



# CULTURAL LEADERSHIP

UNDERSTANDING THROUGH THE AFRICAN AMERICAN - JEWISH EXPERIENCE

News and Events of Cultural Leadership - [www.culturalleadership.com](http://www.culturalleadership.com) - Vol. 4 Spring 2009

## CLASS FIVE IS THE BIGGEST, MOST INCLUSIVE CLASS YET

Cultural Leadership is in its fifth year. In January, Class 4 graduated, unleashing 27 more activists and change agents into the community. That brings the grand total of Cultural Leadership alums to 86—86 young people out there working to make a difference. And they are. We keep in touch with all our alums and are updated monthly on their efforts to make our world more inclusive and socially just. In the “Ripples” section of every newsletter and e-letter, you can stay apprised of their efforts and progress. We are very proud of what they are accomplishing.

We have 31 students in Class 5 who began their year-long Cultural Leadership experience in January. Turn the page to meet them individually! They are from 21 different high schools and 22 houses of worship. We have 17 African-American students, 11 Jewish students, and 3 non-Black, non-Jewish students. Each year, we work to improve the program and curriculum, and Class 5 is



31 members of Cultural Leadership Class 5 - off to a great start

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getting its fair shares of first-time trials. This year, for the first time ever, we have three non-Black, non-Jewish students who are bringing an entirely new perspective to our discussions that is both valuable and vital. Being the minority in our group, these three girls are also learning valuable lessons about the experience of oppressed minorities. Like the classes before them, Class 5 will continue to make pledges every month to go “outside their comfort zone” in a way that will bring about change in their circles of influence.

This year, we created a blog for students to discuss their efforts and provide advice and support to each other between programs. Many changes have been implemented and many are still to come, and we are thrilled to witness what these changes bring. Thankfully, like President Obama, we believe in change! Thank you for your continued support, which makes this program possible. Enjoy meeting Class 5 and reading about the goings on in Cultural Leadership and in the lives of our alums and students.

*When our students see a problem, they grab an ally, or two or three, roll up their sleeves, and get to work.*

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## FROM THE CHAIRWOMAN...

Dear Friend of Cultural Leadership,

As there are growth and development stages in the life of an individual, so there are in the life of an organization. As we progress in our fifth year of operation, we are nearing adulthood. Our board is growing. We have more new members and more engaged continuing members. To do all the necessary behind-the-scenes work to fulfill our worthy mission, a number of committees have been formed with distinct job descriptions. Each member of the twenty member board of directors also has at least one committee assignment. Committees that are currently active are the program, fundraising, legal, financial, board development, public relations, alumni, and community events. We come together each month to rededicate ourselves to our mission and values and report on our progress toward our goals for the year. As the students and their parents strive to understand their own and others' culture and history, our diverse board occasionally tries to engage in some of these same learning activities.

Soon our board development committee will conduct an audit to see where there are gaps in skills and services. When those are determined, we will come back to you, our friends, to see if you yourself, or others you may know, possess the skills we need. Hopefully, at that point, you would volunteer to help.

While we come to you often for financial help, we also need increased visibility in the community. The more St. Louis natives know and understand Cultural Leadership, the broader and deeper their support will be. If you are interested in hosting a parlor meeting for your friends and neighbors at which some of our students could speak, please call Jenny at the office and she will schedule it.

Thank you for your continued interest and support.

Sincerely,

*Terry Bloomberg*

Cultural Leadership exists to create a more just and equitable community by educating high school students to recognize and resolve issues of privilege and injustice through the lens of the African American and Jewish experience. Our students develop leadership skills, build relationships, facilitate dialogues and create change in their circles of influence.



**Thomas Bullock**, Ladue, Shalom City of Peace; **Loren Cahill**, Rosati-Kain, St. Alphonsus Rock Church; **Martilla Davis**, Cardinal Ritter College Prep., St. Alphonsus Rock Church; **Reneasha Ford**, Soldan International Studies, Christ Church Cathedral; **Camille Foster**, Brentwood, Trinity Mt Carmel MBC; **Terrell Gilkey**, SIUE East St. Louis Charter, East Side Church of Christ



