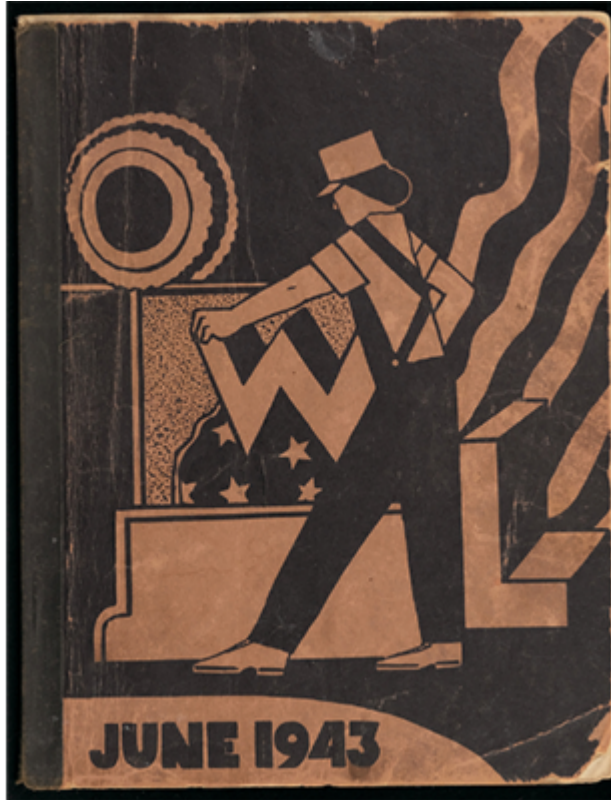




The Roger Lehecka Double Discovery Center

Getting community youth to, through, and beyond college



1943 Yearbook at Wadleigh High School in Harlem

In this July 2021 Issue:

1. Spotlight on:

- Shaun Abreu, DDC '10 and board member, won the Upper Manhattan City Council race, District 7. A tenants' rights lawyer, Shaun received his B.A. from Columbia College, Columbia University, and his J.D. from Tulane University Law School.
- The Summer 2021 issue of *Fordham Lawyer* features *Passion for Real Change*, a profile of Grissel Seijo who was a DDC Counselor from 1993 to 1999. Currently, she is Counsel, Employment, Diversity, and Inclusion, U.S. and International, for Restaurant Brands International (RBI). Grissell earned a J.D. from Fordham Law, an M.A. and an Ed.M. from Teachers College, and a B.A. from Columbia University.

- Dayana Dominquez, Leribel Liz, Abena Manuh, Jesus Gonzalez and Thais Santos received the inaugural Ron Johnson College Award. This fall, they will attend Hunter College, Syracuse University, NYU, Hofstra University and Brown University, respectively. The award was established by DDC alumni and former staff to honor the memory of DDC Counselor Ron Johnson who overcame a difficult beginning and encouraged so many students to pursue their college and career goals.

Congratulations Dayana, Grissel, Leribel, Abena, Jesus, Shaun and Thais!

2. Civic Engagement and Civil Rights

- **Learning Civic Responsibility through Community Action**
- **Lost Voices of Civil Rights Activism in Harlem Schooling**

Learning Civic Responsibility through Community Action

This is such a cool class! This curriculum is really unique, says Jessica Yip, DDC 11th Grade College Counselor. Every week, we review a specific community issue such as environment or food desert, and the following day we go on a field trip to visit an organization that addresses that very issue. Students get a robust understanding of the problems and they learn the basic rules of civic engagement so they can organize and build support to advance the interests of their communities.

The class shows students how to put two and two together, says Taylor Ellis, DDC 9th & 10th Grade College Counselor. They learn how to combine knowledge and skills to take actions – including voting, service learning, and volunteerism – that change the balance of power around important social issues. Jessica and Taylor are collaboratively teaching the Civic Engagement class as part of the DDC Summer Academy. They have structured the class to engage students in a close exploration of social justice issues and civic actions related to four themes: environmental justice, food insecurity, health care inequality and educational equity. Students hone their research and critical thinking skills, and learn to write clear and persuasive arguments to advocate for their ideas around the different themes.

