

## No excuse to use N-word

by Sofia Papakos

The issue of identity is confusing. We spend our whole lives figuring out who we are and what we want for ourselves. Throw race and gender into the mix, and it adds even more layers of complexity to our identity.

I'm not black and I don't consider myself white either. I'm still struggling with my own racial identity. Whether it's growing up in a mixed race family or racially diverse neighborhood, many people can relate.

For example, it was normal to hear the N-word at Englewood Middle School on Chicago's Southside. Or even Lincoln Junior High in Skokie. I heard it everywhere at school, and on the street.

Then I moved to the New Trier District, where the majority was white. Already that was a culture shock to me. I honestly wasn't used to seeing so many white people. It was weird. What was even more shocking was hearing white people say the N-word when addressing one another.

The majority of the time, I hear it at parties but rarely in the hallway. In my experience, I didn't think it was used in a derogatory way. It was used to I guess be funny, or act "hood." In some group chats, a lot of the guys would use it and try to talk in an awkward "ghetto" accent, the way they think a lot of rappers sound.

I understand why some students talk like that. Since hip hop and rap culture is in now, everyone wants to be a part of that. I don't think there's anything wrong with that. But when you try to imitate it, whether it's trying to act black by saying the N-word in a song or to one of your friends, same difference. You're still saying it.

The recent N-word presentations lacked an essential question: why do non-blacks use the N-word in the first place?

It's always baffled me why people who aren't black feel the need to say it. I'm not condoning the non-black students at my other school saying it either, even though they were minorities. I can understand why it's confusing for younger kids to comprehend why only a certain group of kids could say a word that they hear thrown around mercilessly.

For teenagers in a white community to think it's okay is absolutely ridiculous though. There's no excuse for it. No, it's not okay if it's in a song, or if it's used to imitate a rapper. And it's not funny when it's used in a joke.

Yes, in some cases it is used to target blacks and be racist. But the most common use I've heard is to 'act black.' That's a whole other issue.

I've debated writing this article for so many reasons. Although the use of the word is becoming more common among the student body, I didn't want to offend anyone because I'm not being directly affected by it. The N-word presentations we recently had in our advisors emphasized that.

Once I was at a party and someone was playing rap, and a few white kids said the N-word and flailed their arms in the air. I didn't say anything. It wasn't out of fear, but because I felt like it wasn't my place.

I didn't realize until after I attended the minority alliance meeting that I was indirectly contributing. Even though I didn't say it, I didn't want to say anything because I didn't put the perpetrators on blast.

It's ridiculous to think I was both embarrassed to call out racists and it was ingrained in my mentality to think this is an issue for only black people to deal with. It's not.

The N-word is everyone's problem. It impacts non-blacks too because it establishes a precedent that it's okay to use derogatory language in our community and that affects everyone.

Regardless of race, gender, and sexuality, by using that language, we are building a toxic environment that encourages ignorance. There's a sense of humanity that's lost when we dehumanize each other using malicious words.

So, if you hear someone say the N-word or a slur, be the bigger person and say something. Although it's a cliché, the same "golden rule" of treating everyone the way you want to be treated still apply. And honestly it's more crucial now than ever since we all have a basic understanding of the implications of bigotry.

At this point it's ridiculous that our school has to reiterate, to grown adults and teenagers, that it's not ok under any circumstances to imply or use hate speech.

## 100 minutes is not enough time to tackle complex issues



by Emma Mansour

There are racial issues at New Trier. That isn't a secret. I think generally, we have a very shallow understanding of the nuances of race and how race exists outside of the walls of our school.

The logical thing to do would be to learn about race (history, intersections, culture, etc) so that we become more well informed and better people as we go to college and beyond.

Yet New Trier does not seem to care about this as much as they should, at least it doesn't look like that to me. The N-word presentations only served to reinforce that idea.

Obviously, as a white person, my opinion and perceptions about these presentations matter less. Even so, after the presentations, I had a lot of frustrations with how it was handled, and expressed this to a handful of my teachers.

While they were sympathetic to my ideas, they did remind me that the administration was doing its best. It made me feel a little bad and then I was like 'Fine. They're doing their best.'

But then I thought about it, and I was like 'No they're not. This is not even remotely close to their best, and if this is their best, their best is not enough.'

We spend *weeks* every single year with multiple extended advisories to do scheduling. We spend *hours* on choosing classes. And yet they could not carve out more than 100 minutes to talk about the N-word? It's a complex issue that needs more than 4 advisery periods, and the time allotted was

far from sufficient.

Another thing that absolutely perplexes me is why the people teaching this were our advisers. I think many handled this as well as they could, but they don't have the training or background to really understand how to teach kids about the complexities of race.

