



It's amazing how just one word can completely change the tone of your day.

It was a Friday morning; the kind that makes you think that autumn will never quite arrive. I was in my car, sunglasses on and the windows down; neither a given in mid-September. I was coming from an extremely encouraging meeting in a school district that is poised to have civil rights teams in all three of their schools, and headed to a middle school where I was meeting with the civil rights team advisor to discuss ways that we could coordinate my upcoming presentation with civil rights team activities.

It's even possible that the music playing from my iPod was inappropriately loud.

I was loving my job, readying myself for another productive meeting as I approached the town center and school, when I saw the sign pictured above.

There's an overused sound effect in popular culture where a record scratch indicates that an event has jarred someone loose from their current state. I'm pretty sure I heard that sound, but it may have been my tires on the pavement as I stomped on the brakes to get a better look.



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“Did I *seriously* just see that?”

I did. “JP IS GAY,” spray-painted prominently on a speed limit sign on a busy state road. And there it was for all to see.

For all to see... or at least that’s what I thought. I reported the sign to the school’s civil rights advisor, we went to the site and took photos, and she reported it to school administration and law enforcement. One week later, the sign was removed.

But here’s the thing: while the civil rights team advisor was properly horrified by the homophobic graffiti on the sign and acted accordingly, she knew nothing about it previously because she doesn’t travel that particular route. In reporting what we discovered, though, she discovered that it had been there *since the spring*.

We don’t know who JP is. It’s possible that JP’s sexual orientation was outed in an exceptionally cruel and public venue. It’s possible that JP experiences such harassment on a daily basis. It’s possible that JP is simply being called the insult of choice amongst our students today. And it’s even possible that this was a joke between friends, and that JP is equally guilty of such behavior targeted towards an almost-anonymous initialled individual.

We don’t know.

But here’s what we do know. In the months that “JP WAS GAY” was on that sign, many drivers, passengers, and pedestrians passed by. How many? Hundreds? Thousands? Tens of thousands?

And no one said anything. No one thought it important enough to take action and make sure it disappeared. There it was for all to see, and yet it’s as if no one saw it at all.

We know that some saw it and felt it personally, even if their initials aren’t “JP.” How did it feel to see that? For the closeted student on the way to school? For the out GLBT people living in that community? For anyone with gay and lesbian loved ones in their own families?

We can’t afford not to see this. We can’t afford on happenstance circumstances to solve problems. We can’t rely on someone from the Attorney General’s Office to drive by at the right time, or for an active civil rights team advisor to take matters into her own hands. Building safe schools and safe communities can’t be the work of the select few; it’s everyone’s responsibility, including the many who *saw that sign but didn’t see it as enough a problem to take simple action*.

Building a safe community requires community action and support, and this is why our work with the Civil Rights Team Project is so important. Because we know that while



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one person can make a difference, true change comes from consensus. As individuals we troop on, but always with an eye to empowering others to make a positive difference.

Here's what you can expect in this month's newsletter:

The Director's Cut: Thom looks at the rising tide of anti-Muslim sentiment here in America.

Team Spotlight: A simple and effective way to build a team identity and have some important conversations.

Activity Ideas: Last month we introduced three activities/lessons that can help you train your own team. Here are three more!

Pop Culture Winners and Losers: Some welcome diversity on television, some terrible advertising, and an even worse idea for a t-shirt.

FA Issues:

Relevant Resources: Two exciting new resources to help reduce bullying and harassment based on sexual orientation. Oh, and they're free.

Upcoming Events: October looks like a busy month! Plenty of new events on the calendar to check out...

Brandon Baldwin – Newsletter Editor, reachable at brandon.baldwin@maine.gov

This newsletter is written and distributed by the Civil Rights Team Project, a state-wide program under the auspices of the Maine Office of the Attorney General. The mission of the Civil Rights Team Project is to increase the safety of high school, middle school and elementary school students and to reduce the incidence of bias-motivated harassment and violence in schools.

Janet T. Mills—Attorney General

Thomas A. Harnett—Director, Civil Rights Education & Enforcement Unit

Debi Lettre—Civil Rights Project Administrator

Brandon Baldwin—Schools/Curriculum Coordinator



The Director's Cut

A monthly column from our Director, Thom Harnett:

What does freedom of religion look like today? Not a pretty picture.



Hadidjatou Karamoko Traoré grieves. She and her three children grieve for the husband and father they lost. One child grieves for the father she never met. When they commemorate the anniversary of his death, they pray to their God. They call their God *Allah*. They pray at the site of his death. Abdoul-Karim Traoré died on September 11, 2001. He was a cook at Windows on the World, a restaurant located on the top of one of the towers of the World Trade Center. Abdoul-Karim was one of approximately 60 Muslims who perished on 9/11. As his widow describes it “He went to work. That’s it.”