**Bianca Greene**, Trinity Catholic, Calvary Church at the Mall; **David Greenberg**, Lafayette, Shaare Emeth; **Ashaki Hall**, MICDS, The Village Church of St. Louis; **Drake Hall**, Webster Groves, Life Christian Center; **Winona Hawker-Boehnke**, Webster Groves, Evangelical United Church of Christ; **Stephanie Holzbauer**, Villa Duchesne, St. Elizabeth Ann Seaton Parish



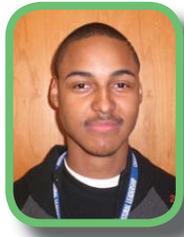
**Kristen Ingram**, John Burroughs, West Side MBC; **Bobby Ingram**, Parkway Central, Shaare Emeth; **Aaron Johnson**, Trinity Catholic, Saints Teresa and Bridget; **Keilah Johnson**, Fort Zumwalt West, St. Louis Christian Center; **Adam Kaplan**, Whitfield, CRC; **Hayley Levy**, Ladue, B'nai Amoona



**Julia Moskowitz**, Ladue, CRC; **Candice Nichols**, Metro, Believers Temple Word Fellowship; **Nina Oberman**, Clayton, CRC; **Eliana Parnas**, Ladue, NA; **Anna Rathje**, Lutheran North, Christ in the City Lutheran Church; **Shayna Rosen**, Parkway North, CRC



**Hannah Rosenthal**, Ladue, BSKI; **Josh Simpson**, Hazelwood West, Word of Faith; **Jake Warshaw**, Crossroads College Prep., Temple Emanuel; **Eric Washington**, Lutheran North, Grace Church-St. Louis; **Hannah Webber**, Clayton, CRC; **Carlton Wilcoxson**, Ladue, Friendly Temple



**Jordan Williams**, Cardinal Ritter, Cathedral Basilica

# WELCOME, CLASS 5!



# A New Minority

by **Winnie Hawker-Boehnke, Class 5**  
**Webster Groves High School**

Privilege. That's something that I have always had, but not always understood. When I was eight years old, my parents made a purposeful move to an all-black neighborhood. I remember seeing all the boys playing football in the street. I knew I couldn't wait to join in the game. When I was this young, I think I believed one was only dark because they were out in the sun so much.

As I moved up through the grades, the difference in treatment toward black and white students became more and more evident and I unconsciously fell into step by separating myself. The group of people I hung out with became mostly white. It wasn't until 8th grade that I realized my behavior allowed for injustices to continue. I wasn't comfortable with that.

Now in my junior year of high school, I have gone through ANYTOWN, a six-day summer residential program run through the NCCJ (National Conference for Community and Justice) and I am very involved in the Webster Groves School District's efforts to dismantle racism in the classroom. However, I had yet to meet peers who understood the issue of racism and cared to create change. I thought I was alone in the realization of this a problem.

This fall, my principal told me about Cultural Leadership, an organization that focuses on dismantling racism and working towards

social justice through the lens of the Jewish and African American experiences. Immediately, I was intrigued and I couldn't stop talking about it. I applied and was accepted. In the interview, I was asked how I would feel to be one of few students who were not Black and not Jewish in a class of 31. The interview panel stressed the difference in being the minority when I was used to being the majority. At the time, this didn't worry me too greatly, and I was right not to be worried.



Class 5 students participate in the opening retreat in January.

My unfamiliar 'other' status was made clear to me during the first retreat. There seemed to be many words used for which I had no previous context. My ignorance worried me until I thought about the people gathered. In my moments of ignorance, everyone responded kindly with explanations to inform me instead of pointing out what I lacked. That is something this program stresses. Fixing the root, not just primping the petals.

I know racism exists. I have never doubted that, but already in my first month of Cultural Leadership, I have tangible hope that we can do something about it.

*These two poems were written by Class 4 students and delivered by them at graduation.*

## ***I'm Feeling***

I'm feeling quite real  
Experiences of lives touched my own.  
I've met so many people who I will  
always know.

I'm feeling quite at home  
With a family who learned the same  
things I have.  
Of course the knowledge will be spent  
differently,

But it will be for the same goal.

My new knowledge and family will be  
with me always.  
To share and give to others as we have  
been given to.  
With a family this strong there is no  
way we will fail.

Singing the same songs.  
Breathing the same air.  
Feeling the same emotions.

We all know what to do with it.  
The stories of struggle and pain, yes.  
We all know where to place these  
battles won, and justice after trial.

With a family this strong there is no  
way we can fail.

