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Here Are the Four Winning Student Essays From the YWCA Darien/Norwalk 'Stand Against Racism' Contest

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The YWCA Darien/Norwalk has announced the winners of the first annual Stand Against Racism Essay Contest for middle and high school students in Darien and Norwalk.

— *an announcement from the* [YWCA Darien/Norwalk](#)

The YW named four winners, one each from both Darien and Norwalk at both the middle and high school levels. The high school-level winners were each awarded a \$250 prize and the middle school winners each received a \$100 prize.

Stand Against Racism is a signature campaign of YWCA USA and is designed to raise awareness about the negative impact of racism in our communities. This campaign is one part of the YWCA's larger national strategy to fulfill our mission of eliminating racism.

- This year, students were asked to identify their blind spot regarding racism. The prompt for the essay is:
- In American culture we say that someone has a blind spot about something,

meaning they are unable to understand it or see how important it is. When it comes to racism in our everyday lives people often have a blind spot regarding their own biases. What would you define as your (or our communities) blind spot and how can it be removed?

Here are the four winning essays:

**Darien High School Winner
Osaru Uwa-Omede – Grade 9**

Diversity, Or the Lack Thereof. As a young African-American woman living in Darien, I have learned that my community, as well as myself, has a blindspot for diversity. We shy away from people that do not look like us. For some people, they are afraid their differences are too vast to ever get along with those that are so different.

Many have preconceived notions, whether right or wrong, that tells them to stay away. I wish I could say I am nothing like that, but I have my own preconceived notions that our differences are too extensive. I want to change that, however.

It is no secret that Darien is known to be an affluent, Caucasian town. It is very different from my hometown, New York City. I board in Darien with other girls and resident directors and attend Darien High School. Once a month I visit my family in New York, but for the majority of the year, I am a resident of Darien. New York City is known for being a melting pot of all types of people. Darien is much less of a melting pot; in fact, it's more like a single favored fondue.

When I first came to this town, I was standoffish because these were not New Yorkers. They did not behave like the people I have always been around. It was easier for me to believe they would not want to be friends with me because we are so different.

They were also standoffish because I was not from Darien. To add to the mix, I am black and there are not many black people in this town. For some students, I may be the first black person they have gone to school with.

When neither of us decide to talk to each other, the cycle of separation continues. We grow up and teach our children what we have not learned about other people. In turn, they perpetuate the same beliefs.

My aforementioned living situation is made possible through the A Better Chance program—ABC. ABC provides young students of color the opportunity to have a better education than the ones they might be able

to obtain in their local public schools.

There are multiple programs like ABC such as Prep for Prep, Oliver Scholars and The Wight Foundation. These programs are our ticket to removing the diversity blindspot. We need integration.

Out of the approximately 1,300 students in Darien High, less than 11% of them are people of color. Only 1% of the entire school is African-American which means there are approximately 13 black students. Six of that total come from my ABC boarding house.

Due to this meager amount of African-Americans, many of our peers do not interact with us and that discourages me from interacting with them. The lack of integration gives us room to conjure up inaccurate stereotypes of others.

We then hold our stereotypes against the new people we meet and see them through our clouded lens. We do not acknowledge that they could be completely different from what we have thought.

That is why we need more programs such as ABC to be spread. People of color need access to better education. At the same time, white people can benefit from these programs because they are meeting people not typically living in their community.

Although living in Darien has been a short-lived experience (as I am a freshman), I know that I will continue to grow. I have learned that growth is often born out of feeling uncomfortable. We are use to being comfortable and avoiding touchy subjects such as race. I feel avoidance needs to end.

We need to talk about what makes us similar as well as to celebrate our differences. We need to hear the ugly and uncomfortable truths before we can move forward.

Living with Hispanic and Caucasian people has made me realize that we can live with our differences and diversity. We have the potential to get along and to remove our blind spot. None of that will happen unless people of all races and ethnicities come together and have an open discussion.

Are you ready to start a conversation?

Darien Middle School Winner

Avi Samal – Grade 7 Middlesex Middle School

In America many citizens have a blind spot in racism. This blind spot may not always be intentional, but it is there nevertheless. As people living in this country, we need to take a stand against these blind spots. If our world is rid of racism it would be a better place.

First, we need to identify the problem. The main problem in the country and the world is assumptions made

based on race. As a whole whenever someone sees how a person looks, she shouldn't make judgements.

As a population of people, we need to keep an open mind to any new person we meet. This getting rid of judgment before meeting someone is a huge step in the right direction. After having an open mind, it makes it fair for both people meeting each other.

We might not know it but our stereotypical mindset has major influences on our everyday interactions. If we have a mindset of meeting someone first and then making your mind up about them will have positive effects on the whole world. Stereotyping someone can also be unjust, because before you even get to know someone you have already made up your mind about that person.

Having stereotypes can also make one miss out on a great interaction. To get rid of stereotyping you need to remind yourself every time you meet someone to just listen to them. Don't think about how they could be, just see how they are.

As well, Americans don't fully realize the extent of the stereotyping, because people do it every day. It is a part of their world and people don't think twice about stereotyping. For instance, whenever people see someone of Indian descent, they may automatically assume that the child is good at math and science.

In our community, people are more stereotypical because of the lack of diversity. There are very few people of color in the community. This lack of diversity also leads the community into believing any time there is a horrible event or tragedy in another town it is due to people of color. This is a stereotype as well due to the fact that people do not know the entire story of the event, and they are already making their own judgements and jumping to conclusions.

In short, I think we need to be open to meeting new people and having real interactions with an open mind.

