

New take on MLK day changes schoolwide dialogue

Classes honor MLK Day after decision to eliminate seminars

by Claudia Levens

Following two years of contention over the substance and format of New Trier’s Martin Luther King Jr. Seminar Day, this year’s commemoration of the day brought a change in the format and a subsequent change in dialogue.

Developed at last year’s Apr. 17 board meeting and throughout the months preceding the day, this year’s iteration involved teachers building discussions related to Martin Luther King or race in general into their material for the day. Though technically optional, this was highly encouraged by the administration.

Another aspect of the day was a display of poster boards in the scrounge made by Student Voices in Equity and other contributing clubs including Committed to Action, African American Culture Club, Spanish Club, SWEETS, and numerous others.

Junior and Student Voices in Equity member Izzy Cox helped make posters. “It was cool to see classes walking around the scrounge looking at the posters, talking, thinking, interacting with the information, which is what this day was supposed to be about.”

Cox participated in numerous discussions and activities throughout the day. “We didn’t do much in Bio, but in American Studies, we discussed



The art department installed a mosaic of Kerry James Marshall in the atrium for MLK Day this year | Levens

the transcendentalism connection to Martin Luther King’s ‘Letter from Birmingham Jail,’ in Calculus, we did stuff about the calculus of income inequality, and in Band we played ‘A Movement for Rosa,’ a piece based on Rosa Park’s life.

Junior Sarah Cortina also noted that a lot of her teachers did something related to MLK day in class. Specifically, “In APUSH, Mr. Klein taught a lesson relating Jacob Riis, a photographer who captured the poverty of the gilded age, to Martin Luther King’s less often discussed poverty activism.”

In addition, Sarah described viewing a relevant movie in her Bio class, reading Martin Luther King’s “Letter from Birmingham Jail,” similar to Cox, in her AP Lang class, and in her French class, examining a French political cartoon relating to human rights.

However, it seems that students’ experiences of the day worked out in a sort of lottery where whether or not they did anything came down to the classes they take and teachers they have. Cox said, “The accountability wasn’t great. In theory teachers were supposed to build their material for the day around Martin Luther King and race, but the fact that it was optional meant that a lot of teachers didn’t address it, and if you ended up with a certain combination of teachers throughout your day, you might not have talked about it at all.”

So while some students such as Cox and Cortina may have had numerous engagements with discussions of MLK and race, others such as Junior Laura Stone didn’t end up doing much.

“I honestly don’t remember it so I guess it didn’t have enough of an impact on me. I know we talked

about it in APUSH, in chorus we sang a song that had to do with civil rights but we do that pretty often so it wasn’t anything special,” said Stone.

Cox noted that she understands how certain subjects may appear to be more difficult to connect to MLK and race. However, she also acknowledged the creativity of her Calculus teacher who had the class work on finding the area under different income inequality graphs, which “related perfectly to the stuff we were doing in class. It was actually the most interesting thing I did all day.”

Similarly, in Cortina’s biology class, her teacher played “The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks,” a movie about a black woman whose cells have been used for important scientific research but were taken from her without her consent, which related to their unit on cancer and

epigenetics. In comparison to previous years, more people showed up to school that day than on usual seminar days.

“I think there’s a balance we need to hit,” said Cox. “Previous seminar days were really effective at making the community talk, regardless of whether you agreed or disagreed. But at the same time, more people showed up this year.”

One of the things emphasized by administration at the Apr. 17 board meeting was the need for issues addressed on MLK days to be integrated further into different aspects of the curriculum and not focused solely on a specific day of the year.

And especially in light of the recent controversies surrounding racial slurs found in New Trier bathrooms, the questions of the best way to address social issues like race persist.

Cox agreed with the sentiment of building further upon the day, saying, “I think what it comes down to though is that a day isn’t enough. It’s a good starting point--that’s important--but some people barely made it to the starting line.”

Racist Graffiti Continued

by Rebecca Lee

But, how to go about effecting such change is another point of contention.

Some proposed formulating new curricula. “If as a school, that were to be something that we were to really commit to, we could be really creative in thinking about how to have those conversations across a range of classes,” said Arado.

“As an English teacher, my primary goals are teaching careful reading skills and careful writing skills. At the same time, the way we choose works to teach and the way we frame questions get students to think about their own feelings. I believe in exposing students to works and framing questions that get kids to think,” explained English teacher and adviser Jessica Malamuth.

Outside of classrooms, “If we really want to confront this problem, we need to allow the students to take responsibility and confront this. I think there’s a moment when we give students the power to start deciding how they want to have these discussions—and obviously guide them along the way—but really give them the platforms,” proposed Sollie.

Administrators argued that change cannot only be initiated by authority figures, but also needs to come from within the student body.

“We’re talking about culture. Culture is a very difficult, long-term conversation. Change doesn’t happen because we say, ‘Tomorrow we’re going to hold an event and everyone will be different,’” said Hayes.

