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WINSOR OPINIONS

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Politics of Identity Class Speaks with Montana School

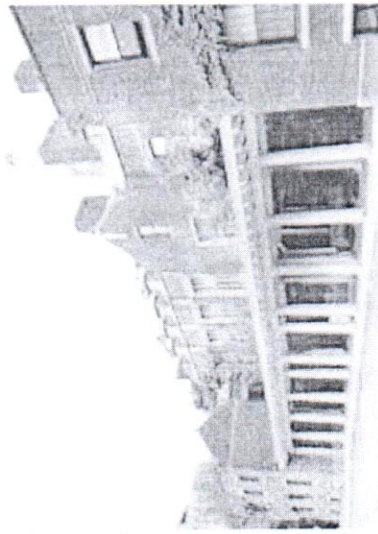
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BANNER STAFF

"What comes to mind when I talk about Montana?" This was how Mr. Braxton, Director of Community and Inclusion and History Faculty, introduced his Politics of Identity class to the opportunity to Zoom with students at Sidney High School in Sidney, Montana. Politics of Identity has a curriculum centered around examining how the social construction of race, class, and gender affect the political, economic, and social life of the contemporary U.S. In class, Mr. Braxton emphasizes the importance of having challenging conversations and tells his students that as "we are in one of the bluest states in the country it's very interesting talking within this community about these issues and why we believe what we do, but I worry that without engaging with someone with a different point of view we run the risk of thinking we're better than someone." Individuals miss an opportunity when in such a politically charged society they cannot give anyone a second chance or the opportunity for real engagement because they assume that they can't be friends with anyone possessing opposing political views.

Sidney and Winsor students alike entered the conversations with open minds and what little knowledge they thought they

had about each other. Very different from Boston, Sidney is a rural city of just over 5,000 people in an overwhelmingly red state. Winsor students were quickly assured that Montana is mostly flat, not hilly, and those from Sidney were disappointed to hear that not many people have Boston accents. An initial point of interest for Sidney students was Winsor's affinity groups. Brandon S. '21 noted "I was taken aback when I learned about [affinity groups] because we don't have anything like that here." Sidney lacks much of the racial diversity that comes with Winsor's being in a city, and while Sidney students do not regularly discuss issues confronting the Black community, learning about Native American culture is a large part of their curriculum. The conversation quickly shifted towards political issues, especially with reference to the 2020 presidential election. Brandon described our conversations as "a culture shock," and another student mentioned only ever seeing such liberal opinions voiced on the internet. While social issues are the focus of most political discussions at Winsor, for Sidney students, their political decisions are largely defined by the economic issues. This surprised Pardis K. '21, who "thought it was interesting to see how focused the Sidney class was on issues that would so directly affect them, like the fracking

industry, the Affordable Care Act, and tax cuts." Although their region of Montana is quite red, Sidney students all noted that a big misconception about Montana is that it's monolithic, and that in actuality, different parts of the large state house their own unique cultures and diverse opinions. As shown by the results of the 2020 election, this nation is, at present, a nation divided. President-Elect Joe Biden has spoken about the need for the country to come together across these various divides in order to heal. To Sidney's Daniel S. '21, "we need to become less polarized, and I think part of the issue is people just don't listen to each other." Daniel believes it's important to have "a variety of people in a class to bring those various perspectives, not just being diverse politically, but economically and racially as well." For that reason, Pardis found it "really interesting to be exposed to views that are completely opposite of ones we are surrounded by at Winsor." Likewise, Brandon summed up the experience, saying "it's nice to get out of your social bubble, and it has been a breath of fresh air even if I don't agree." Only if we continue to challenge and expose ourselves to these fresh perspectives may we



Sidney HS and Winsor

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