The environmental justice theme addressed the negative impact of urban development on neighborhoods. Students have studied some of NYC's major infrastructure projects developed by Robert Moses, including the Cross Bronx Expressway that took 24 years to build and displaced some 250,000 people; and Jones Beach, a state park built in 1929, that was inaccessible to low-income individuals due to overpasses built so low that they could not accommodate buses. *Robert Moses did improve many NYC neighborhoods but he also affected hundreds of thousands in a horrible way, says Laura A., DDC '24.*

Students experienced civic action for environmental justice through their visit to the Billion Oyster Project on Governor's Island. The Project is a city-wide initiative to

restore oyster reefs to New York Harbor. Working alongside Project volunteers and staff, students learned how people are revitalizing and rebuilding an important ecosystem.

Food insecurity – people’s limited access to sufficient quantity of affordable, quality, nutritious food – was another theme that students examined. They visited GrowNYC, a nonprofit that increases people’s access to healthy foods through farmers’ markets and community and school gardens. *A neighborhood can have many fast food restaurants and still be plagued by food insecurity, says Taylor. It is about having easy and affordable access to fresh produce, fish, and meat.* Food insecurity is prevalent in many low-income and communities of color. Often, the least expensive food in these communities is the least healthy; and bodegas and liquor stores tend to outnumber supermarkets with affordable and fresh food options. In discussions about how they would begin to address food insecurity, Stephanie L., DDC ‘24 said *I would raise the tax on liquor and use the extra tax dollars to help make fresh produce affordable.*

Students are really interested and the excursions provide them with experiences that reinforce ideas explored during class, says Taylor. They understand that these issues deeply affect them and that they can make a difference. They also realize that these fields offer very interesting career options.

There are so many ways we can make positive changes and inform people about our environment, says Kendy G., DDC’23

Lost Voices of Civil Rights Activism in Harlem Schooling

*History focuses on messianic narratives where a few superheroes perform extraordinary acts of courage to change the world and it forgets the huge efforts of so many other individuals who fought relentlessly for years and played a crucial role in building a better path, says Mahir Syed, M.A. Teaching of Social Studies, Teachers College. Mahir leads DDC’s Summer Academy class, *Lost Voices of Civil Rights Activism in Harlem Schooling.**

Students are exploring educational activism in Harlem during the Civil Rights Movement through the lens of youth, women and multicultural advocates who led the struggle against segregation and racism but are not mentioned in the school curriculum today. *This is a great opportunity for students to learn how to research authoritative information, analyze it and put it into context, says Mahir, so they understand who writes history and why various perspectives are silenced or lost.* The class was developed in collaboration with *Youth Historians in Harlem*, a project initiated at Teachers College to engage local students in the history of the Harlem community.

Using primary sources, the class covers the struggles of forgotten activists like Mae Mallory who filed a suit against the New York City Board of Education in 1957, three

years after the landmark Supreme Court case *Brown v. Board of Education* ruled as unconstitutional the racial segregation of children in public schools. Mae Mallory argued that city's schools were segregated and she asked for an "open transfer" policy to let students attend schools outside of Harlem. She won the right to transfer and ultimately forced the Board to acknowledge that NYC schools were segregated.

Another overlooked milestone is the February 1964 NYC school boycott, which was the nation's largest civil rights demonstration at the time. There were almost twice as many protesters as in the August 1963 March on Washington, says Mahir. Led by several civil rights activists including Milton Galamison, pastor of Siloam Presbyterian Church in Bedford-Stuyvesant, the boycott demanded integration along with better teaching conditions and school facilities for Black and Latino students.

History shows that segregation was established intentionally and strategically to undermine and obstruct efforts by racially marginalized communities to access quality education. The drawing of zoning lines today by the NYC Department of Education perpetuates the problem, says Mahir. My students look at their own school and they see that segregation is a contemporary issue.

I am learning about so many perspectives of the civil rights movement in NYC, says Giada R., DDC '23. It gives me a greater understanding of the issues, then and now.

These students are super motivated, says Mahir. I am amazed to see them so engaged in this online class after a year and a half of Zoom! And this class is awesome for me too, Mahir adds, students share their insights and they teach me as much as I teach them.

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