

The MHS METCO Program

- Kareem Beckles & Mosheh Tucker

The following article was submitted to Headlight as part of Kareem Beckles' and Moheh Tucker's senior project. It is a reflection on their personal experience at MHS as part of the METCO program.

The day we seniors have been waiting for is upon us. As METCO seniors, it seems as though we have lived in two realities: one showing us the ups and downs of being an urban Black youth in a small suburban town called Marblehead, and another teaching us how to survive in the inner city of Boston. An experience like this can make you or break you. If you make it, you will come to the realization that it has molded you into the young man or woman you are today.

The first day we heard that we were enrolled into the Marblehead school system, we automatically became aware that this would be a new experience, and we knew it was going to be a strenuous task attending this school for the next four years. From kindergarten to eighth grade we were in Boston public schools. We never sat in a class with a Caucasian student before we came to Marblehead. Not only was it going to be a new town, and new people, but also a whole new culture to us. It seemed as though these cultural differences would affect us in many ways. We felt it may be harder to make sports teams and get good grades. Once we were enrolled at MHS it was a challenge meeting people outside of the METCO program. It took us four years to finally become comfortable with school.

As METCO students we were often treated differently, and the biggest issue is the fact that we weren't recognized. People stared and made us feel unwanted. It seemed as if we were sometimes in a zoo, being stared at in curiosity of what our true environment was. These things took a toll on us. A first experience for one of us at the high school occurred when a class was watching a movie in English, and a Black man appeared on the screen. Being the only Black student in class really made him feel nervous, but having people look at him and laugh, because he shared that one similarity with the man in the movie, made him overwhelmed with discomfort. Something all we METCO students experienced sooner or later is a movie about slavery. Seeing your classmates stare and laugh at people of our kind enslaved really made us feel like maybe we didn't belong, like maybe they did not want us here.

Most of what we learned about Black people in school was that we were enslaved. And most of what we learned about leaders like Malcolm X was that they were radical and hostile people. This education is something not taken into consideration. Teachers and students must realize it's the small things like this that make us stay amongst ourselves. We noticed that students who had been in the METCO program since a very young age do not know Frederick Douglass, or W.E.B. Dubois, or even Stokely Carmichael.

In Boston, during Black History Month, every day we would learn about a Black leader or inventor. Yet Black students in Marblehead knew very little of themselves, and what they did know was either degrading or basic. In history we were told that Marcus Garvey was a "lunatic,"

but after doing some research we learned that he was man of great intelligence. Can we learn about Black inventors or people like the Buffalo Soldiers? African-American history is just as valuable as the history we are taught in class. If anything they are one in the same, American History. We want to learn more than a couple of good things about our history. We want to feel more connected to the school and the community.

It is these things that make the METCO program a constant struggle. A lot of us remain quiet about our difficulties and keep it to ourselves, but every once in a while someone will rise up and ask, why? We just hope their questions will be answered.

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