

Minorities respond to N-word presentations

Students reflect on the effectiveness of the presentations

By *Mattea Carberry*

The N-word presentations in advisery were focused on addressing discriminatory words and actions directed against the black community within the school and beyond. But there are other races which find themselves in the minority population at NT amid the 79.9% white population.

Many other minority students expressed they haven't been a recipient of blatant hurtful speech on account of their race, but they still notice subtle harmful statements.

Senior Nico Toban, whose parents are both from Colombia, said sometimes he receives small ignorant comments about his ethnicity.

"I think people tend to be lowkey about it," he explained. "Someone in my AS class last year came up to me and asked me what my parents accent [sounded like] in English and then asked me to reenact it. I was like, 'Really?'"

For biracial students, they sometimes struggle with people being un-

aware of their ethnicity and thus proceeding to make offensive comments about part of their identity.

"I'm mixed enough that some people who don't know me that well don't think about my race enough to assume I'm anything other than white, and make comments about Asian people that I don't think they would make if they realized there was an Asian person right next to them," said junior Pearl Shing-Roth who is of Caucasian and Asian descent.

With the experiences of these racial minorities in mind, some students feel it would have been beneficial to broaden the N-word presentation to encompass more racial slurs and other offensive behavior.

Junior Annie Scadron, who's half Filipino and half Causasian, feels broadening the conversation could have been beneficial as it may have made the black community feel less singled out during the presentations.

"I can't speak from experience but if I were in that situation, I would feel extremely uncomfortable and like they were targeting me and my ethnicity," said Scadron. "I feel like there's power in numbers. The more people you have, the less uncomfortable you feel because you can relate

to more than just a handful of people."

But while a discussion of all the transgressions targeted against races may be ideal, many acknowledged that it is by no means an easy task.

"One of the more difficult aspects of tackling general racism for the school is that you can't just pinpoint it to one word that you can educate students on and build a conversation around," said Shing-Roth. "Discussing racism towards all minorities has to be a much bigger undertaking that challenges the fundamentals of what a lot of people at this school have been taught, and that's a challenge that I haven't seen the school adequately take on."

Junior Devlin Guthrie noted the difficulty of trying to have a discussion while not prompting discriminatory behavior to escalate.

"I feel like the school could probably do a better job of including other racial slurs but I know it's difficult where you draw the line between promoting it and addressing it," said Guthrie.

Junior Mira Gupta, who is half Greek and half Indian, feels focusing on specific groups allows for more productive conversation.

"I think it's better to focus on

smaller groups because it gives you more of a chance to speak about your own experiences," said Gupta. "It allows people to focus in on the topic more and less on generalizations."

Some feel the approach and mindset applied in facilitating these discussions ought to be reassessed entirely.



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'You can't just pinpoint it to one word that you can educate students on and build a conversation around'

For Scadron, the N-word presentation was a good start in having these discussions but not a realistic way to achieve significant change going forward.

"I don't think a powerpoint presentation should be used in the future because I felt like it was more going through a slide than a presentation with passion and emotion," she said.

Toban took it a step further and said that he feels the N-word presentation is a step back in how the school addresses the topic of race since they cancelled the All-School Seminar day addressing race which they held in 2016 and 2017.

"I think the school showed when they cancelled race day that they don't really care about racism at this school. I think they understand it's a problem but they're not ready to put their full weight behind it and they're super susceptible to pressure so they're willing to do the smallest thing to make a change," Toban emphasized.

Gupta said that while the N-word presentation was far from perfect, she's hopeful more discussions will follow which will steadily bring about change.

"I think it's important that we had the conversation in the first place," Gupta said. "The only way to go from here is to keep having the conversations and it will get easier and more effective."

These two articles addressed the usage of the N-word in academic material. The article on the left was originally published March 25, 1977 and the article on the right was originally published May 14, 1976.

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Let freedom ring at NT

Westwatch is alarmed by a reactionary trend that is occurring in our school system. The lessons learned and the freedoms gained in the sixties and early seventies have been either forgotten, abused, or renounced. Ten years ago, students clamored for increased academic freedom and the abandonment of moral and scholastic imperatives. Today, however, a reactionary swing has occurred.

The painful manifestations of this distortion of our heritage of liberal thinking were felt when the great novel **The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn** was removed from the required reading lists at NT because the word "nigger" is used to depict Blacks. Further reflecting this sad retreat from enlightenment is the limitation on the instruction of **The Merchant of Venice** and recent attacks by a few students and their parents against the instruction of works by E.E. Cummings and J.D. Salinger.

We are sad to report that this destructive tendency toward limiting education still exists at NT-W. Influenced by the Board of Education's unfortunate decision to limit the teaching of **Huck Finn**, four students recently complained to the administration that a teacher was instructing a work of serious literature they deemed "pornographic." The students demanded censorship of the poem. Cool heads prevailed, however, and these young reactionaries were placated.

Incidences of this nature reflect a dangerous trend. Now the students, who in the last decade staged sit-ins and riots to obtain academic freedom, use that freedom to demand censorship and limitations on what they can be taught.

Westwatch believes that students and their parents are entitled to voice their opinions regarding curricula. However, we are seriously disappointed by the nature of recent criticisms which have attacked teachers' freedom to judge what is and is not suitable teaching material.