**Norwalk High School Winner
Julia Curtin, Grade 12**

Everything has blind spots. Cars have them, people, the human eye. Anything can cause them, and usually it's an accident. Whether it is due to posing, the optic nerve, our own brains, emotion, and more, they are always around and in us.

When it comes to our everyday lives, racism can easily become a blindspot to us. The reason behind the blindspot can vary for every person, community, state, any demographic.

In the Fairfield County area, the one that I belong to, has many blind spots. I think that my blind spot, and my community of Fairfield County's blindspot is stereotypes. There is a stereotype that Fairfield County is comprised of only rich, white people, to put it generally. This stereotype, enables racism within my

community.

There is no immediate solution to this blind spot, but there are small fixes that can build to eliminating this problem. The solutions are simple, to first eliminate the stereotype and reputation of Fairfield County, and second to then educate everyone on the diversity of my community and how to help eliminate the problem of racism.

The stereotype of Fairfield County is very popular, but not many people understand the danger and harm that comes with believing it. Fairfield County is comprised of so many diverse areas, diverse in race but also in income and jobs. But in circumstances when people listen to the stereotype of Fairfield County being comprised of rich and white people, they have hindsight bias, as they are only looking at the areas that match this stereotype.

There are many areas in Fairfield County that do match this description, which there is nothing wrong with them, they just do not represent the entire Fairfield County population. Areas like Darien, New Canaan, Greenwich, or Rowayton, that have demographics that in general, do match the stereotype.

Though these are large cities that should be represented, when their populations are taken to describe a much larger and more diverse population, there is an issue. If people outside of Fairfield County, or even within Fairfield County, believe this stereotype, they are missing the reality that my area is much more diverse than that, and they are also holding the reality that there is not a population where racism can exist, because there is a lack of people of color within the population.

If there is a belief that there is a lack of diversity in Fairfield county, we are excluding the people of color who are a big portion of the population and therefore allowing for racism to exist. By eliminating this stereotype, we can take a step closer to celebrating and accepting our diversity, and making sure everyone is equally represented.

Eliminating this stereotype of Fairfield County is a step towards eliminating the blind spot of racism. Once we accept what our true population looks like, and therefore represent all those who live here but do not fit into the stereotype.

We can look to solve the real problems that exist in some of the areas in Fairfield County like racism, poverty, violence. These are the problems we should be looking to fix, not creating a much bigger problem

by allowing a stereotype to exist and be held as the truth.

By representing the whole, we make sure everyone is equal, and we do not allow racism to exist. We put our money, and our government towards the right causes.

When I grew up here, I lived in one of the nicer areas, and since I went to school in that area for elementary school, I subconsciously also believed that stereotype. When I ended up going to public middle school and high school in the greater Norwalk area, I was exposed, as everyone should be, to the greater demographic, and that the population I lived in was so much more diverse than I had ever been exposed to.

That was a very defining moment because I was then aware of all of the problems that needed fixing within my community, and I wanted to help. The key to ending racism, is to opening people up to the reality of diversity, and rather than shielding it, celebrating it.

If we can work to eliminate the stereotypes and also at the same time, show everyone the reality of the diversity of the population of Fairfield County, we can shrink our blind spot.

Once we have accomplished these things, we can start doing something that hasn't taken a back seat while this stereotype is present, educating. We can educate people. We can educate them so that nobody else has to have an experience similar to mine, not being able to be open minded because of stereotypes that have been established.

When we as a community can stop worrying about having a blind spot, we can turn to the bigger issues and fix them. We can put our time and our money towards causes and people and good mindsets, that matter.

In conclusion, blind spots are a weakness, but they also are everywhere. When a blind spot isn't paid attention to or is not worried about, it can prove fatal. When we address our blind spots, and rather than ignore them we work to mend them, is when we can fix bigger issues.

Racism is a true evil in the world that must be eliminated, and it will be eliminated if a lot of people do the right thing. I think doing the right thing is addressing and eliminating blind spots.

My blind spot and my communities blind spot is the stereotypes surrounding Fairfield County. If we can shutdown the belief in these stereotypes, we can open everyone's eyes to what the real issues are and to how amazingly diverse we really are.

Norwalk Middle School Winner

Jacob Gonzales – Grade 7, Nathan Hale Middle School

Racism to me is believing that someone is better than someone else just because they are a different race than you. Racism happens all over because of actions people show towards others due to their beliefs.

For example: certain people who commit the same crimes but are different skin colors are punished in different ways. Why, if they have committed the same crime. We read about this all the time, see it on the news, and some of us have even experienced it. I have also seen where people are judged because of their last name or how much money they have. That is just another form of racism.

I feel people are taught color and that is one reason why racism still exists today. Growing up my family never taught color. We have family members who are black, white, Spanish, and we never thought anything of it. I always had friends of all colors and races, I never thought to myself you can't come over because we are different colors.

Maybe it is because I am half Spanish and half white but when I hear people my age say that they can't have certain friends over because their parents won't like it I am shocked and saddened. How could people still be so racist?

The word racism or racist just brings so many negative thoughts to my mind. I wish that word or the actions of those words never existed. The word is also thrown around too often. Even by people who should know what it means. Sometimes it's just used in the wrong context to get people upset, again if it didn't exist it wouldn't be a problem.

What we need in this world is for people to stop teaching color, stop being racist. I also believe racism is not just the color of your skin but if you are gay or straight, if you are rich or poor, and stereo types help keep racism alive. We need to come together and realize there is no place for racism in our world.