

MICHAEL: During this year’s planning, we were very hesitant to continue including MLK in our assembly. As you can see from the projection behind me the theme of our assembly was “black is...”. Our aim when picking this theme was to dispel the claim that Black is a monolith. That it could be understood or summarized by one word or person.

CAMILLE: But how do you create an assembly that dispels that notion when for many, MLK is the first, and sometimes only, person that comes to mind when they think of the history of Black people in America. Every year, students are introduced to Black America through lessons on the march on Washington, the Montgomery bus boycotts and little else. MLK is not the face of Black America. He was one man, with flaws of his own, who took a stand for civil rights. Black Americans have done so much more, and are so much more than the big names you see in your history classes. We are Langston Hughes, Malcom X, and Rosa Parks. But we are also Joseph Bologne. We are Claudette Colvin, Jane Bolin, Mozambique Yasuke.

MICHAEL: We are the strength of Muhammad Ali

CAMILLE: the anger of Nat Turner

MICHAEL: the pain of Emmett Till

CAMILLE: the creativity of Jordan Peele

MICHAEL:the joy of Tina Turner

CAMILLE: the failures of Shirley Chisholm

MICHAEL: and the success of Barack Obama

CAMILLE: We are not defined solely by our best or by our worst. We are everything in between and still somehow more.

MICHAEL: This realization is why MLK is still a part of this assembly. MLK may not be the totality of Black America but he is an important piece of it, and our story cannot be told without him. And in deciding to keep him an integral part of this assembly, we began to think about an often overlooked part of MLK’s most well known speech.

CAMILLE: When MLK began his I Have A Dream speech, he said America had defaulted on the Founding Fathers’ promise “so far as her citizens of color are concerned”. That Black people were left languishing “in the corners of American society and found themselves in exile in their own land.” Nearly 60 years later, we as students of color feel the same.

MICHAEL: Every year, regardless of the theme, the goal of the MLK assembly is to enlighten and inform our fellow students, faculty, and administration about the intersectionality of Blackness. For years, we have spent time finding new ways for Black voices to be acknowledged and celebrated.

CAMILLE: But after the events of this year, we find ourselves at a deep questioning: Is society at a standstill? Is Lab at an impasse? Are we celebrating and informing or are we just pandering? (PAUSE) And if we have not reached an impasse, why has our school community made little progress towards belonging? Why do we, as students of color, still feel like outsiders at a place that should feel like home?

MARIAMA: When I got my acceptance letter to Lab, I was *so* eager to enter what I knew was an entirely different world. A world I knew little about but where I saw so much opportunity. One held in high regard for its academic rigor, access, and diversity. Now, as a junior, I can say I *deeply* miss the bliss of my ignorance. I miss the anticipation and pride of not only getting into but attending one of the best schools in my city. Instead of relishing in pride for this school, I can't go a moment without missing and comparing Lab to my middle school. This Lab bubble everyone seems to be so aware of is thicker than we think. Between hearing about past experiences of people of color and other marginalized communities here, to hate crimes and microaggressions. (PAUSE) And to find it's an annual thing? ... To see it as I come here every day?.. To see how comfortable others are with experiences that wouldn't have been tolerated, let alone *permissible*, at my previous schools. It only makes the decision to go through with the hour-long commute to school harder. Looking back, I can't help but question my choice to attend Lab. Knowing what I know now, would I still tell my younger self to accept Lab? *Should* I recommend Lab to anyone now or in the future? I desperately want Lab to be a place that when I get to that 5, 10, or whatever year anniversary, I'll be happy to come home. That isn't how it is right now.

MYLES: One of the worst things to hear from our parents is, "I'm not mad, I'm disappointed." Well, hate to sound like a parent, but I'm disappointed. (PAUSE) We are disappointed. Imagine what it's like for us, as 14 through 18 year olds, to REPEATEDLY see pieces of our identity critiqued and mocked. I am exhausted. I am tired of having to deal with the same old responses to discrimination in this building. Despite our mission, since 2018, the health and wellness survey reports that at least 25% of our student population feels unwelcome. Why is *this* our truth? Why is there such a stark contrast between what is said and what is done? And while I, as a Lab lifer and Black man, do not feel this way every day, I can't help but feel disappointed that too many of my peers have. (PAUSE) Sometimes I wonder how this beautiful building with all of these amazing people, can be colder inside than it is outside.

CAMILLE: As a Lab lifer, what I wanted and what I got out of my four years of high school, are two completely different things. What I wanted was an environment where I felt safe and free. What I got was an environment where far too many students feel unsafe and not free to bring our full selves to school. An environment where racist actions are not openly and directly denounced. Where students are petted like dogs because their hair is "different." Where *zip codes* are assumed. Where feelings are dismissed because no tears have been shed. Where we sit amongst peers and adults who justify actions that tell us we have no right to be here. An environment where our voices in our community are unheard, devalued, stereotyped, and straight up ignored. That should not be the environment of one of the top high schools in Chicago. We are thankful for letters we've received over the past four years that reaffirm our mission statement. We appreciate the curriculum audits and shifts. We still find those actions to be lacking.

MICHAEL: We are not advocating for censorship. We are not asking for an end to free speech. We are asking for Lab, at every level, to respond immediately and directly to acts of injustice and hate. For every action, or inaction, that is in direct opposition of the values and mission of Lab, adults AND students respond with more than just closed-door conversations. That for every racist, sexist, homophobic, transphobic, ableist, socio-economic attack, the community rebounds with a ready demonstration that hate has no place here.

CAMILLE: This responsibility should be on all shoulders of any person, group, or system within our school, community, or country. This is a call to action, a call for rights, that should automatically, resoundingly be heard and confronted the minute hate arises.

MICHAEL: And until that call is answered, we no longer see the benefit in an annual MLK assembly.