

ELECTIONS ARE LIKE A FOURTH GRADE BAND

This election season turned into a screaming match in which everyone thought they were right.

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No one listened this election season, but everyone made a bunch of noise.

I may be over generalizing here, but think about it. Count the amount of times when you talked to someone whose political opinion was different than yours and actually considered whether or not it made sense.

If you're like most, you probably can keep track of these times on one hand.

Nothing exhibited this more perfectly to me than when I went to a Donald Trump rally before the Pennsylvania Primary. As I lined up along the sidewalk to get in, a large group of Bernie Sanders supporters and Black Lives Matter protesters gathered on the other side of the street. They had vulgar signs and screamed loud chants. The people on my side began to scream back.

As I stood there, I watched this shouting match and thought about whether or not the screaming is accomplishing anything. No matter what each side says, screams, or writes on a sign, they probably are not going to change anyone's mind.

The truth is that America is like a fourth grade band.

At Malvern I currently play in the jazz band, but I remember when I first started playing in fourth grade I was completely terrible. When I got my first piece of sheet music, I practiced it for an hour and thought I was making beautiful music on the level of

Mozart. My beautiful music consisted of two notes that I played very loudly and with no sense of rhythm. Finally my dad yelled at me. "Stop making noise. Start making music," he said.

Now, imagine a band of about 25 fourth graders playing like me without listening to each other. Each is super fascinated with their own ability to make any type of inarticulate tones from an instrument and competing to play louder than the kid next to them. And at the end of the concert, they look to their parents so that they can hear "Good job."

Sums up this election season pretty well, don't you think?

According to CBS News, most people think they are above average and overestimate their IQ. When arguing about politics, we will argue as if it is impossible for us to be wrong. We are terrified of being wrong because our society tells each of us we are special, so we act on that.

Debates turn into screaming matches.

Everyone is proud of themselves for having some type of political thought or repeating the same fact over and over again to bolster their argument. And everyone wants to hear that they're right—the equivalent to a parent telling them they did a good job after a concert.

But the approval never comes, so each side blames the other for degrading political debate. Buzzword accusations fly around, blaming the other for problems in America and labeling them a part of the problem.

Politics have become more polarized, and each side says the

other is the problem. If we want problems to actually be solved, we must work civilly with opposing sides.

Each political school of thought has intrinsic merit in the same way that each person has intrinsic value.

When each of us hears an argument that we have never heard before, we have the responsibility to open-mindedly evaluate the validity of the argument and appropriately adjust our beliefs.

Some may argue that staying true to one's opinion is a sign of strength. But it takes even more strength and maturity to realize when you are wrong and admit that. Screaming and shutting people out is not the solution and not a sign of strength.

We need to listen.

When I got to high school and started playing music, I realized I had to listen. I had to listen to other people that I played with. I had to listen to my teachers. I had to listen to previous great musicians.

I learned how to play music better and I no longer annoy my dad when I practice. When everyone listens and then plays, music is made. Bands sound great. Just as a band with one instrument playing one note is bland and not musical, a country full of like-minded people is weak.

Different notes can make beautiful chords and harmonies. Different arguments and schools of thoughts make our country stronger, but it all starts with listening.

If America wants to start to compromise and work together, we must listen so we can stop making noise, and start making music. ♦

>LEADER IN DIVERSITY, 2



MALVERN GROUP AT SDLC CONFERENCE IN ATLANTA, GA | COURTESY N. LI

person, no matter what he or she looks like, believes in, or identifies as, has his or her own unique story.

It was also an opportunity to experience life from a different perspective. How often does one get to be surrounded by a group of people in which each individual is unique? Where there is no majority or minority? To listen to each unique person's opinions, experiences, and struggles, both internal and external, was truly eye-opening and humbling.

Another aspect of the event that struck me was the strength and courage of the students. The fact that each was willing and able to express themselves for who they were and how they wanted to in a society that may not embrace it was very impactful for me. That strength and courage is what separates leaders from the rest of the crowd.

If one word could sum up the keynote speakers at the weekend, it would be dynamic. The speakers included Equal Justice Initiative founder and criminal defense lawyer Bryan Stevenson, peace campaigner and son of a terrorist Zak Ebrahim, Vice President of Teach for America and co-founder of Campaign Zero Brittany Packnett, baseball legend and civil rights leader Hank Aaron, Congressman and civil rights leader John Lewis, sister of Martin Luther King Jr. and civil rights leader Christine King Farris, and many others. Each had their own story to tell regarding justice, race, power, dignity, nonviolence, diversity, change, and love.

The most incredible thing that I took away from the conference was the ability

of over 1,600 students to create a family dynamic of nothing but love and acceptance in a little over two days. In family groups consisting of about thirty students, each person was willing to share his or her struggles and experiences regarding diversity and finding themselves.

There's a special bond that forms between a group people when they meet as strangers from across the country and open up and share things that may have never been shared before.

The theme of this year's conference in Atlanta was "Advancing human and civil rights, fulfilling the dream together". The dynamic words that the conference revolved around were "love, change, power, dignity, forward, purpose, hope".

When reflecting on the theme and dynamic words, I think of the Malvern community. We should all be extremely grateful, for we are very fortunate to be where we are. Malvern strives to develop leaders and provide students with as many skills and opportunities as possible, including the ability to achieve that theme.

However, what strikes me is this: over 1,600 students from across the country were able to become a family in less than three days. Are we, as students at Malvern, doing everything we can to make each other feel at home from the beginning of freshman year? Are we able to fully express ourselves comfortably and feel accepted for who we really are? Can each and every one of us say that we are achieving the brotherhood that is the pride of Malvern Prep? ♦

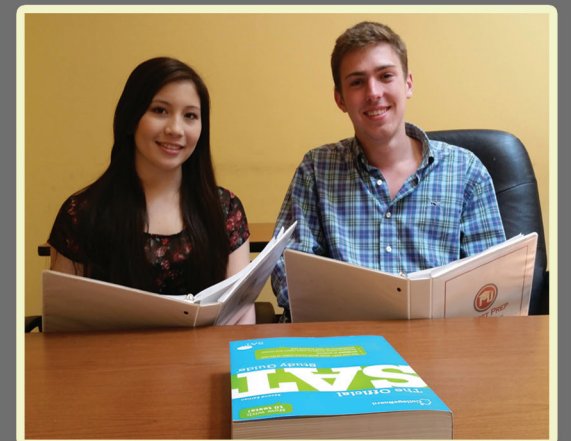


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