

Surviving Is Not Living

By Kidist Habte, sophomore at Rainier Beach High School

(*Editor's Note:* Kidist delivered this speech at the Black Lives Matter at School Student Talent Showcase on March 8 at Cleveland High School.)

Hello everyone, my name is Kidist Habte. I am a sophomore at Rainier Beach High School. Originally, I wrote this speech for my school's Martin Luther King Assembly, so there's going to be a lot of Dr. King references. This speech today is called "Surviving Is Not Living".

"Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere. We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny, whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly." - Martin Luther King Jr.

There are a thousand more quotes that I could've chosen by Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. today, but I chose this because I feel that it's something that applies to each and every person in this room today. Justice is a word that has been abused by human society. It's a moral, a form of righteousness, meant to uphold equality for those who have suffered and continue to suffer.

It's been thrown around improperly by the corrupt in power. When we sit down knowing that there are people in the world who have suffered and have become the stepping stool by those in power, we are just as bad as the perpetrators.

And we allow that same thing to happen to us. We give those same corrupt people the comfort of being able to manipulate justice and us. And when we experience injustice, we become the ones asking ourselves "Why? Oh, why God, have you allowed me to become the stepping stool? You know I'm innocent." But, do you know who else was and is innocent?

The person who was abused, oppressed, and denied of justice, that we refused to help. Because at the moment we were caught up thinking about what was directly affecting us and what isn't affecting us. We allowed that to dictate our activity when it came to fighting for one another, and because of that we turn our eyes away. That will become the reason for when that one injustice act that we ignored becomes the reason for the million other injustices to come, if we continue looking the other way.

We continue to believe that things that don't happen in our house, our school, our circle of friends, our town, our workplace has no effect in our lives. This belief, this ritualistic ideal, is a disease that has been embedded by our oppressors and has been passed down through generations.

When our oppressors see that this ideal that they've planted is working, they have been guaranteed that we will never come together as one, sharing our experiences, being activists for one another, and providing comfort. When Rosa Parks was asked to give up her seat for a white person, she refused to give her seat up. This made many white people angry because they were pushed out of what was once providing them comfort, which was the obedience of not only Black people, but other people of color. Rosa Parks contributed in the sparking of the civil rights movement. But do you think that if people didn't join Rosa Parks in boycotting segregation that segregation wouldn't exist?

What if people said, "Well, it wasn't me being asked to give up my seat to a white man so this ain't none of my concern!" would segregation be banned?

What if people chose not to march with Martin Luther King Jr. because they believed that they weren't the ones being directly affected by inequality existing?

We would still most likely be living through segregation, being asked to give up our seats, our rights, to white people. Do you see my point here?

WE MUST STOP BELIEVING THAT WHAT DOESN'T HAPPEN DIRECTLY TO US DOESN'T AFFECT US! We must open our eyes and realize that we aren't fighting only for the rights of our own, but the rights for all of us. I'm not saying that every single person in this room has to become a national civil rights activist, but I'm asking everyone to open their eyes!

The civil rights movement is just as relevant as it was 50 plus years ago! AMERICA HAS NOT CHANGED AS MUCH AS WE BELIEVE IT HAS!

The gap between black folks incarcerated and white folks incarcerated has widened: AMERICA HAS NOT CHANGED!

Black people and hispanic people are denied loans and mortgages just as much as during the civil rights era: AMERICA HAS NOT CHANGED!

People of color are still being paid less than white people, even if they are more certified for the job: AMERICA HAS NOT CHANGED! Just because we aren't noticing these problems doesn't mean they don't exist. Maybe we're just the ones who are choosing to look the other way.

Cause these problems do exist!

Justice still has not been served. People are still becoming the stepping stool of this country. The movement is not over just yet. We, as the future generation of this country, still have room for growth, for wisdom, and knowledge. We must keep our eyes open. It can start off as small as voting for proper representation. When we use our voices as a group, it becomes louder, stronger, and more meaningful than just one voice!