NT-W hires English teachers because of their outstanding qualifications: knowledge of, appreciation for, and ability to instruct literature. Therefore, the teachers should be free to determine what is suitable for classroom use and students should respect liberal expression of thought, though it may come from seemingly "pornographic" literature.

Shall we demand that the administration regard us as mules whose vision must be shuttered to protect us from the harsh realities of the outside world? Nay, let those who want and need shelter quietly sink into the abysmal pit of ignorance — but do not let them drag us with them.

Let us appreciate the freedom we have as students and not fight to have that freedom curtailed.

Huck Finn: racial dilemma

by Peter Howell

"Dean' hurt me — don't! I haint ever done no harm to a gosh. I always liked dead people, an done all I could for 'em. 'Dean' do nuffin to Ole Jim. . ."

Thus, docile, superstitious "nigger" Jim glows in helplessness before Huck in Mark Twain's **The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn**, a novel just recently recommended by an advisory faculty committee for removal from the required reading list in English courses. The committee's proposal, to be considered by the Board, was motivated by the belief that Huck Finn's prejudicial language and Jim-Crow-like stereotype of a major character have caused intense suffering for many black (and white) students in English classes.



Mark Twain's **Huckleberry Finn** is subject of recent controversy concerning characterization of major figure, Jim. Twain's novel is criticized for its alleged racist prose: photo by Smith.

THE PROPOSAL to remove **Huck Finn** from the required reading list raises important questions concerning academic freedom at New Trier — the supposed tradition of liberty which New Trier, unlike some schools in West Virginia, has been able to maintain. Yet more to the point, the faculty's recommendation is the offspring of a strained racial atmosphere at New Trier which a latent white racism — on the part of coaches, teachers, and students — has aggravated. Though race relations, as all would agree, seem relatively stable, unlike at Evanston or Proviso High Schools, there exists a marked cleavage between black and white, as real as the segregated early morning social groupings in the halls. Though we'd like to think it isn't so, there is a certain racial inequality at New Trier. Thus when Mark Twain, despite all the greatness of his storytelling, presents in **Huckleberry Finn** the deprecatd and humiliating image of "nigger" Jim, a lazy drunken man made to appear childish in his superstition, it perhaps is understandable that black readers would feel uneasy, surrounded as one student said, by "those white stares."

The conflict between academic freedom and the responsibility of the school to insure racial harmony first surfaced in 1970, when a faculty committee proposed the elimination of the novel from the required reading list. As a result of parental pressure, the faculty proposal was submitted to Dr. Cornog and the Board of Education. Cornog disagreed with banning the book and stipulated that the classic must be taught. However, doubt — on the part of the faculty and in the community — persisted as to whether academic freedom ranked above the

concerns of students, who were subjected to "very real suffering," as one teacher stated.

IN LATE 1975, another grievance was filed by concerned parents of black students concerning the required reading of **Huckleberry Finn**. A faculty committee was again formed, this time consisting of 10 faculty members, the majority of whom were English teachers. After 5 meetings, held in March and April of 1976, the Committee voted 6-4 to again suggest the removal of **Huck Finn** from the curriculum. Yet as the vote indicates, the committee was not unanimous; many teachers feel that the decision reflected a narrow-minded anti-intellectualism, a contempt for literary standards as well as an ignorance of the culture of Mark Twain's setting.

The case for academic freedom and retention of the novel as a literary work of art, which was embodied in the minority opinion, becomes especially relevant in light of the "Bible Belt's" pervasive tendency to ban books which seem offensive to God-fearing Christians. Although the faculty proposal in no way bars **Huck Finn** from the library, seeking only to remove it from the curriculum, the suggestion nonetheless smacks of an encroaching and inflexible anti-intellectualism, unhealthy in the educational process.

THE MAJORITY opinion, written by Miss Diana Steever, English teacher and Junior Girls adviser chairman, attempts to meet the issue of academic freedom, the right of the teacher to determine his own text, with the argument for a higher priority: concern for the students. The freedom of teachers in public schools in determining the texts is conditional upon the Board of Education's approval. As even Mr. Paul McCloskey, who played a major role in writing the minority opinion, has said, the academic freedom of high school teachers is indeed limited.

The overriding motive for dropping **Huck Finn** from the reading list was concern for the students: both black and white. Parents who came before the committee spoke of the hardship and suffering their children had undergone, describing the mental torment inflicted by many of the white students in the classes. The use of the word "nigger" and the picture of a childish black man, superstitious, ignorant, led around by a white boy were, as Miss Steever related, the chief objections to the novel. As she said: "No book [is] more important than the children we teach."

Black students, reflected much the same sentiment, favoring a removal of **Huckleberry Finn** from the curriculum. Many students interviewed spoke of the mental harassment: the stares of white students, not consciously racist, but intensely aloof. Junior David Norris, a black student, supports the faculty proposal in light of his experience in class discussion of the novel. "I think it should be taken off because of the repercussions in class. I don't think it should be discussed in class. A person ought to read it on his own," he said.

At the root of the **Huck Finn** controversy is the incontrovertible fact that New Trier lacks in any meaningful sense an integrated racial climate. Although simply increasing the number of blacks at New Trier would not necessarily improve the race relations here, some effort is needed to bring the whites closer to alienated black students. A faculty study group as well as the counseling department have initiated proposals designed to bridge the gap between races both on the faculty and in the student body. Hopefully in the future, when white students quit their stares, and decided to hold English class in the spirit of racial harmony, the true qualities of **Huck Finn** may be assessed.