

Introduce: I'm Aidyn Gleason, I am a junior at FHN, and I'm here today to speak in response to some of the pushback against the black history and black literature classes that are being offered for next school year.

The social progress we have made in even the past few decades is undeniable. However, as perception changes, as does the social response. Attempts to highlight minority communities, even if the efforts feel brief or superficial some, are often met with objection from others. People of the majority may paint certain things as overcompensating or exclusionary, when the real purpose is an attempt to make up for the insufficient attention and credit that these communities otherwise receive. Classes teaching black history or literature aren't exclusionary either. They wouldn't, as some who oppose them might be inclined to suggest, require the counterpart of a white history class, because they would serve to make up for a portion of what typical social studies classes lack.

In an area and a school that largely lacks diversity, it's common for people to feel that they have no obligation to try and understand the lives of those who they don't see. However no matter the make up of one's home community, this understanding is absolutely crucial to continued social progress. As uncomfortable as can be to admit, we all exist within a power dynamic of privilege or some lack thereof on the basis of race, and to be aware of the positions of those around you is to be aware of your own position and to act accordingly. We cannot be successful in dismantling such an imbalance when so many are unable to even acknowledge its existence.

Classes that give students access to resources to learn the history and the standing of America's black community, especially coming from the personal experience and knowledge of black authors, is incredibly valuable. If that is taken proper advantage of, so much can be learned that is vital to having a working understanding of a world that recognizes and weaponizes race in the way that ours does. Most of the history/social studies classes that we have access to exist, as many things do, with a strong bias in favor of the majority. We prefer to gloss over that which we know we shouldn't be proud of. Just this past week, our entire grade of students learned in our government classes that *de facto segregation*, or segregation that exists despite not being legally imposed, is something that occurs by choice, therefore disregarding a myriad of hard truths about oppressive systems and practices that still affect communities today. Small, misguided teachings like these are not intended by teachers to do any harm, however these things add up over years of learning through such a small lens.

Classes such as these would give us the opportunity to counter this ignorance which we fall back on when it comes to so many things that require our country's attention. Allowing our younger generations to continue to be comfortable in obliviousness only stagnates us. Classes in which the goal is to help build a better understanding of racial dynamics have the opportunity to remedy much of the ignorance we see as a result of white-washed teachings. To take either of these courses in tandem with typical social studies classes would allow students to create for themselves a more comprehensive perspective and worldview in ways that are immeasurably valuable to our future.