Surviving isn't living. Must we continue to condone the bigotry of the world?

That is not living!

Must we look the other way and act as if these problems don't exist?

That is not living!

We may look the other way, but we can never say we didn't know.

"Do we settle for the world as it is, or do we work for the world as it should be?" - Michelle Obama

Educators' Vision

Published By the Social Equity Educators (SEE)

March 2019

Black Lives Matter at School Week 2019

Editor's Note: Social Equity Educators is proud of the role played by our members and fellow educators in the Seattle Education Association as well as the amazing students in the NAACP Youth Coalition and our allies in the Seattle Council of the PTSA in making this year's Black Lives Matter at School week a smashing success! We dedicate this issue of Educators' Vision to the week, to the voices of Black students and educators, and the ongoing struggle to make Black Lives Matter in all schools throughout the U.S. as we fight for the following demands:

1. End "zero tolerance" discipline and implement restorative justice
2. Hire more black teachers
3. Mandate black history and ethnic studies in K-12 curriculum
4. Counselors not cops
5. Fully fund our schools
6. Oppose standardized tests
7. Detracking

Thanks from the national Black Lives Matter at School Coalition!

(*Editor's Note:* Below is a short statement of thanks from the national Black Lives Matter at School Coalition for the efforts of educators around the country to make this week an incredible success.)

On behalf of the Black Lives Matter at School Coalition, we are writing to thank everyone for a powerful week of action from coast to coast. Because of the bravery and tenacity of many thousands of educators, students, parents, activists, and organizers, BLM@School week was bigger and more impactful than ever before.

It is truly stunning to visit #BlackLivesMatterAtSchool on Twitter and see all the photos and stories of communities around the country reclaiming their schools, affirming Black students' lives, and challenging anti-Black racism. We were especially moved by the intersectional approach to fighting racism that so many schools engaged in with lesson plans to teach about queer, transgender, female, and immigrant Black people.

At the same time, during our week of action, a girl at a Pennsylvania high school was grabbed by the hair and slammed on the lunch table by a police officer. This incident, the many recent like it, and the ongoing inequities in the public schools are bitter reminders of work left to do. It is our hope that the BLM at School week of action can serve to jump start activism and pedagogy to transform the school system and dismantle institutional racism—but we know that this work can't be confined to the week if it is going to be successful. We must use the week to launch ongoing initiatives for ethnic studies, restorative justice, hiring more Black educators and counselors, to get police out of the schools, and more.

Yet there can be no doubt that this movement has begun. The Black Lives Matter at School week of action reached more than 30 cities; we engaged tens of thousands of students in lessons about the 13 principles of the Black Lives Matter Global Network; we held rallies at local school board meetings and city halls around the four national demands; and we organized forums, youth talent showcases, and speak outs to educate the community and empower young people in the movement.

Read the full statement:
blacklivesmatterschool.com/2019/02/09/419/

Upcoming Social Equity Educator (SEE) meeting

All Seattle Education Association (SEA) members who believe in bringing social justice ideas into our classrooms and union are welcome and encouraged to attend. Our next 3 meetings are:

When: Saturday March 30th at 10am-Noon
When: Capitol Hill Library (425 Harvard Ave. E., Seattle, WA 98102)
[facebook.com/events/263879611197317/](https://www.facebook.com/events/263879611197317/)

When: Saturday April 20th at 10am-Noon
When: Douglass-Truth Library (2300 E Yesler Way, Seattle 98122)
[facebook.com/events/340238279951435/](https://www.facebook.com/events/340238279951435/)

When: Saturday May 18th at 10am-Noon
When: Douglass-Truth Library (2300 E Yesler Way, Seattle 98122)
[facebook.com/events/397256057728609/](https://www.facebook.com/events/397256057728609/)

For more information check out: socialequityeducators.org
[facebook.com/socialequityeducators/](https://www.facebook.com/socialequityeducators/)
Call or text: 206.550.1609

What Does Public Education Have Against Black Teachers?