Thousands upon thousands grieve for those who lost their lives on September 11, 2001. Many of those people also rely on their faith for support and pray to their gods or prophets. The pain felt by the Traoré family is no less or more than the pain felt by thousands of Catholics, Jews, Buddhists, Lutherans, Baptists, Episcopalians or other relatives of these victims. Their pain is shared and is universal. Their right to practice their religion should be shared and universal as well.

But for Ms. Traoré and her family, the pain of loss is exacerbated by the politics of hate and *Islamophobia* so evident around our country right now. In addition to dealing with her husband’s death and the reality of being thrust into the role of both mother and father to her children, she faces discrimination and is afraid. Ms. Traoré recently told *The New York Times* that when she wears her traditional robes and head scarf, people on the street treat her with suspicion; something that she does not feel when she wears Western style clothes. She feels this way walking down the streets of New York City, one of the most diverse cities on the planet.

Ms. Traoré, along with other Muslims living in the United States (a number estimated to be somewhere between one and seven million), feel not only the power or stares of mistrust, they feel and hear the criticism of their faith as being nothing more than a terrorist cult. They hear national political leaders, talk radio pundits and self-proclaimed ministers tell them they cannot build mosques or cultural centers and that their holy book, the Koran, should be burned. They are told they are to blame for the loss of life at the World Trade Center, the Pentagon and in the fields of Pennsylvania. A woman who lost her beloved husband and the father of her children is told she is to blame because of the religion she has practiced all of her life. She is to blame for her own husband’s death. That is an outrage and runs counter to everything this country stands for and everything we learned in basic civics class when we were children.



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Consider where we find ourselves as a nation. What have we become? Are we retuning to the days of the Know-Nothing Party, an anti-German, anti-Irish and anti-Catholic organization that took to burning churches in Maine? Can we comfortably sit here today and say that could never happen again? Are we drifting dangerously close to a time when we interned hundreds of thousands of Japanese-Americans because we were at war with Japan? What risk do we run acting as if we are at war with a religion, with Islam?

In the last few months, we have seen a torrent of harassment directed at Muslims. Here is just a sampling. A plastic pig with graffiti was hurled into a mosque in California. There was a shooting outside of a mosque in New York during Ramadan prayers. Protestors have angrily decried the construction of a mosque in Murfreesboro, Tennessee, a community that has had a Muslim congregation for over 30 years! Consider all of that against the backdrop of a recent poll that revealed 45% of Americans believe Islam is a religion that encourages violence. Imagine if the tables were turned and a more Western religion was the object of such scorn. Would people do nothing, say nothing?

Now, more than ever, we must reverse this trend, stop these behaviors and speak up about the religious tolerance and freedom that are the bedrock of our democracy. We must counter those who blame all of Islam for the acts of those who distort it with their hate-filled zealotry. I know that I do not cast all Christians under the same net as Terry Jones, pastor of the Dove World Church in Gainesville, Florida, who, with the assistance of the press, caused an international incident when he announced plans to burn 150 copies of the Koran on September 11, 2010. To do so would be foolish, but no more foolish and mean-spirited than painting the world's second largest religion, with well over a billion adherents, with the single broad brush of terrorism. This is something our forebears would not have tolerated and we should not dishonor them by remaining silent and letting freedom of religion become a hollow right that can be taken away and rendered meaningless by those who do not understand it. To do so would also dishonor Abdoul-Karim Traoré and his family. We are better than that.





Team Spotlight:



The Eric L. Knowlton School and a Simple Survey

The beginning of the school year is always a time of great excitement, but there are also many unknowns. This is probably true for you and your civil rights team, and it's one reason why the first of our five expectations for teams is that you come together as a team.

For some, this means lots of time spent doing icebreaker and teambuilding activities, but we recommend that your activities focus on civil rights issues. The team needs to come together, but they also need to develop an understanding of the mission and philosophy of the Civil Rights Team Project. They need to know who they are and what they do.

The Eric L. Knowlton School in North Berwick is building a sense of team *and* purpose through a simple survey. Surveys are great. They are often used to gather information from the whole school population, but the Knowlton School is using survey to get information about their team. Very smart.

Students on the team were given a simple five question survey:

1. Why do we have a civil rights team at our school?
2. What are some of the things that students here get teased, made fun of, and/or harassed about?
3. Which of these categories protected by the Maine Civil Rights Act do you think have the most problems here in our school?
4. What are some of your strengths that will help our team?
5. What kinds of projects do you like to do?

