

Stand Together

The persisting effects of racial division and how CT is working to mend that bridge

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Photo by Maxwell Marucut

Gathered around those that they educate, the CT faculty listen to the power of a student-teacher relationship on student success, the struggle of minority groups in schools, and the ways that students and teachers can collaborate to create a better, more accepting community. "Holding relationships with students is the most important thing we do...when I think about our school, the thing I'm so proud of is the way we develop relationships," English teacher Mrs. Molly Robbins said.

Photos by Max Marucut



With the recent discovery that Gov. Ralph Northam, among many other politicians, have donned blackface as well as the call for national emergency to fund President Trump's border wall, discussions about racial prejudice are rising with no sign of quelling. While race is a persisting issue that continues to emerge in the news, the issue of racial discrimination is one that runs much deeper to impact the lives of people of color across modern society, across the country and even within CT's walls.

Many CT students can attest that the issue of racial prejudice is one that has and continues to impact them in various aspects of their lives.

"I've been affected by race my entire life," Kobe Sconiers (12) said, "from school, from football, even at King Soopers. Sometimes I get followed around for no reason or they think I'm stealing or something," he explained.

"I've experienced race being an issue at airports, you know, my name...[getting] a random search every single time I go to the airport," Iman Sadr Haj Sayed (12) said.

However, some experiences with racism aren't as subtle, such as when biracial student Olivia Eyre (10) said, "I was in Canada and [a stranger] called me a [derogatory term], and I was a little shocked...that's when it really hit me [that race is] an issue...something I need to deal with too."

Many have experienced the more nuanced, unspoken impacts of racial prejudice, influencing the way they feel they are perceived or treated when carrying on through their everyday lives, even within school.

"It's subtle, because it has to be...small things like...sometimes teachers treat you a different way when you walk into the classroom. I'm black...they think I'm gonna be more loud and obnoxious, but 90% of the time that's not the case," Sconiers said. In an effort to address and work to resolve this issue, CT has implemented several programs

and forums aimed at giving students the opportunity to speak about their experiences. One particularly impactful example of such a program is the Student Forum: a long-running forum occurring during school multiple times a year in which students meet to share their experiences while faculty advisors work to listen and help them resolve the issue.

"One goal is to make sure [students] have some input in how the school is run and issues of race in the school," Dean Daryll Hall, a facilitator of Student Forum, said. "We want to find out what issues there are and what issues we need to address."

As far as the concerns raised by Student Forum, Hall explained, "The biggest thing that has come up is that students feel ignored...sometimes students are walking down the hall and teachers don't speak to them...[they don't] acknowledge them at all....Sometimes kids feel like they're being treated different because of their race, and we are working...to make sure that's not the case."

Students involved in Student Forum praise it for its ability to give them a voice while also allowing them to connect with students with similar experiences.

"Student Forum is honestly the frontrunner in...acknowledging that there's a problem [of] race within school," Sconiers said. "We all get together and we all talk about subtle things that happened to us...it's just cool to connect with those people and acknowledge that you're not the only one that goes through those struggles."

The morning of Feb. 19, all of CT's staff as well as a student panel gathered to reflect on relationships between students and teachers, sharing the painful effects of their experiences with racism and offering insight on the power and necessity of positive teacher-student relationships in developing the student as an intellectual and as an individual.

"If we don't have relationships with our students, it makes it difficult for them to learn," English teacher Molly Robbins

said, "We as teachers have chosen this career because we love the content... what good is our relationship with our students if we don't [help them] develop a relationship with the content."

Students then shared their experiences before the faculty and discussed how they've been affected by them. "I first noticed race when I moved to this country when I was seven years old," Tanzanian immigrant Nelisse Niyongabo (12) said. She described how she asked to use the bathroom and, as the only student of color, was "denied that right." Through teary eyes, she said, "In Africa, being black meant being proud, but for the first time, it was something that would hold me back for the rest of my life...in America, it meant that I have to work twice as hard to get to the same place [as] everyone else."

The panel concluded with students expressing the value and impact of positive teacher-student relationships to empower them, to give them the best opportunity to succeed, and to combat the destructive effects of prejudice.

"Just saying hello...teachers will show they actually care...that relationship...that respect is there," Ben Garcia (12) said, "This teacher believes in me more than I believe in myself."

Leonor Zavala (11) echoed his remarks when she said, "I didn't try at all...I didn't think I [was] smart enough. [But], I had this teacher who put this time and effort... [she] helped me a lot."

America's controversial history with racism, as well as the intense emotions surrounding the issue, makes it a difficult topic to discuss. However, if we are ever to move past this issue, we must be willing to recognize it, be brave enough to engage in open-minded dialogue about it, and put aside the feelings that may prevent us from achieving social unity.

As Sconiers said, "There's gonna be a lot of uncomfortable talks...[and] situations that you're gonna have to go through, but that's the sacrifice we make for racial equality."