This year’s trips really opened my eyes to a side of Philadelphia I had never seen before. Even though I lived in Philadelphia for my whole life, I've just now realized how much history is hidden in the streets we walk on every day without noticing. In the two trips I've gone on, I have learned that there is so much more history in Philadelphia that many people aren't aware of. For example, during the walking trip, I learned more about who lived here and who contributed to our world in powerful ways that often go unnoticed. It felt strange to think that these stories were always around me, lying silently in the buildings,the blocks,and the neighborhoods yet I never knew the truth behind them. Seeing the old documents during our visits also made the past come back to life. As I looked at all the papers,photographs,and physical items from so long ago, it was almost like I was stepping back in time. I found myself learning about things and people I didn't know about till that day, and it made me understand how much African American history is overlooked.The documents weren't just paper, but it was proof of strength, leadership, and courage from people who helped shape Philadelphia and the country.

One moment that stood out to me, and will always stick with me, was the second trip to Mother Bethel when we visited the church and learned how it was built. I remember thinking about the purpose behind it. It wasn't just a building for worship, it was a community. It brought people together, especially during the time when Black people faced discrimination, exclusion and danger. That church was proof that people found ways to create an environment to feel safe where they could support each other, grow together,and not feel less than anyone else. It reminded me that history is not only about what happened, but about the people who found strength in unity.

Learning about leaders like Octavious Catto helped me understand this even more. Before these trips, I didn't know much about him at all. But now I know he was a powerful activist, educator,and athlete who fought for equal rights, including the right for Black people to vote. His dedication and the fact that he risked his life for justice shows just how important it is to remember these stories. The same applies to the Institution for Colored Youth, an institution that trained young Black students to become leaders at a time when opportunities were extremely limited.

Learning about these places and people changed the way I see Philadelphia. What I used to think were boring and ordinary streets are actually filled with legacies of resilience. These stories matter today because they remind us that progress didn't come from nowhere. Real people fought, struggled, built, created,and stood up so that the future generations, including us, can have opportunities. Understanding their stories helped us value our education, our communities,and our voices. It also teaches us that we still have work to do. The same issues of equality,representation,and justice Catto fought for continue in different ways today. Overall, these trips helped me grow by opening my eyes to the hidden history around me. They taught me to pay attention, to ask questions,and how to honor the stories that often go untold. Most importantly, they remind me that history isn't only in textbooks but that it's alive in the streets we walk, the buildings we enter, and the communities that continue to rise.