“The culture of New Trier depends on the adults and also depends on the students. How is it that together, we move this forward? There is a shared responsibility here,” noted Sally.

“We are making more efforts. They’re not perfect, they’re continuing to be debated, but I think that’s what makes New Trier New Trier,” said Heidkamp. “I look to the future with hope. That’s ultimately the purpose: for students to be good citizens, to understand issues in our democracy, and also to be better prepared to interact with all of the people they’re going to meet in life.”

Alumnus wins 2017 George Orwell Prize

Richard Sobel wins an award for his book *Citizenship as Foundation of Rights*

by Layla Saqibuddin

Alumnus Richard Sobel received the 2017 George Orwell Prize for Distinguished Contribution to prominence in Public Language for his book “Citizenship as Foundation of Rights: Meaning for America.”

Sobel is a political scientist who has authored and edited eight books. He earned his bachelor’s degree from Princeton University and his doctorate from University of Massachusetts-Amherst.

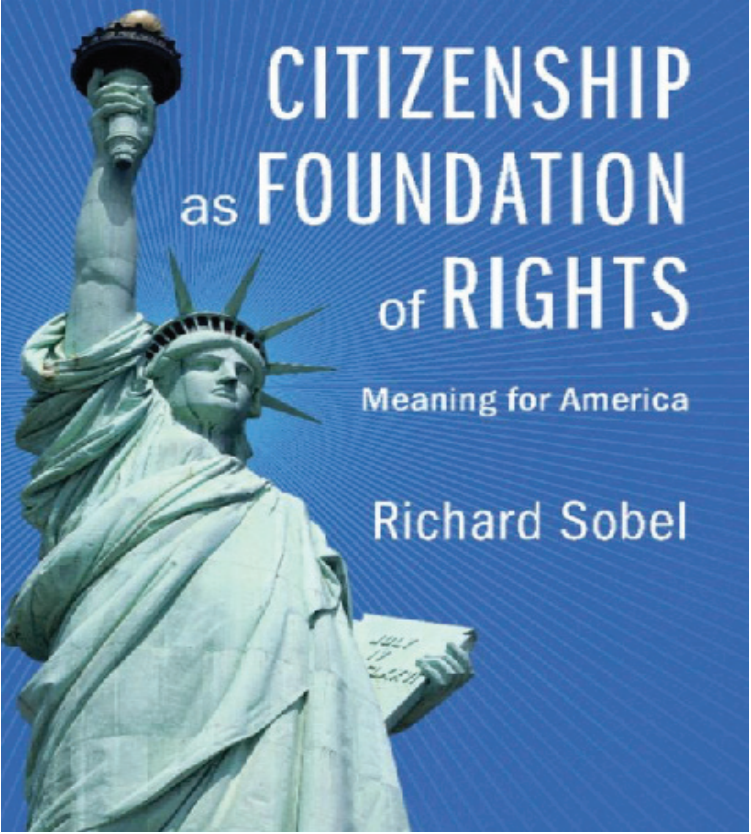
Sobel is currently a research associate at Harvard, and the director of the Cyber Privacy Project in Chicago and Cambridge. Sobel taught political science, public policy, and history at Princeton, Smith College, the University of Connecticut, Harvard, and has researched and written at Northwestern as a visiting professor.

His prizewinning book, “Citizenship as Foundation of Rights,” contributed to public discourses in understanding the rights that citizens are given, which was fundamentally the reason why Sobel won the Orwell award.

The book explains the value of American citizenship and the rights given to Americans. The book spotlights the right to vote, right to employment, and the right to travel in the United States. Sobel evaluates how protecting citizen’s rights protect them from future issues and generations.

He thought it was essential to spell out the values of citizens in detail for America and anyone who plans on becoming an American.

“We are in an era where people’s



Sobel studied Political Science at NT before attending Princeton | Sobel

constitutional rights are threatened in everyday life. I wanted the book to contribute to public discussion to understand the rights of citizens,” said Sobel.

“I would like people to read my book then discuss it. I hope they pursue their interests in a way to preserve the preamble of The Constitution and to preserve the blessings of liberty to ourselves and our posterity.” said Sobel.

Sobel also wanted to be an example of a good citizen and be involved in politics and policies. Sobel saw advantages to being a citizen and wanted to be involved in the process of politics.

While a student, Sobel was a volunteer for the Charles Percy campaigns for Governor and Senate.

Students were a big part of the group known as “Teens for Percy.”

“Michael Greenebaum was one of my most influential teachers who I had for two years. When he left the school, he co-founded the Metro High School in Chicago, where I was an intern my junior year at Princeton. He went on from there to become the principal of the laboratory school at the University of Massachusetts, School of Education. When I started graduate studies there, we reconnected and he agreed to become one of my graduate advisers.

“I want people to understand how the world operates, what our rights are, how we can protect them and how ID requirements can undermine them,” said Sobel.