



# CULTURAL LEADERSHIP

UNDERSTANDING THROUGH THE AFRICAN AMERICAN - JEWISH EXPERIENCE

News and Events of Cultural Leadership - [www.culturalleadership.com](http://www.culturalleadership.com) - Vol. 2 Spring 2008

## LARGEST CLASS EVER BEGINS JOURNEY

The largest class of students Cultural Leadership has ever attracted is now almost a third of the way through their amazing experience. This year, 28 students representing 17 different high schools and 20 different houses of worship in the St. Louis area embarked on a life-changing journey that only Cultural Leadership offers.

They have already completed three programs. At the Opening Retreat over Martin Luther King, Jr.'s birthday weekend, they began the all-important process of getting to know each other and building trust among themselves. They engaged in many team-building activities and exercises that demonstrated who they are and their social backgrounds: family, friends, schools, and houses of worship. We must know where we come from to know how to get where we are going. The Opening Retreat also introduced the core concepts for the year ahead: the causes and consequences of racism, oppression, and discrimination.

At the second program, African and "African-American History & Culture," participants encountered the long, complex,



Class 4 students make time for a group photo at the Opening Retreat

and often misunderstood history of black Americans. Dr. Jonathan Smith of St. Louis University presented an amazing education for our students that expanded the common "school" version of this history. It was a perfect start to the learning to come.

The March program, "Jewish History and Culture," provided an overview of what it means to be Jewish. The program included a condensed Jewish history excellently presented by Rabbi Mordecai Miller, as well as the history of anti-Semitism. This program, too, laid foundations upon which our students will construct their educations.

Our next program will be another intensive weekend retreat. This time, we study the Civil Rights Movement in the United States and what it means to be a change agent, focusing on Gandhi and Cesar Chavez. Our students will meet and talk with

local individuals who have been activists for social change: Rabbi Susan Talve, Percy Green, Frankie Freeman, Eric Vickers, and Reverend Marek Bozek.

In May, the students will delve deeply into the core issues addressed by the program: Institutionalized Oppression, Power, Privilege, & Prejudice. Then, in June, they set out on the Transformational Journey to New York, Washington DC, Atlanta, New Orleans and Jena, throughout Alabama and Mississippi, Little Rock, and Memphis. Along the way, they will be immersed in the vast history of righting social wrongs and confronted with the enormous duty we all owe, and which they have assumed, to make the world a better place. No one has a crystal ball, but all you have to do is turn this page to see the bright faces of the future of social change.

**IN THIS ISSUE...**

- Largest Class Ever..... 1
- Message from the Founder..... 2
- New Program Director..... 2
- Introducing Class 4!..... 3
- Ripples..... 4
- Year Off to a Great Start..... 4
- Two Looks at the February Program..... 5
- Two Looks at the March Program..... 6
- Opening Retreat Inspires Student..... 7
- Donors..... 7
- School Swap Program..... 8

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# FROM THE FOUNDER...

We are growing and building and very excited!

We are well into Class 4 with our largest class ever – 28 students. They are fabulous (I know I say that about every class!). 18 girls, 10 boys from 17 different high schools and 20 different houses of worship. We are proud that we have three “legacies” in this year’s class – siblings of alums (Arnold Bullock, Jen Golden, Baron Ross) and two students from across the river – Chris Watkins and Allister Byrd. We truly want students from all over the region.

We have made some wonderful changes. Richie Gallant’s and Tyjuan Morrow’s school swap last year was so successful that all the kids in Class 4 say they are doing it this year. I’ll keep you updated as they go to school with each other.

Also new is that we are making it mandatory that every student do something every month outside his/her comfort zone. We are learning that this is a very courageous bunch!

Our incredible, life-changing trip is basically the same. We are adding Jena, Louisiana this year – after the Jewish summer camp. The days are as full as ever and I continue to be guilty of trying to shove as much knowledge into them as possible!

We have new board members including four parents and one alum – Sean Scott from Class 2. We are at 18 now and they are all hard-working. We just hired a Program Director we are very excited about – Jenny Harris - who starts May 1.

Not a day goes by that I don’t hear from an alum or two or three. Lucky me. Thanks for being our friend/supporter.

Love,

*Karen*



Parents and board members at the welcome party in January; parents attend meetings every six weeks during their children’s year in Cultural Leadership.