Together reaching and rising.  
Claws closed.  
Fingers interlaced.  
We're gonna rise together.  
I'm feeling quite content.



by **Jessica Swopshire, Class 4**  
**Fort Zumwalt West**

## ***Ode to those who have fought for human rights***

Everyday I speak my mind  
I owe it all to you  
Every night I sleep without fear  
I owe it all to you  
I am brave and I am strong  
I refuse to sit on the side  
And let others guide my life  
I was inspired by each of you  
I am your disciple  
To follow in your footsteps  
To teach others human rights  
I promise this because  
Everyday I speak my mind  
Every night I sleep without fear  
And I owe it all to you



by **Emalie Jacobs, Class 4**  
**Parkway South**



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

**Candice Bassett (Class 3)** is working with a friend on her Atlanta University college campus to start Ladies of Virtue. It is designed for women to become leaders in society. It will host seminars with speakers and do volunteer and outreach projects throughout the Atlanta community.

**Loren Cahill, ReNeaSha Ford, and Winnie Hawker-Boehnke (Class 5)** attended a discussion on the prevalence of race issues at the Missouri History Museum and helped brainstorm ideas to combat these issues.

**Scott Friedman (Class 1)** was accepted to the Forum for Dialogue Among Nations - Study Visit to Poland. This is a Polish non-profit organization whose mission is to foster Polish-Jewish dialogue, eradicate anti-Semitism, and teach tolerance through education.

**Emalie Jacobs (Class 4)** won the Silver Key award for an essay she submitted to the Scholastic Arts and Writing Program. The essay described Emalie's experience during her visit to the Slavery and Civil War Museum in Selma, AL on the Transformational Journey. The complete essay is available on our website, [www.culturalleadership.org](http://www.culturalleadership.org).

**Brionna Jimerson (Class 4)** gave a 90-minute presentation on the Civil Rights Movement to her history class at Metro Academic and Classical High School with a slideshow of pictures from the summer Transformational Journey.

**Jillian Lynum (Class 4)** received the Archbishop May Service Award. She was also invited to participate as one of six panelists for the March 2009 Speaker's

Series at the YWCA on the topic, "Have things changed with the election of President Barack Obama?"

**Michael Naclerio (Class 3)** is teaming with his Duke classmates to start a social venture that will provide kids from the slums of Cape Town, South Africa with remedial education, leadership, and community engagement training. Their venture, Hope Scholars Program, recently received \$10,000 dollars from Goldman Sachs. No doubt, more funds are on the way.

**Adam Rosen (Class 3) and Class 4 members Meredith Stoner, Jessica Swopshire, and Porsche Poole** (below, L to R) facilitated a discussion on prejudice and speaking out at Francis Howell Central High School after the movie *Crash*, organized by Class 2 parent Lisa Milos. The principal reported that, "It was a terrific forum. Our students voiced their feelings and thoughts [on discrimination] in an open comfortable setting." *\*If you would like Cultural Leadership students to speak or facilitate for an organization or group, please contact us at 314-725-3222.*



**Kyriah Shannon (Class 4)** spearheaded and organized the observance of Black History Month at Ladue High School for the first time

# THANK YOU

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

Community organizer Eddie Caumient for teaching our students the skills of community organizing.

Professor Sowande' Mustakeem (WU) and Professor Stefan Bradley (SLU) for sharing their knowledge of African American history and culture.

Rabbi Mordecai Miller, Dan Reich, Rabbi Randy Fleisher, and Student to Student for sharing their knowledge of Jewish history and culture.

Nubian Jewels of the Nile for teaching our students about African dance.

Gene Dobbs Bradford for teaching our students about the history and evolution of blues and jazz music.

Class 5 parents Gary Boehnke, Laura Davis and Todd Oberman, Cynthia Hall, Donna Hall, Laurie Furman and Dan Rosenthal, Pamela Greenberg, Mickey Johnson, Peggy Kaplan, Joel and Marcia Levy, Larry Rosen, Winnie Stewart, Susan Warshaw, Cherilyn Washington, Rosalyn Washington, and Keith and Jeanine Young for providing delicious food at monthly programs.

Cynthia Hall and Mr. Blakley for teaching our students the Negro national anthem *Lift Every Voice and Sing*.

in six years. Each day, a member of LAASA (Ladue African American Student Alliance), of which Kyriah is president, provided a Black history fact on the morning announcements and they ran a "quiz bowl" every other day. As a result, the entire student body became very engaged with Black history month.