The team's answers to these questions are not only useful in terms of the information provided; they are also great conversation starters.

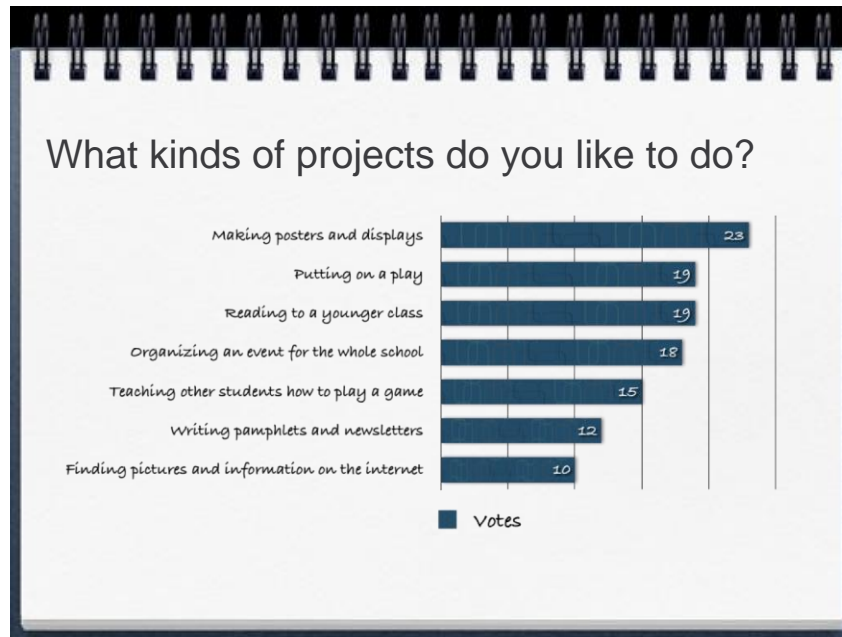
And this is exactly what Sarah Burcalow and Julie Dyer, the team's advisors, did. At their first meeting they distributed their survey to their team. For their second meeting,



they created a PowerPoint presentation with the survey results and discussed it with their team. It led to some interesting discussions about the purpose and roles of the civil rights team and helped everyone, including the advisors, get to know each other.

The value of surveys, then, is not just in what you learn through the data, but the opportunities for dialogue that they provide.

Here's a sample slide from the Knowlton civil rights team PowerPoint presentation:



Two more important notes:

1. Notice that this project isn't a major school-wide initiative. It's a really simple but really smart thing that the Knowlton advisors did with their team. For something to be valuable and "*Torch-worthy*," it doesn't need to be huge.
2. The reason why we know about this survey is because the Knowlton school advisors contacted us. *We want to know about what you're doing.* Please share.

And finally, thanks to Sarah and Julie for sharing! You're already doing a great job of addressing our first expectation by coming together as a team.



Activity Idea: New Team Start-Up Guide: Not Just for New Teams



Last month we profiled three ready-made activities/lessons that are particularly valuable for new teams, but also relevant as review sessions for even the most veteran civil rights teams. Those three activities/lessons focused on what civil rights issues look like in the school setting, both in general and highly specific-to-your-school terms.

The fourth, fifth, and sixth activities/lessons in our series are again useful for teams of all experience levels (especially the fifth and sixth, which you could do every year). They assume some basic knowledge of what civil rights issues look like in the school setting, which was the focus of the first three activities/lessons, and look at the role of the law, the individual, and the civil rights team in addressing these issues.

Interested in checking them out? There are two ways to do so.

You can go online to our Moodle site and check them out there. Simply follow this link:

<http://civilrightsteams.org/mod/resource/view.php?id=235>

You can also e-mail Brandon and he'll send you copies of the lessons.

Here, then, is a preview of activities/lessons 4-6 (and wow, am I sick of writing *activities/lessons*):

4. The Maine Civil Rights Act: Learning the Law

The Maine Civil Rights Act is the foundation for everything we do. Civil rights teams in the state of Maine don't exist without this law. It's not especially important that team members memorize and understand every aspect of the law because they aren't the ones responsible for enforcing it; however, learning the law is time well spent. This activity/lesson highlights the need for the law and will help students see why bias-based behaviors are so damaging, whether they break the law or not.



5. Influence on School Climate: Spectrum and Self-Reflection

This activity/lesson was introduced last year in *The Torch*; it's a keeper. Students think about the net effect individuals can have on school climate, and through self-reflection, their own influence. It's too easy for students to identify all the things they think others are doing wrong; here the focus is on self. If you want your students to model proper behaviors and *really* think critically about their own behaviors, this is a must.