## New Program Director Well-Prepared for Role

Cultural Leadership is delighted to announce that we have hired a new Program Director. Jennifer Harris is a graduate of Ladue High School and Middlebury College in Vermont, and has a background in Sociology and Anthropology. Research she conducted for her senior thesis, “On a Divided Front: A Study of Educators’ Responses to the Black-White Achievement Gap” will no doubt serve her well in our work here.

Jenny also has extensive experience with teenagers, having served as a camp counselor and as a college admissions advisor. Most important, though, she is passionate about our mission and our work. We look forward to a long and rewarding relationship.

Cultural Leadership is a nonprofit youth leadership development organization that teaches high-school students to recognize and resolve critical issues facing society while building and using a diverse network of allies. Cultural Leadership begins by tackling the central issues of racism and discrimination in St. Louis while providing skills required for making any change in any area of society.

# HEEEEEEEERE'S... CLASS 4!



Mimi Brown, Cardinal Ritter, St. James AME  
 Arnold Bullock, Ladue H.S., Shalom City of Peace  
 Allister Byrd, Governor French (Ill.), Pilgrim Temple AME  
 Brittany Campbell, Incarnate Word  
 Lauren Caskey, Villa Duchesne, St. Monica Catholic



Kala Coleman, Metro, First Baptist of Webster Groves  
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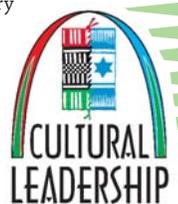
Jillian Lynum, Cardinal Ritter, Midwest Church of Christ  
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Each time a man stands up for an ideal, or acts  
 forth a tiny ripple of hope and crossing each other from a million  
 different centers of energy and daring, those ripples build a current  
 that can sweep down the mightiest walls of oppression and resistance.  
 - Robert Kennedy

## RIPPLES

**Melissa Garcia, Class 3**, received a National Minority Leadership Award from the United States Achievement Academy.

**Alyssa Hadzima, Class 3**, and her team partner will compete at the International Career Development Conference of Delta Epsilon Chi (DECA), an international association of high-school and college students studying marketing and entrepreneurship, April 26 through 29. Alyssa's team previously placed second at districts and in the top seven in state competition.

**Brian Hamilton, Class 1**, is currently training to be a Summer Welcome Leader at Mizzou, where he is also involved with the Association for the Betterment of Culturally Diverse Educators (ABCDE) and United Ambassadors, which is Mizzou's minority student recruitment team.

**Blake Harris, Class 1**, has started a Multicultural Fraternity at the University of Missouri-Columbia. He hopes the fraternity will formally join the membership of Sigma Lambda Beta International Fraternity Incorporated by the end of 2008.

**Elliott Kleimann, Class 3**, won the regional United Synagogue Youth (USY) award for best

Social Action/Tikun Olam Program of the Year with his program "Cracking Misconceptions: Exploring Stereotypes."

**Clarissa Polk, Class 1**, has been selected to work as a Manzi Fellow with *Facing History and Ourselves* based on her commitment to community service and her relevant experiences, skills, and achievements.

**Cydney Ross, Class 3**, founder of a diversity club at Villa Duchesne Oak Hill School, recently partnered with the diversity club at St. Louis University High School and their diversity director to facilitate a school-wide discussion of racism and sexism entitled *A Dream Deferred*.

**Tony Westbrook, Class 1**, is pursuing a career in higher education so he can follow his passion for teaching others about diversity and ending racism. He hopes to "make a difference in students' lives" the way Cultural Leadership did in his.

**Rachel Winston, Class 1**, has been accepted to a study abroad program in Ghana this summer, and another program in Paris and Tours, France in the fall.

## THANK YOU

Cultural Leadership would like to thank the following people for their generous donations of time and talent...

Rachel Armoza, for her exhilarating lessons in Israeli dancing.

Rabbi Mordecai Miller, for sharing his knowledge of Jewish history.

Dan Reich, for his contributions to understanding anti-Semitism and the Holocaust.

Dr. Jonathan Smith, for providing his insights into the history of African-Americans in the United States.