**Maayan Simckes (Class 1)** helped establish the TAAJA (Tufts African-American/Jewish Alliance), kicking-off the organization with a Soul Food Shabbat attended by more than 80 students.



# School Swap

The foundation of Cultural Leadership is understanding—understanding each other as individuals and understanding each other as a product of life circumstances—be it a life filled with privilege or a life filled with injustice. As part of our continuing effort for our

students to truly understand the inherent inequalities in our society, we encourage them to go to school with each other one day and gain first-hand experience with our separate and unequal school systems. Four Class 4 students recently swapped schools and the experience was profound. Maurice Cooksey, senior at Roosevelt High School (a St. Louis City public school) and Sean Joyce, a senior at Ladue Horton Watkins High School (a wealthy suburban public school) spent a day “walking in each others’ shoes.” Meredith Stoner, a senior at John Burroughs School (an elite private school) and Jessica Swopshire, a junior at Fort Zumwalt West (an enormous public school in St. Charles County) also swapped schools for the day. Here are snippets of their experiences.

## Sean Joyce on Roosevelt



- After [a quiz], I watched four students go up to the teacher and ask him when they were going to begin the rest of class. The teacher promptly ignored the students’ ardent pleas for an education and after the quiz, teaching was never resumed. As a result, the class quickly faded into anarchy with students beat boxing, rapping, and clowning in general. While this angered the teacher, he still made no effort to teach.
- The students had no History class in their schedule—which was normal for them.
- I saw a student ask a teacher for help and he responded, ‘Man, its Friday, I just got my paycheck, life is good. Can’t we just all be quiet and sit back.’

### Roosevelt High School

Student to teacher ratio: 25:1  
 Percentage of students of color 91%  
 Average ACT 14.3  
 Percentage of students go on to 4-year college: 21.3%

### Ladue

Student to teacher ratio: 14:1  
 Percentage of students of color 28%  
 Average ACT 25.9  
 Percentage of students go on to 4-year college: 80.8%

## Maurice Cooksey on Ladue



- Ladue teachers love what they do. Most of Roosevelt High School teachers come to get a check and that’s all.
- At Ladue, in the classroom you can actually learn something without being disturbed. At Roosevelt High School, you have to continuously switch seats to actually learn something.
- Ladue moves faster than St. Louis Public High Schools, which makes me mad because I felt that I wasn’t smart because everything that Sean was learning I hadn’t even learned yet. After the day was over, all I could say was ‘What about college? Would I make it in?’ The next day when I went to school I felt dumb. The A’s that I had felt like D’s.

## Jessica Swopshire on John Burroughs



- John Burroughs is not only a school. John Burroughs is everything a student needs in preparation for college.
- Everyday, school begins at 8:30 am. At West, the school day begins at 6:35 am, giving me about a two hour difference in sleeping time.
- The teachers all are spectacular and teach a lot differently than teachers at West.
- I really enjoyed all of the artwork that filled the walls and classrooms of Burroughs. The thought of being able to see art everyday compared to hallways endlessly filled with lockers is wonderful.

### John Burroughs

Student to teacher ratio: 7.5:1  
 Percentage of students of color 25%  
 Median ACT 31  
 Percentage of students go on to 4-year college: 100%

### Fort Zumwalt West

Student to teacher ratio: 23:1  
 Percentage of students of color 69.7%  
 Average ACT 21.7  
 Percentage of students go on to 4-year college: 48.5%

## Meredith Stoner on Fort Zumwalt



- Following Jessica’s schedule, we woke up at 5:00 am to catch the 5:45 am bus that brings her to her Zero Hour, an extra class period, at 6:30 am.
- In most of the classes that I visited, there wasn’t much interaction between the students and the teachers. The students did worksheets or watched movies in class.
- During Jessica’s English class, the teacher didn’t seem to mind that we phoned Karen to give her an update on our day!
- I could sense a feeling of general disinterest among many students and even some teachers.



