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ERASE Racism Announces Four Winners of its “Raise Your Voice” Student Essay Contest, Each of Whom Receives a \$500 College Scholarship

The Winners are High School Seniors from Commack High School, Hewlett-Woodmere High School, Malverne Senior High School, and West Hempstead High School

Syosset, NY – December 7, 2021 – Elaine Gross, President of ERASE Racism, announced today the four winners of ERASE Racism’s 2021 “Raise Your Voice” student essay contest for Long Island high school seniors. The essay contest focused on discussing the importance of teaching students about the impact of racism throughout U.S. history. Each winner receives a \$500 college scholarship through the generous support of SCOPE Educational Services in Smithtown.

The four winners – along with brief excerpts from their essays – are as follows:

- Asha Brown – West Hempstead High School in West Hempstead, NY

“I am 16 when the January 6, 2021 insurrection occurs. Outraged, I remarked to my Social Studies teacher that if the ‘protestors’ had been black and brown, they would not have reached the Capitol steps. To my dismay, he responds, ‘There is no way to know’. Crippled with disappointment, I raise the multitude of peaceful Black Lives Matter protests that were met with tear gas, batons, and arrests and wonder why this evidence is not enough.”

- Annika Duhaney – Malverne Senior High School in Malverne, NY

“Even as a kid, you could pick up on it. It was subtle, but noticeable enough for six year old me to catch on. I didn’t need to ask *if* it was happening. The evidence surrounded me. I’d see it in my neighborhood, in the streets I’d bike with my sister, and in my mother’s frustrated grimace as she was caught mid school-morning-drive by yet another red light. Attending school made it even more apparent, a mere detail becoming an undeniable realization. *Only people of color lived beyond that stoplight.* By second

grade, all of those odd details began to pile up; you'd see the roads coated in cracks, the smaller houses, the park forever dilapidated, the grounds covered in litter and the swing chains rusted. As apparent as it seemed to me, this fact was completely ignored at school, as if the racial segregation was only to be understood, not to be discussed."

- Gabriella Persantez – Hewlett-Woodmere High School in Hewlett, NY

"Teaching students about the slavery that occurred right here on Long Island and using examples such as the housing discrimination in Levittown and how red-lining was a disgracefully common practice in our own backyards, will help students realize how much discrimination affects the futures of people of color. If we don't start using concrete examples of the racism that is still very present here on Long Island, the next generations will never understand how pressing the obstacle is or have the drive to change what is deteriorating our society today."

- Lakshanna Raveendran – Commack High School in Commack, NY

"As I learned about the Middle East in my world history class, I was stunned when a peer said, 'Who cares if they get bombed, they're all terrorists anyway.' Many Long Island schools are trapped in 'bubbles'. Harmful rhetorics and racist sentiments are constantly repeated without intervention in our classrooms, bouncing back at students who then absorb them. Our schools are echo chambers: students learn biased narratives of history which reinforce stereotypical ideas and misconceptions about our society. Unfortunately, the predominantly white racial makeup of our schools has also created learning environments where students of color are treated as peripheral, as their narratives and histories have been ignored in our curricula."

The winning essays are available [here](#).