Harold & Lorraine Buck-Poole, Dr. Arnold & Marjorie Bullock, Alonzo & Sharon Byrd, LaTonia Collins, Cliff & Marsha Jacobs, Felice & Gerry Joyce, Raizell & Mark Kalishman, Doug & Marcene Menendez, John & Paula Mills, Barbara Morrow, Brad Stoner & Leslie Wright, and Cordia Young-Brown, for providing delicious food at monthly programs.

Tony Westbrooks and Rachel Lockhart-Korris for chaperoning our students at the Opening Retreat.

Cordia Young-Brown, for securing space for the February program.

Alonzo Byrd for his wonderful photographs on page 2 and at all of our programs.

## THIS YEAR, OFF TO A GREAT START

by David Kalishman

On Martin Luther King, Jr.'s birthday weekend, Cultural Leadership Class 4 gathered for a retreat, where we formally met for the first time. Friday night, we conducted a Shabbat dinner and then split up to attend services at B'nai Amoona and United Hebrew. Afterward, some of my new African-American friends told me that they were pleasantly surprised by how the Jewish congregants greeted them with smiles and open arms.

The next morning, we discussed each other's history and were amazed by how intertwined they are.

For example, Black soldiers fighting on the front lines in World War II were among the first to liberate Jews from the concentration camps. Twenty years later, many

Jews, including B'nai Amoona's own Rabbi Bernard Lipnick, participated in the Civil Rights Movement.

Later on Saturday, we participated in an exercise that exposed the stereotypes that exist in both the Jewish and Black communities. One of my new African-American friends related how teachers would ask Black students if they needed extra time to take a test. Several Jewish students reported that they had often been told that all Jews are going to hell. We learned how hurtful this can be, and I realized that there still is a lot of racism and anti-Semitism throughout our community.

Sunday, we attended services at The Williams Temple Church of God In Christ, where Bishop Lawrence M. Wooten and the congregation welcomed all of us. As part of the service, four Cultural Leadership alums spoke to the

congregation. I enjoyed the congregation's enthusiasm and exciting music.

After returning to our hotel, we began an exercise called in which we worked in teams to create the best protection for an egg to be dropped from a high distance.

Later, the day turned emotional when people described the different ways they had been discriminated against. One participant described having to listen to racist jokes. Another African American was distraught that the N-word is used too loosely in the Black community. Everyone expressed their feelings and we all realized that we were not alone in how we felt.

Unfortunately, the end came too soon. All of us were becoming very good friends and looking forward to our next meeting. With hugs, we said our good-byes.

David Kalishman attends Ladue High School.



# LESSONS FROM THE FEBRUARY PROGRAM

by Sean Joyce, Class 4

Although history is based on fact, history does not write itself. While this might seem obvious, it is too often ignored. Writing history is like writing a newspaper; scholars of the time decide what will be recorded, and from what perspective the story will be told. At the Cultural Leadership meeting in February, Dr. Jonathan Smith, a Black professor of African-American Studies at Saint Louis University, led us in an exploration of the narrative with which white scholars have chosen to indoctrinate America's children.

It was enlightening to see both the African-American narrative from a Black perspective, as well as the reactions of my Black Cultural Leadership classmates to their own history. The lecture focused on the point that the Black narrative had been constantly minimized and

suppressed by white scholars based on the belief that Blacks had an unimportant history. Even though our generation is now taught a much stronger history of Black Americans, their identity as a historically important people still struggles to ingrain itself in the young people of America.

Dr. Smith was astonished at the lack of outrage from the young African Americans in the room at the suppression of their own culture and its importance. It was fascinating to see the completely different perspectives and passions of the older generation and the youth. The most striking thing I learned about was the deliberate ghettoization of Black culture in America by the predominately white population, which strongly affects the way Blacks are educated and socialized about their own culture today.

We also discussed the pledges that we each made at our first retreat to try to

enact change in our social environments. Our pledges varied from stopping discriminatory language like the word "gay," to simply being more open and talking to new people. One student implemented a "mix-it-up" day during the school lunch period, which encouraged students to sit with different people. The common factor in success was having a base of firm allies to strengthen students' resolve and confidence.

However, many students were not successful in stopping discrimination. We discovered first-hand the difficult lesson that some people are so ingrained with hateful habits, or simply apathetic, that there is no way to change them. I believe that more difficult than facilitating change is learning how to identify the people who can be changed and leaving behind those who cannot.