(*Editor's Note:* The following is a reprint of part of an article from the national Black Lives Matter at School coalition. The third national demand of this movement is "Hire More Black Teachers". This piece explains why it's crucial this become a priority nationally.)

You may think this is an exaggeration, but an analysis of the data from Journey 4 Justice Alliance and the #WeChoose Coalition, shows that in at least six major cities, Black teachers are becoming extinct. The same data shows us that each of these cities has a growing population of students of color, but many of them will not see a teacher who looks like them. Instead, they will face discriminatory discipline and gaps in opportunities and attainment that negatively impact their future. From a 3% gap in Oakland to a 30% gap in Pittsburgh, Black students are attending schools increasingly taught by white educators (The Purge of Black Teachers Cities, 2019).

This gap is even larger in charter schools that tend to serve more black students and hire fewer black teachers. Both New York City and Chicago have seen gaps of 38% and 39% respectively, between the population of black students and the number of black teachers within the charter school system (The Purge of Black Teachers Cities, 2019).

To understand how the decline in black teachers began, we must first look at New Orleans. After Hurricane Katrina, privatizers were able to push out Black teachers and turn the school district over to charter operators. In 2004, 71% of teachers in New Orleans were Black. In 2005, all New Orleans teachers were summarily fired, a mass dismissal of 8% of Louisiana's teachers and 24% of the state's Black teachers. (The Purge of Black Teachers, 2019). By 2013, only 35% of new hire teachers were Black, and only 22% of dismissed teachers were rehired, down from 33% in 2007 (The Purge of Black Teachers, 2019). Nationally, we have seen a decline of Black teachers to 6%, while Black students make up 15% of the student population, and students of color account for more than half of the student population (The Purge of Black Teachers, 2019).

Read the full article with graphics: blacklivesmatterschool.com/2019/02/07/hire-more-black-teachers-now-a-research-statement-from-blmschool-j4j/



Educators' Vision

Published By the Social Equity Educators (SEE)

SEE steering committee

Tracy Castro-Gill, Olivia Gefner, Jesse Hagopian, Darrin Hoop, Bruce Jackson, Kaitlin Kamalei Jenkins, Rosa Powers, Lauren Ware-Stark, and Justin Vinson.

Educators' Vision is a monthly newsletter of the Social Equity Educators socialequityeducators.org info@seattlesee.org

Mission

Social Equity Educators is a rank and file caucus of Seattle Education Association educators that focuses on democratic, anti-racist, and anti-oppression policies and practices in our classrooms, schools, and communities. SEE engages in local, national, and international social movements for liberation and radical change by building alliances and addressing the roots of institutional racism and other forms of injustice.

Points of Unity

- ◆ Organizing and bargaining for equity from the bottom up
- ◆ Anti-racist, anti-oppression pedagogy and practices
- ◆ Supporting social movements through community alliances
- ◆ Full and equitable funding for public education
- ◆ Opposing corporate education reform

Black Lives Matter at School Student Talent Showcase

Words can't describe how proud SEE is to have worked with the NAACP Youth Coalition (NYC) to cosponsor the Black Lives Matter at School Student Talent Showcase on Friday March 8 at Cleveland High School. These creative youthdancers, poets, filmmakers, singers and more defined the phrase, "Young, Gifted, and Black!" and made the case for how to uproot institutional racism in education!

We'd like to give a special thanks to all kinds of support from the Seattle Council of the PTSA, especially Sebrena Burr, Eliza Rankin for designing the poster and program for the night, Cleveland High School for hosting, Elliot Stoller for videotaping it, Seattle International Socialist Organization for donating gift cards to the student performers, emcee Jerrell Davis, aka Rell Be Free, DJ Pax for sound, and many other students, educators, parents and community members who lent their support in various ways.

These student performers are the future! We are in excellent hands!