# Alumnus Chronicles His First Year at Brandeis



In 1968, following the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr., Brandeis University felt the need to recommit to its mission of social justice. Seeing education as the bedrock of progress, they created a program, modeled in part after Upward Bound, to prepare bright but ill-prepared students from disadvantaged backgrounds for success in college. Thus was born, their Transition Year Program (TYP). Tyjuan Morrow, Class 3 Cultural Leadership graduate and graduate of Beaumont High School (a St. Louis public school) joined the TYP program at Brandeis this past fall. It takes a village to raise a child and Tyjuan's "village" hears about his experiences through frequent "journal" entries sent via e-mail. Below are excerpts from those entries that express what he is experiencing in this program, what he has learned and all his other epiphanies, big and small, along the way.

## **August 22**

This was my first day on campus at Brandeis University. I didn't know what to think just yet. I found that my roommate was very smart and came from a different background than me. He is from Atlanta, Black, 19, and middle class. He comes from a private school in the suburbs. This was wonderful news. I had a roommate that was useful.

## **September 5**

My classes will become a challenge I see. It is sooo much reading. That is what I do all day—read. I guess that is a good thing. I also went to a job fair and shut it down. I was the only student that went to the job fair in slacks and a button up. People were offering me jobs without me filling out applications.

## **September 20**

College is getting hard! I have papers due left and right and it feels great. My first paper, I received an "A". I stayed up till 3:00 in the morning writing that paper. I never thought I would do that. The class that I am shaky about is my science class. I feel so far behind. It made me think about how TYP is really closing the achievement gap for me.

## **October 6**

I haven't been in all my classes thanks to my Jewish friends and their holidays. It's like a holiday a week. I still have not found anyone to do my hair. I'm starting to give up. All people tell me that I have to go to Boston, but that is too much just for my hair. I will just do it myself.

## **October 22**

For one paper, I wrote about the stigma of being smart and having the thirst for knowledge in my community. I talked about how being smart in my community is not thought to be the norm. I am finally finished with the madness of midterms. I have a really good feeling about my grades.

I MISS HOME. I just heard that my family would be moving on Thanksgiving while I'm gone and my heart dropped. I won't even be able to move into my new house with my family. I think a lot about what I would be doing if I was not here. I think about what my twin brother is doing a lot, and what my little brothers are doing in school. I think about my mom a bunch too. But the person I think about more than before is my father. I think about what he would tell me right now. I think about what he would think of me. Everyone here seems to have a father, but not me.

## **October 29**

I didn't get straight A's. I have some work to do. I have to have straight A's by time the semester is over. It's my goal. The 40th anniversary for TYP was Saturday. It was so fantastic. About 100 alumni came out. It made me think about my future a lot and where I would be. Hearing about the success stories of the alums made me realize how precious and fortunate this program is.

## **December 1**

Barack Obama is the president elect!!! The most exciting night of my life!!! My friends and I celebrated like it was a holiday. I was crying, screaming, and jumping. This night was the single most unforgettable night ever.

## **January 21**

When I was at home in St. Louis, I realized at Brandeis I was not missing St. Louis, but missing the people who are in St. Louis. St. Louis brings me down. The same things that were happening when I left are still happening. I would look at my friends and tell them that it isn't their fault that they are in the position they are in. I would tell them how President Obama told the nation that the history of the nation is to blame for the problems of the urban communities, not the people

in the urban communities. I believe that the main reason why most African Americans are in the position of poverty and struggle is the lack of access to education. Therefore, the way out of "the struggle" is education.

My dream is to have equal opportunities in education. I think that if there were, my twin brother would be studying at Harvard right now instead of being homeless. I would not have to be in TYP. My mom wouldn't have to get a Habitat home; she would be able to afford her own home.

I wish that I would have read the books that I have read now in middle school. If I would have known what I know now, I would have stood up and told teachers who gave us free time not to take a break from teaching me. I would have known that they were cheating me out of an education. Cheating me out of an adequate life.

Something important happened yesterday. Yep, you guessed it. President Obama!!!! I loved this whole moment. Tears came to my eyes when I watched him get sworn in. While I watched him, I thought about how the slaves who built the White House and maintained it would feel to have one of their own in there. Obama has given me hope.

I feel myself changing everyday. I make my own decisions now. I am not easily influenced anymore. I have my own values. I have the courage now to stand up against something that I don't agree with. I know that I will do well this semester. I think, in fact, that it will be easier than last semester. I know what it is like to miss home now, and I know what teachers are expecting now. Well, it feels good to be writing again. More to come...



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