Sean Joyce attends Ladue High School.

## FEBRUARY PROGRAM OPENS EYES AND MINDS

by Jillian Lynum, Class 4

Our February Cultural Leadership meeting took place at St. James African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church on Sunday, February 17, 2008. St. James is the church home to fellow Cultural Leadership student Mimi Brown, who explained the history of the church and the historic places around it in the Ville neighborhood of St. Louis, including Charles Sumner High School and Annie Malone Children's Home. Each institution represented the sole support of its kind in the Ville in the early years of African-American history in St. Louis. At one

time, Sumner High School was the only school African Americans in the St. Louis region could attend, while Annie Malone was known as the only place for African-American "orphans." These institutions, along with St. James, were the foundation of the community.

The guest speaker was Dr. Jonathan Smith, a scholar and expert on the history of African Americans. We started by selecting a slip of paper with a list of African-American names. As a name was chosen, we had to tell Dr. Smith who these people were, including Marian Anderson, Mahalia Jackson, Carter G. Woodson, and Mansa Musa, just to name a few.

Dr. Smith detailed this history from Africa through the present day. He discussed how African Americans survived through all that they went through. Dr. Smith gave an in-depth view of the Middle Passage and what it must have been like to be transported on a slave ship to an unknown destiny. I had seen a replica of these ships, but it is hard to visualize the actual experience. Dr. Smith brought the image closer to reality and asked questions that encouraged me to think

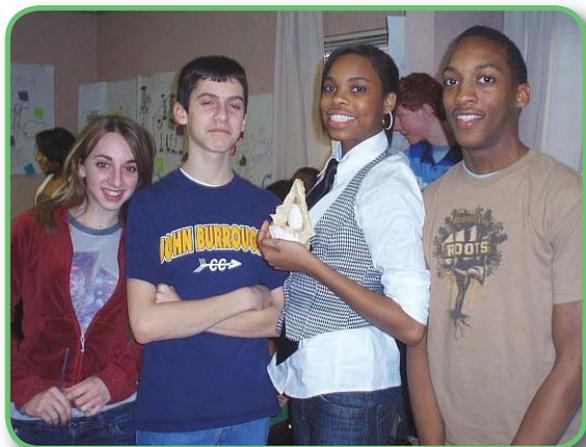
outside the box.

Dr. Smith also encouraged us to read to educate ourselves further. One of the books he suggested was *The Souls of Black Folks* by W.E.B. DuBois, a contributor to thought about Africans and Africans in America on a global level. The book contains essays on race based on DuBois's experiences.

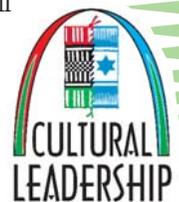
The presentation by Dr. Smith taught me more detail about my history. I think that it was also a good experience for my Jewish friends to understand the history of African Americans in a way they may never have experienced.

Finally, we all learned and sang the Negro National Anthem, *Lift Every Voice and Sing*. I thought about how there was a time when you would never see people of different cultures and races singing that song. It was a reflection of Dr. King's "I Have a Dream" speech, which set the tone for the Civil Rights Movement. Through continued shared experiences, we may one day be judged by the content of our character and not the color of our skin. We all bleed red blood.

Jillian Lynum attends Cardinal Ritter High School.



Meredith, Nate, Kyriah, and Baron after a job well-done.



## MARCH PROGRAM OFFERS “HINT OF DIVERSITY”

by Lauren Caskey, Class 4

The evening started with a simple ice-breaker. Rabbi Mordecai Miller of Brith Sholom Kneseth Israel (BSKI), asked us to list our three favorites in various categories—favorite ice cream, sport, music artist, movies, and holidays. As these were reported to the group, we noticed a slight segregation of our youth culture. We Black students tended to have the same music and movie taste, and typically had Christmas in our top three holidays. The Jewish students, however, focused on a more popular genre of music, sports like soccer and lacrosse, and favorite holidays such as Passover or Chanukah. As straightforward as it seemed, this activity highlighted the simplest cultural differences between our two groups, and opened our eyes to a slight hint of diversity.

