



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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

**The Winners are Seniors at High Schools in Elmont, Lattingtown, North Babylon,
and Old Westbury, NY**

Syosset, NY – June 3, 2025 – April Francis Taylor, Acting President of ERASE Racism, announced today the four winners of ERASE Racism’s 2025 “Raise Your Voice” student essay contest for Long Island public high school seniors. The essay contest focused on discussing “Brave Spaces: Shaping Change and Transformative Communication.” Each winner will receive a \$500 college scholarship at ERASE Racism’s Annual Benefit on Wednesday, June 4. The scholarships are made possible by the generous support of SCOPE Educational Services in Smithtown.

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

- James Corwin – Locust Valley High School, Lattingtown, NY

“At my dinner table, the conversations have never been small. While some families talk about sports or schedules, mine dives into ethics, free will, technology, and philosophy—often all in one meal. My dad encouraged me early on to question everything, to listen deeply, and to always think beyond the obvious. These conversations taught me one of the most important lessons of my life: knowledge isn’t just about information—it’s about intention. That lesson has stayed with me as I’ve developed a passion for artificial intelligence. I see technology as a tool with enormous potential to help people—but only if it’s guided by empathy and ethics. As AI becomes more powerful, I’ve grown increasingly aware of how it can also be used in ways that reinforce bias or inequality. Facial recognition software misidentifying people of color, hiring algorithms trained on discriminatory data—these are just a few examples of how “neutral” systems can actually reflect the worst parts of society when built without diverse voices or ethical frameworks.”

- Imani Lyons – Elmont Memorial High School, Elmont, NY

“Rather than wait for change, I decided to be a part of it. I founded the Mental Wellness Club at my school to create a safe space for students to speak freely about what they’re feeling. We host open forums, self-care events, and collaborations with community leaders to promote emotional literacy and reduce stigma. I’ve led school-wide mental health awareness campaigns, spoken at local town halls, and used my platform as a student leader to advocate for increased access to mental health services. A world without this issue would be one where every student feels seen, heard, and supported. There would be no shame in struggling, and seeking help would be as normalized as going to the nurse for a fever. Schools would prioritize emotional wellness alongside academic success. Families would talk openly about mental health, and care would be available regardless of income, language, or background.”

- Shekinah Ndika – North Babylon High School, North Babylon, NY

“I began researching air quality data from the EPA and tracking patterns across Long Island and New York City as a whole. I looked for connections between zip codes and health outcomes, and interviewed residents whose stories mirrored my family’s. It was in those conversations—raw and honest, that I saw the full scope of the problem. I learned we needed environmental equality. I wasn’t alone in caring. Alongside a passionate group of peers, I launched a research initiative to explore the links between environmental injustice and public health in our communities. We analyzed air pollution trends, asthma rates, and housing conditions in predominantly Black and Latino neighborhoods while continuously advocating for the Clean Air Act. We didn’t want to just point out the problem—we wanted to offer solutions. So we did. I proposed legislation for stricter emissions regulations, pushed for more green space near schools, and advocated for community air monitoring programs.”

- Regina Gonzalez – Westbury High School, Old Westbury, NY

“Bullying today isn’t just name-calling in the hallway. It shows up in microaggressions, exclusion in group chats, discrimination in the workplace, and hate masked as humor on social media. Growing up between Queens and Long Island, I was bullied relentlessly for my brown skin, my name, my facial features, and sometimes, just for wanting to be friends with everyone. I internalized much of it, thinking maybe if I stayed quiet, it would pass. I was often a bystander too, afraid to speak up against those I considered “friends.” But real friends aren’t territorial. They don’t belittle you or thrive on your silence. So, how do we change something that feels so embedded and intangible? We start with what’s tangible: education and empathy. We need to teach young people not just what bullying is, but how it feels. Not just how to avoid being cruel, but how to be kind. Empathy needs to be woven into the fabric of school culture, not tacked on through a one-time assembly. Imagine a Long Island where schools held monthly storytelling circles—spaces where students could share their experiences and listen,

really *listen*, to one another. Imagine school as a place where courage and compassion are taught as deliberately as math or science.”

For more information, including the winning essays and photographs of the winners, contact Henry Miller – hmillier@highimpactpartnering.com or 917-921-8034.

ERASE Racism is a civil rights organization based on Long Island that exposes and addresses the devastating impact of historical and ongoing structural racism, particularly in public school education and housing. It does so through research, policy advocacy, legal action, and educating and mobilizing the public – driving policy change at local, regional and statewide levels and through national coalitions. It has been recognized locally and nationally for its cutting-edge work.