for what is right, I stand up for what I believe in, I stand up for others

3. This quote is an unsourced quote that is referenced often in articles and speeches.

who need it, and most importantly, I know I stand up for myself.
After all, that is where it all starts.

Shani Walker is a student at Franklin High School in
Franklin, Massachusetts.

The Writing Our Hope Poetry Contest

And the Winner Is . . .

Congratulations to Shani Walker, first place winner of the first annual *Writing Our Hope* poetry contest. Her poem, “help has arrived,” struck us as many things: hopeful, poetic, transitory, and eloquently simple.

Subsequent prizes went to Lynanne Rueda, who received second place for her poem “Redemption,” and Monica Sheinin received third place for her poem “I Can’t Tolerate It.”

All three poems can be read on the website at:

www.writingourhope.org

Send your own work to
Writing Our Hope

Any high school student
in North America
(The US, Canada, and Mexico)
can submit a work of
creative nonfiction
to *Writing Our Hope*.

The next deadline for the 'zine
is in the fall of 2008.

Our 2nd annual poetry contest
will be held in spring 2009.

See our submission guidelines
and poetry contest rules at
www.writingourhope.org