Next, Rabbi Miller led an informative show-and-tell. Starting with a Menorah, my Black peers and I were introduced to other common Jewish items. We learned that the Kiddush cup is used to serve wine during celebrations, and that the necessity for wine in celebration originated in the Old Testament. Psalm 104 states, “wine gladdens the heart of man.” The Shofar, a hollowed ram’s horn, is used as a call to worship and can be seen as equivalent to the ringing of church bells before a Christian Mass.

After a short a break, we were joined by Dan Reich, the curator of the St. Louis Holocaust Museum. Mr. Reich led a discussion of the evolution of anti-Semitism. Beginning with the etymology of the word “Semitism,” we learned that the root of “semi” probably originated in Noah’s son Shem. We recounted the years of slavery in Egypt, the Jews’ expulsion

from Spain in 1492, and the eventual “lock and key” ghettos preceding World War II. Later, we discussed the details of Emile Zola’s condemning article of the Dreyfus case, and the consequences of the Guild System. Lastly, we discussed three of the main misconceptions that cause anti-Semitism: the killing of Christ, blood libels, and the desecration of the Christian host. At the end of the day, I was left with the simple words of Rabbi Miller: “Religion is simply the binding together of a group of people with common beliefs and values.”

My African-American classmates greatly enjoyed learning about a religion and culture so different from ours, and of its importance and significance to our Jewish friends.

Lauren Caskey attends Villa Duchesne High School.

## JEWISH STUDENT GETS A JEWISH EDUCATION

by Hannah Novack

I have grown up in a Jewish home and always celebrated the High Holidays and commonly practiced prayers and customs of Reform Judaism. But on March 9, at our monthly Cultural Leadership meeting, I learned to look at my own religion in a new light.

Rabbi Mordecai Miller brought many frequently used tools for prayer and celebrations, including a Kiddush cup, a Shofar, and a Seder plate. He explained the importance of each object and answered questions we had about Judaism.

Judaism is saturated with symbolism, language, and expression. Rituals and instruments are of vast importance and seemingly simple synonyms actually have very distinct meanings. For instance, I thought the two most frequently used words for God, “Elohim” and “Adonai,” were interchangeable. However, “Elohim” refers to a God of judgment, while “Adonai,” is associated with mercy and compassion. As Rabbi Miller explained, the Torah begins with Genesis and uses “Elohim” to suggest that God wants to act justly, meaning cruel and compassionate actions are followed by immediate

## THE EMPTY NEST

Many Class 3 students are still making their college decisions. Here’s what we know so far.

Candice Bassett, Columbia College Chicago

Richie Gallant, Vanderbilt University  
(Ingram Scholar)

Alyssa Hadzima, University of Missouri-Columbia

LaParis Hawkins, University of Missouri-Columbia (\$10,000 scholarship)

Michael Naclerio, Duke University

Dakin Sloss, Stanford University

Lucy Thayer, Bradley University

punishment and reward respectively. However, God understands that humans make mistakes and that mercy must be exercised first, followed by justice. So, for the majority of the Torah, “Adonai” is used to indicate a merciful God.

Another topic we explored was anti-Semitism. We all received a paper on the history of anti-Semitism that demonstrated that Jewish history is unfortunately speckled with Diasporas, inquisitions, and tragedy. Dan Reich, curator of the St. Louis Holocaust Museum, explained the sources of historical anti-Jewish feelings. One of these was a rise in Nationalism, which Mr. Reich explained led to the notion that Jews’ loyalty was first to their religion, and second to their country. Jews were therefore seen as disloyal to whatever country they inhabited. Theodor Herzl, upon witnessing the Dreyfus Affair, realized that Jews would never be accepted unless they had their own nation. This view sprouted the Zionist movement and initiated discussion of the creation of Israel, the Jewish State.

Rabbi Miller explained that education is key in Judaism and the purpose of life is learning. The idea that anything, any situation or experience, can be seen as valuable is something that everyone in Cultural Leadership, both African-American and Jewish, believes.

Hannah Novack attends Clayton High School.



Hannah, Erik, Porsche, and Emily ham it up.

# Opening Retreat Inspires Student

by Emalie Jacobs

Words like “inspiration,” “amazing,” and “experience of a lifetime” all come to mind when I think of my first Cultural Leadership retreat. The retreat took place on the weekend before Martin Luther King, Jr. Day. Upon arrival, we – the new members of Cultural Leadership Class Four – were told to go to our rooms, put on our dress clothes for synagogue, and come right back down.