The purpose of an adviser is to advise, not to teach lessons on race or any other intense topic. It seems unfair to expect them to successfully deploy this presentation, when many of them are probably in a very similar spot to students in terms of understanding race.

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I am not qualified to teach this topic, so why should every adviser be expected to?

There are plenty of highly qualified people that I'm sure would have been happy to come speak to us. Why they couldn't hire people to come in and talk about the N-word is truly beyond me.

To give them some credit, the school tried bringing in people with Seminar day, aka New Trier's attempt at addressing race prior to the N-word presentations.



Despite the controversy, it was probably helpful because we had educated professionals talking to us about racial issues, and it had a lot of positive feedback. But the administration kicked it after two years.

I asked the administration why they got rid of it, and they said that it was exhausting for teachers, especially multiple years in a row.

They also said that one day wasn't enough. The next year, they went to 0 days. Then 100 minutes this year. I'm not great a math, but I feel like one day is more than both of those.

The final thing I had an issue with was them choosing the N-word as the only thing to address. Non-black students saying the N-word is a problem that deserves attention. And addressing the word is valuable and necessary, regardless of its success rate.

But talking about the N-word in a manner that seemed forced and scripted does little to address the underlying issues of racism that persist at New Trier.

It would be better if they gave students an idea of what the plan is for future presentations in order to address similar problems, but based on my conversation with administration, it seems like these plans don't exist outside of a vague desire to keep talking about how language exists in relation to minorities.

There are racial issues at New Trier. We need to go beyond a presentation and do more.

## We shouldn't have to hear homophobic and sexist slurs in advisery



by Eva Roytburg

On the last day of the N-word presentations, advisors and advisees watched a video of Ta-Nehesi Coats addressing a student at Evanston Township High School about the use of the N-word.

Coats is a renown writer who has published several powerful pieces on white supremacy in America and policies towards Black Americans; there is no doubt that he is qualified to speak on the subject.

Coats said the N-word multiple times in his speech, which he arguably has the right to, as a black person. But he also voiced slurs against communities he isn't a part of, such as the B-word, which is used to marginalize women, or the F-word, historically used to belittle the LGBTQIA+ community.

The choice to include this video

in the presentation screams rashness and hypocrisy. Students had just had 3 days of learning why saying a slur is bad, even if it is not out of malicious intent.

We were rightfully told that singing the word in a song, reading it out loud, or using it in our own vocabulary is all wrong.

Though Coats was saying those slurs as examples of words he couldn't use, he still voiced it out-loud, incensing terrible imagery of cruelty.

The B-word has often been used to demean women who are assertive as a way to silence them into submission. The F-word remains a prolific slur, utilized to hurt members of the LGBTQIA+ community and is often hurled as a synonym for "weak". Saying these repulsive words can and does harm members of both communities.

Even if it was for a split second, LGBTQIA+ and female-identifying individuals, both students and teachers, were forced to confront jarring verbalization of institutionalized hatred. Advisers were given a pre-written statement on the slurs the morning of the presentation to read, but it left little



A video of Ta-Nehesi Coats was shown in the N-word presentation | Demczuk

room for students to prepare for it or opt out of hearing the video. There is no reason an academic institution should inflict this distress onto their students.

But the school doesn't need to hear that; it has publicly acknowledged the damage that saying slurs out loud does to students. They officially made a statement, as a school, expressing that they did not want their students to use racial slurs as it reflects poorly on others and the community. The

question then becomes why they felt that it was okay for students and teachers to hear Tah-Nehesi Coats say these slurs.

Perhaps this carelessness is due to the fact that we have not had many public incidents with the B-word or the Fa-word. In the 2017-2018 school year, we had three separate instances of the N-word being graffitied on bathroom stalls, which made headlines on the Chicago Tribune and ABC-7. It was clear that we needed to come

together to have a discussion about the N-word in particular.

But that doesn't have to come at the expense of other marginalized communities. LGBTQIA+ individuals and female-identifying individuals suffer from prejudice and microaggressions frequently in this school. "Bro-culture" is still very much alive and harms students and teachers from both of those communities.

Limited discussion of LGBTQIA+ individuals in history classes, English texts, and health class is a predominant issue which plagues our curriculum.

This isn't about deciding who is the most oppressed of them all, rather creating a welcome environment for everyone.

People might think a few seconds of one video isn't a big deal. But bigotry thrives and festers on repeated patterns of neglect from school leaders who have a duty to manage a safe school community.

There were many other videos that could've been chosen with equally powerful oratory, or the words Coats used could've been censored out.

We have to do better.