

FRIENDS OF THE LIBRARY ESSAY WINNER

The Maples Want Their Sunlight

By Zach McCartney

Imagine that you are walking down the street and people act as if you don't exist, or act rudely to you, or even attack you. Imagine that you, your friends and family are herded from the place where you have always lived to a place where everything you do is regulated.

Imagine your culture is completely altered and your heritage stripped. This is not for anything that you have done, but because of the color of your skin. People are always oppressed. History is always written by the victors. Facts are warped to fit the agenda of the ruling class. Those that are deemed superior decide the fate of others. Nothing is as it seems.

John Howard Griffin changed the world with his book "Black Like Me." He made the world aware of the atrocities being committed. He changed the view that people had of blacks in the '60s. In a time of confusion and unrest he provided a level-headed and fair account of what happened in the South. However, he went beyond the racial barrier. Griffin took the risk of becoming black in a dangerous time and place. He took his analysis one step closer and actually lived what he wrote. At one

point, Griffin is shining shoes while undercover and he comments about how the whites completely ignore him. When he first goes out in his black form he is on a bus and he fully realizes the tension that exists between the blacks and whites. He is sitting in a seat and, though the bus isn't segregated, whites don't sit with blacks by choice. A white woman is standing in the aisle due to lack of seats and Griffin makes eye contact to let her know that she is welcome to the seat next to him. She then proceeds to yell and ask him what he's staring at. Now this is from a simple gesture of kindness. I find it hard to envision a world where such humanity can be thrown to the ground and trampled simply because of race.

Another book that comes to mind when thinking of "Black Like Me" is "Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee" by Dee Brown. This book practically rewrote what we know of history. The stories of the Native Americans are always told from the warped view of the whites. However, this book sheds light on unfortunate occurrences such as the massacre at Wounded Knee, the assassination of Sitting Bull, etc. So many horri-



Legacy High School student Zach McCartney, 15, accepts a check for \$500 from Paula Highfill, president of the Friends of the Mansfield Public Library on Sunday. McCartney won the "Power of a Book" essay contest, sponsored by the Friends and Alternative Funeral Home. Also shown are former first lady Laura Bush and City Librarian Steve Standefer.

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ble things happened because of misunderstandings. For example, a group of Indians started participating in a spiritual ritual called The Ghost Dance, a completely harmless part of their religion. But whites who saw the dance were frightened and mistook it for an act of violence and war. They demanded that troops be sent to arrest the leaders and chiefs. Sitting Bull was one of those arrested, but as he was being taken a follower fired his gun in protest. Sitting Bull was subsequently shot and killed in retaliation. A simple mistake and over-

reaction ended the life of one of the greatest leaders and men this country has ever known. Many events such as this led to death and injury of not only men, but also innocent women and children.

Everything is twisted and manipulated by one's mind because of the preconceived notions that are harbored about certain subjects. Great books challenge such notions, give insight and change people's perspective. This is what John Howard Griffin and Dee Brown did with their books. They changed how people thought and how they

acted about racism and segregation. Most white people were unaware of the atrocities and hardships that minorities had to endure. These people were not so different from themselves. These people were unfairly judged. These people were stereotyped. One publication can change so many minds.

An idea can enter the hearts of people who otherwise would never have given a second thought to the norm. That is the power of a book.

— The title of this essay is a reference to the song "The Trees" by Rush.