

## IN STUDENTS' OWN WORDS

### RACISM AT SUBURBAN SCHOOLS:

#### Georgie Silvarole and Justin Murphy

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In interviews with more than a dozen students of color at various school districts across Monroe County, several topics came up repeatedly. Here are some of the most common concerns, in those students' own words.

#### Slurs and the N-word

"Every day there's a lot of racial comments made at school, directed basically at anyone who's not a straight white person." — Mark Simmons, Hilton High School "One thing in this school is (white kids) saying the N-word and finding that socially acceptable when it's not. ... They think that because it's in a song, they can say it. ... I should feel comfortable going to school and I don't always, because people say that word." — Kennedy Jackson, Penfield High School

#### Fraught discussions about slavery

"You get around that topic in English and social studies, it's a bumpy road." — Yaa Korne, Penfield High School "I'm not the whole black race. I was not a slave; my parents were not slaves. ... All I know about it is what you (teachers) tell me." — Kennedy Jackson, Penfield High School **Consequence of a lack of black teachers**

"I don't have a teacher here I can talk to who relates to my experience as a person of color." — Kennedy Jackson, Penfield High School "There's no (black teachers) here to check these (white) teachers when they let things happen." — Will Barrett, Fairport High School "I think it's in (teachers') heads that they want to be more racially (sensitive), but they go about it the wrong way." — Mark Simmons, Hilton High School "I hear all the time when I'm walking through the halls: 'Oh, she doesn't like me because I'm black.' My brother always says that. ... In his mind it's, 'Every teacher I know is out to get me.' If it was all black teachers, he wouldn't feel that way." — Bethany Beru, Rush-Henrietta Senior High School

#### Underestimated academically

chance. ... I had to work very hard to be put in these classes and advocate for myself. I feel I have to work twice as hard to get half as much as some of my white peers." — Will Barrett, Penfield High School "There's a certain level of ignorance that I am willing to tolerate because I expect it, just because of what I've gotten used to. And that's a shame to get used to, but it's something we've put up with and it's something that we have considered to be part of the norm." — Kidane Malik, Greece Arcadia High School

#### Emotional strain of racial isolation

"I often feel like there's 1,000 eyes on me while I'm taking a test. It creates a lot of stress and anxiety. ... They're staring me down. Honestly, sometimes I feel I'm invisible but at the same time everyone's watching me to see if I fail." — Will Barrett, Fairport High School "You have to put on two different attitudes at home and at school. At home (in Rochester) people ask me, 'Why do you talk white?' I have to put on a different self." — Yaa Korne, Penfield High School  
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**Justin Murphy**

“In my AP classes there definitely weren’t a lot of us and we definitely weren’t encouraged. It was more, just, get through and don’t fail. ... Especially at the beginning, they’d be like, ‘Wow, great job, a B.’ And I made it clear my expectations were higher.” — Elijah Goldberg, Brighton High School “The few black students at my school, I feel they’re not in these (advanced) classes because of perceived biases. They just don’t get a



**Georgie Silvarole**