Here's the list of performers in order:

- Jerrell Davis, emcee for the night – CoFounder & Restorative Justice Director WABLOC (Building Leaders of Change)
- DJ Pax
- Rena Mateja Walker Burr, Viviana Williams, Deyvonna Williams, Black Student Union members at Cleveland High School – Opening remarks
- Isaiah Banks, Cleveland High School – Black National Anthem
- Dearborn Park Elementary School HipHop – break dance
- Simone Higashi, Franklin High School – song
- Emma Fedore and Aneesa Roidad, Ballard High School, Luci Roman, Ingraham High School – NAACP Youth Coalition speakers
- Angelina Riley, Rainier Beach High School – song
- Marquita Prinzing, Director of the SEA Center for Racial Equity
- Namaka Auwae Dekker, Franklin High School – poem
- Tracy CastroGill, Ethnic Studies Program Manager at Seattle Public Schools – speech
- Dexter Nance, Orca K8, and Daniel Warren, mentor – rap
- Katrina Johnson, cousin of Charleena Lyles, and Jesse Hagopian, Ethnic Studies teacher, SEE member – speech
- Luci Roman, Ingraham High School – song
- Kiyoshi Sakaue 2018/19 Youth Poet Ambassador, The Center School – poem
- Bruce Jackson, Special Education teacher, SEE member – speech
- Israel Presley, Rainier Beach High School – spoken word
- Kidist Habte, Rainier Beach High School – speech

Our apologies go out to Orca Film and Theater Family. Due to technological difficulties, we were unable to show a video students with this group made. We hope to post the video in the future.

Watch the entire Student Talent Showcase: tinyurl.com/y3ma2rb6

Is It Too Much To Dream?

By Israel Presley, Rainier Beach High School student

(Editor's Note: Israel delivered this spoken word at the Black Lives Matter at School Student Talent Showcase on March 8 at Cleveland High School.)

Is it too much to dream?

Well, I want to say I dream of a city full of churches where our leaders can return and preach. I dream of peace and a voice so powerful there isn't a place on this planet it couldn't reach. I dream of teachers that look like me, think like me, love like me, so we can finally connect when they teach.

But I guess I'm just another dreamer. Well, those are not dreams. They are what I demand, but I couldn't expect America to comprehend or understand. If I were to leave it to America, it would spit on me, give me a back hand, and hang me with it's red, white, and blue flag for being a black man.

I mean, you see what they did to Martin when he had a dream. Excuse me, a demand. They killed our voice, preacher, teacher, right when he took his stand. As I come out of chrysalis, I start to fly, but the white man tries to force me to land.

The system has put a target on me for my melanin and hates my very being from clothes to my hair down the very last strand.

But, I don't hate you America. I appreciate you because you made me a dreamer that seeks unity with my brothers whether Latinos, Asians, Blacks or Native Americans through the oppression we share. We can all come together, fight back, take a stand, and be grounded and put our right fist up in the air. You can try to stop us from our rapid progression if you dare.

We have taken off your shackles and put on black leather jackets and berets. We've escaped your snare. I know our "hands up, don't shoot" and "black lives matter" signs always catches the white man's glare. We seek a world with hope, peace, equality, and equity where all people are treated fair, so again I ask, is it too much to dream or is it too much to care?

In Honor of Ziad Shakur: Push the Ball Forward

By Bruce Jackson, Special Education teacher at Aki Kurose Middle School, member of SEE

(Editor's Note: Bruce delivered this speech at the Black Lives Matter at School Student Talent Showcase on March 8 at Cleveland High School.)

When I was 10 years old, my uncle Ziad Shakur was murdered on the New Jersey turnpike while fighting to protect the unalienable rights of black people in this country. After his death, his family, my aunt Louise and cousin Craig moved in with us. A few days later she started receiving threats on her life and the life of her son. My uncle was a member of the Black Panther Party and the Black Liberation Army. Those organizations felt they owed a great debt to my uncle, so from that day on there was an armed presence in and around my home.