When I came down, I was told to draw my life. Draw my life? Not only that, but draw it in seven minutes. How was I supposed to draw almost seventeen years in seven minutes? I managed, as did my classmates. Then, we each presented our drawings. It was quite interesting to learn about my new friends and how we have many interests in common.

Afterward, we went into another room for dinner. We loaded our plates thinking we were about to eat. At this point, we were all told to stop and wait, that this night was the Sabbath. I had heard that word, but had never actually known its meaning. Two of the Jewish students stood up to show us what is traditionally done on the night of the Sabbath. They recited their blessings over grape juice and then told us each to take a bite of the bread. Finally, we were allowed to eat, and then we headed off to synagogue, some to United Hebrew, the rest to B’nai Amoona.

This was the first time I had ever stepped into a synagogue. At first, I didn’t see any difference from a church other than that the males wore yarmulkes. When the service began, I was immediately confused, wondering what exactly the people around me were singing. I attempted to join in. The Jewish women during the service started dancing in the aisles, and to my surprise they asked my Cultural Leadership friends and me to join in. I had not expected such friendliness from complete strangers; I felt very welcome.

After leaving B’nai Amoona, my classmates and I started talking. One of

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the first things we noticed was that there was no mention of Jesus Christ during the service. We also took notice that there was no offering. This is when we learned that there is not supposed to be talk of money on the Sabbath.

The rest of the weekend consisted of many programs, including an eye-opening fishbowl that I will never forget. I got to know my classmates better, and am sure that we will be friends for a long time. I am very pleased to be included in what I am sure will be an inspirational and educational journey. I only hope that the rest of my Cultural Leadership classmates felt the same closeness, the acceptance, and the powerful alliance that I had felt by the end of the weekend.

Emalie Jacobs attends Parkway South High School.

*Going to school with a high percentage of Jewish students, I never fully understood the prejudices that they could possibly go through.*

*After this weekend, I now have insight on the Jewish experience during the school day.*

African-American Student,  
Class 4



## New “School Swap” Component Integral to Program

As most of our readers will know, Cultural Leadership is a year-long, INTENSIVE program designed to get students to recognize and resolve problems of social justice to make St. Louis, their circle of influence, and the wider community more inclusive. This year, we have instituted a very important mandatory exercise specifically to highlight inequalities in that most important of social institutions: school. We call it the “School Swap.”

Access to an excellent education should be a civil right of all people. Unfortunately, that is not true today, especially in the public schools in urban centers. Schools with the best leadership – that is, superintendents, principals, and teachers; the highest level of parental involvement; and an expanded school day and year – are producing the best students, who in turn become productive members of society.

In an attempt to begin to understand the complexity of this social justice issue, Cultural Leadership student participants are encouraged to spend a day in a school that is very unlike the one they attend. If they go to a private school, they are encouraged to attend a public school. If

they go to a same sex school, they are encouraged to spend a day in a coed school. If they attend a school in the county, they are encouraged to spend a day in a city school. If they attend a school that is basically one race, they are encouraged to spend a day in a school with a diverse student body. They do not go alone, but rather with one of their fellow Cultural Leadership participants.

This swap can occur at a mutually convenient time for both students and the school they are attending together that day. The students are responsible for getting themselves to the schools and back home. This swap should be completed by the end of the school year in May, 2008.

Students are not done when they finish their school day, though. Each student writes two short essays. One includes observations, feelings, and thoughts they had as the guest when they attend a different school. The other is about what it was like to host a guest at school that day. New eyes and ears in a setting that one has become used to can provide valuable insights to be considered.

Already, many of our students are gaining new eyes, ears, and understandings about their worlds from this program. We look forward to sharing their essays with you in future issues.

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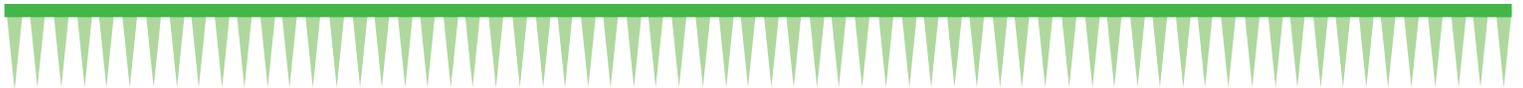
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