

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

To the Editor,

Over the last few weeks, immigrant communities have been front and center in the national dialogue, where their situations are discussed in televised debates and impassioned op-eds. But if you're wondering where to find the most fascinating, most nuanced, most compelling conversations on the topic, don't look to CNN or the blogosphere. To find those, you'd have to visit room 237 at Chalmette High School in St. Bernard Parish, Louisiana. There, my students ask big questions, propose bold ideas and model what it will take to chart the more equitable, more inclusive future they deserve.

When I decided to center my lessons this month on the American Dream, I never anticipated just how eagerly my students would dive into the material — lesson learned. Last week, we had a fascinating debate about whether American-born Hispanics are truly American or would be “forever hyphenated.” The week before that, I poured over their impassioned, principled draft letters to Donald Trump, wondering if I could actually get them in Mr. Trump's hands. And one of the best days we've had all year revolved around a reading of Pat Mora's poem “Legal Alien” — a work of one of many Latino authors we've been reading to help take our conversation further still. As I watch them devour the content, I'm reminded of exactly why I began this work. If we want to live in a more inclusive America, we need to be a part of building it.

As a teacher, I get more of an opportunity to do this than most. I get to see what students are capable of when they get the supports they need. I get to share these stories about my students and their inspiring families. I get to reflect on all the things that made my own road to college possible. I was born in the United States but my parents don't speak English. I was 7 years old before I learned. Needless to say, this made school a challenge. If not for my family and the educators in my life, I would not be standing at the front of the classroom I'm now

proud and privileged to lead.

Every day, those of us in schools grapple with two realities — the tremendous progress we're making and the tremendous work left to be done. My students, for example, inspire me with their tenacity, wit and humor, even as I find myself frustrated by a system not equipped to support them. Today, Latinos lag behind their white counterparts in achievement — reading, writing, performing in math and graduating high school at lower rates. These challenges are particularly acute for English language learners. This has nothing to do with ability or will. It's a direct reflection of systemic gaps in educational opportunity according to race, class and zip code. With our country's demographic moving towards majority minority, unless we address these gaps, we will soon be living in a world where the majority of students are behind.

As an educator, I get the chance to make a direct impact. This chance helps keeps my focus on what it will take to make change in my lifetime, instead of getting distracted by the latest political gaffe or policy scandal of the moment. As a result, I devote my energies to striving for excellence in my instruction — locating resources far and wide, traveling to other schools and states to observe excellence and bring back best practices for my students, engaging with the school board to think beyond the four walls of my classroom to the needs of our district as a whole.

As the national debate rages on, we all have a choice to make. We can watch from the sidelines, or we can get in the game. Our students are in it — they don't have a choice. Their families are, too. Let's be the advocates and activists and Americans they need us to be. Most importantly, let's empower them to do the same.

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tweets of the week



“Wearing my @thebootnola shirt to the library tonight in honor of Hump Day Happy Hour. #missit”

@llange07

“I picture a typical workday at #NOLA S&WB is just a bunch of dudes poking each other in the eyes with sticks until the lunch whistle rings”

@ScottDKushner

“Over/Under on how many Tulane Students are daring each other to drink from the tap?”

@JDouglasDavis

“Watching *Scream Queens* and it's just making me miss Tulane so much”

@hillarydbenton

St. Roch's Market strives for inclusion, despite criticism



SARAH SIMON

STAFF WRITER

In the Bywater and Fabourg Marigny communities, there are few affordable grocery options. When St. Roch Market reopened in April, there were hopes that it could help alleviate this food desert in the Eighth Ward. The residents near the market weren't satisfied, however. Only recently has the market become accessible to the larger, low-income population in the neighborhood. Despite fears that St. Roch Market is merely increasing gentrification in the area, the market's recent events prove that it is trying to better integrate itself with the residents who need it most.

New Orleans and cuisine are inextricably linked. St. Roch's Market is central to this rich food history. Originally established in 1875, St. Roch's provided fresh, local sea-

food to the Bywater community.

After Hurricane Katrina in 2005, St. Roch's was forced to shut down. It remained closed for a decade, and when it did finally reopen, St. Roch's revealed a drastically different form. The 13 new food vendors are all small local businesses, selling more than just seafood. They represent diverse assortments of gourmet food, from sandwiches to smoothies to Creole-Korean fusion. The market's original fresh, raw food focus is now limited to a small booth selling produce and canned goods. Clearly, the market is marketing to a new clientele.

The new St. Roch Market has faced significant criticism for appealing to a gentrified community. These allegations stretch the truth. Though St. Roch has become less accessible, it's trying to reverse this image by taking steps to include the whole community in its customer base.

When St. Roch reopened in April, it attempted to apply to accept Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, the federal Food Stamp program. Though St. Roch applied for this before it even opened, access was not granted until Sept. 9. In the period between opening and accepting SNAP, St.

Roch faced heavy criticism from the neighborhood.

On May 1, five vandals broke the market's windows and spray-painted on the building “Fuck yuppies” and “yuppy=bad.” Clearly, the community did not feel that their voices were heard. They wanted an accessible market. They wanted a market for the people. St. Roch's gained a reputation for appealing to the new, wealthy members of the community.

Indeed, 40 percent of the surrounding neighborhood lives in poverty. This is heavily linked to property ownership, as 55 percent of the community rents, and of those who do, 74 percent pay 30 percent or more of their monthly income. A large percentage of the community stands outside of the demographic that St. Roch's appeared to be marketing to; upper-middle class residents who might regularly shop at places like Whole Foods.

Despite this initial image, St. Roch's Market is trying. Every Sunday, the market brings the community together for Saint's Sunday: a Saint's game viewing party accompanied by a happy hour boasting \$5 cocktails. On Sept. 7, St. Roch's hosted a

fundraiser supply-drive for the Homer S. Plessy Community School, a local elementary school, providing food, a community space and live music.

St. Roch's is trying to change its image. It opened to be a community space and is working to fit that role. St. Roch's is becoming more accessible and is visibly working to reel in more of the community.

Six months after its reopening, St. Roch's market has room to improve. Though the SNAP program has been launched, it is too early to tell whether this will change the demographics of the market's customers. The public outcry has yet to die down. With time, St. Roch's has the potential to be a great center for the community.

Until it has proven itself as a space that excludes local populations and ignores their needs, the market should not be discounted. It has a great chance to offer a unique, innovative service to the community rather than harming it. Blind dismissal of it helps no one and only removes the potential for constructive dialogue.

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