Consequently, there was no lack of people in our home that knew a lot about black people, black history and our people's place in the struggle for liberation of all people. From that day on, I had mentors who would not let me fall. I had proud, strong, black men in my circle. I attended breakfasts with community members who would ask me about what I was learning in school and give me questions for my teachers about those topics, questions that would tip the conversations in class toward the topic of social justice. When I asked these questions in class, I would usually stand alone, or other students would use me as a way to avoid the teacher chosen topic of the day.

I would usually lack the depth of knowledge to defend myself against my teachers, and due to my curiosity and these contradictions, I would often end up in the principal's office asking those same questions. I remember asking those questions in relation to what I was being taught in school, in terms of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. I would often end up bringing those questions home to my mentors where I would be given the answers and rebuttals with no class time for the discussion necessary for the depth of knowledge I craved.

I wanted to create an ideology, something that made me stronger in the face of grief and loss. That didn't happen in school, and at an early age, I knew that there was more to knowledge than what I was being told in school. That there was more to being black than poverty, ignorance, and slavery. As my mentors told me more about my uncle, I started to see my education as a gift I had no right to squander, a gift that no one had the right to twist and shape into a master narrative that omits the proud truths of my ancestors and the ancestors of the marginalized groups I lived and learned with.

My uncle was murdered while trying to create a Black Studies program in elementary and middle schools in New York and the surrounding areas. He was murdered while fighting for many of the demands we are still asking for with the Black Lives Matter at Schools movement: Ethnic Studies, More Black Teachers, and a move toward Culturally Responsive treatment of people of color in this country, a strengthening of our communities. Why is this such a difficult thing to give? Why is the truth such a guarded secret?

I still have questions. Why must we glorify our oppressors in education? Why must we glorify criminal acts by praising that "Louisiana Purchase", that "Manifest Destiny", all the while downplaying the genocide they caused? Why must we glorify racism by ignoring merciless acts of dehumanization like slavery, Chinese exclusion, Japanese internment, Native re-education schools, in this Master Narrative?

Why can't we glorify those who fought against these acts of cruelty? Why can't we create our own heroes in history? Why can't we praise humanity? Why can't we join the human family? I want to teach our children to be humane beings on this planet, citizens of a world that needs their creativity. Citizens in a species that will not survive without them. How can we save ourselves from self-destruction when we teach history in its current form?

My uncle died 19 years after the Brown v. Board of Education decision. He died moving the ball forward, moving the ball ever further away from ignorance and closer and closer to enlightenment.

I am honored to help him push that same ball forward 40 years later. I am honored to live for the people, the humane beings on this planet. I am privileged to know my history, to know that I am capable of much more than the current master narrative believes I am. I want to share that dignity of knowledge with all who are willing to listen.

We have so many stories to tell. Stories of great heroes fighting and dying for justice. Stories of communities rising and demanding more from themselves and from those who govern them. Stories of our rise after being knocked down by the forces of ignorance. We, as educators, are obliged to tell these stories, to hold these truths to be self-evident that all men are created equal.

As educators, we are required to teach an equality in education. We are endowed by our creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. When we fight for our education, we fight for the rewards of independence. If we do not teach about the structures of life on this planet and how to maintain those structures, we are denied our rights.

If we do not have critical knowledge about the cultures and ethnicities that fill this planet, if we are not free to interact with all people, we do not have liberty, and our rights are denied. If we cannot see happiness in as many of its forms as possible, we cannot understand it. We tend to pursue what we are told to pursue, and our rights are denied....we have to do better. No more murders to deny self-evident truth.

I would have loved to have known my uncle, to have joined him in his struggle to make education benefit all people, but all I was left with was a ball that needed to be moved forward.

I am not alone in my desire to see this ball moved forward. Many of us are in this audience now. There's Tracy Castro-Gill, Head of the Ethnic Studies Department pushing, pushing that ball forward. There's Jesse Hagopian, the first educator to teach Ethnic Studies in the city pushing, pushing that ball forward. Sitting among you is the NAACP Youth Coalition, students making the same demands as I made all those years ago pushing, pushing that ball forward. Help us push this ball forward to the top of the hill. Then release it with me.