6. Defining Good Team Members, Good Teams

This activity/lesson is an amalgam of some of our previous works. Students think about the qualities that good civil rights team members must have, and what characterizes good teams. It includes a quicker and more effective alternative to creating a team mission statement, too. All of this is important internally, but it's easy to share with the school, too.

Pop Culture Watch: September

The Pop Culture Watch is where we offer our opinions on what's going on in popular culture from a civil rights perspective!



Nostalgia for Chauvinism

General Motors recently unveiled some nostalgic billboards, including this one:





In GM's world, not only is it perfectly acceptable to define women as cupholders, but it's nostalgic to hearken back to a day when such idiocy would go unchecked.

But GM thinks this is so clever that they even sell a poster version of it online. Ugh. It doesn't seem particularly clever to alienate 50% of your possible customers, but maybe GM is fondly recalling an era when women didn't drive? (And when *was* that, exactly?)

I just hope my tax dollars didn't pay for this.



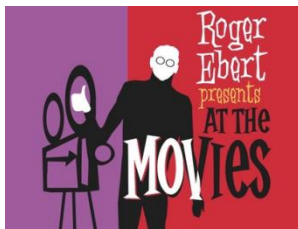
Another Reason Why NBC Was Smart to Yank Jay Leno out of Primetime

OK... that was a low blow. But I'm really excited about NBC's new hour-long action drama *UnderCovers*!

Have I seen it? No. But check out the two leads: an African-American husband/wife team who are retired secret agents... but pulled back into action!

Now, quick: list another hour drama with two people of color serving as the co-leads.

Exactly. The list is *UnderCovers*, and that's why the show is a big deal.



At the Movies Features a Great Cast

It has been years in the making, but Roger Ebert and *At the Movies* are returning to television. The movie geek in me is out-of-control excited, as I am most definitely a big Roger Ebert fan. (See *Torch*, May-June 2010, p. 17 for proof!)

But what's really getting me excited are Ebert's selections for hosts and guest commentators. The principal co-hosts are Christy Lemire, film critic for the Association Press, and Elvis Mitchell, former film critic for the *NY Times* and current host of public



radio's "The Treatment." Regular contributors and sometime co-hosts will be Kim Morgan and Omar Moore, both film bloggers.

I know, I know... so what? The show's four most prominent critics: two women, two black men. The world of film criticism, and pop culture criticism in general, is dominated by white males. (And yes, I see the irony in this statement.) The dominant culture is rarely questioned when the critics and reviewers share in that culture.

So it's great that we'll see more women and black men on television, but the real benefit comes from hearing their voices.



X-Games Clothing Finds Hate Crimes "Extreme"

ESPN's X-Games celebrate extreme sports and like to push boundaries, but their X-Games Clothing line just crossed the line with a new t-shirt for sale in Canada.

It's loaded with text detailing the youthful escapades of some kids. Here is the text, with my emphasis:

Oh man, I don't know. They got their equal parts of being ridiculous. Terry is pretty high jinks. I'd say Terry is pretty up there... remember one time when he and I were like fifteen or sixteen, we were driving around.... getting hyped, listening to Mafia; just youngsters having some fun. Me and Terry would see the transvestites on Santa Monica and this one time we're like **"Yo, let's get 'em. Let's drive-by egg these transvestites."**

The text is sometimes hard to read, but later on there are references to "tranny" and the summary statement "That was some fun sh*t."

This shirt is making light of *violence* directed at people because of their gender expression and/or sexual orientation. The only thing that's "extreme" about that is the ignorance and offensiveness of it.

Unbelievable. There's nothing else to say.

(Except that stores have pulled the shirt from their shelves and ESPN Consumer Products has offered an apology... but so what?)



Using  www.civilrightsteams.org

The Maine Civil Rights Team Project



Our Moodle site has seen more traffic in the last several weeks than ever before. Surely our request that anyone attending our recent faculty advisor trainings show up with a current and working account has made a difference, but it also seems like many of us are realizing just how valuable the site can be.

Great! Since we have so many new or inexperienced users at our site, we thought we'd share just a couple of the many resources that are available there.

1. New “Nuts and Bolts” guide to starting/running a civil rights team

We created this guide this summer to help out our new advisors, but we've discovered that the content is valuable for advisors of all experience levels. It's worth thinking about how you advise you team, and we offer plenty of recommendations for the best way to do that.

You can get this guide by looking in the “From the Augusta Office” section, or go to a direct link right here:

<http://civilrightsteams.org/mod/book/view.php?id=234>

2. *The Torch* newsletter

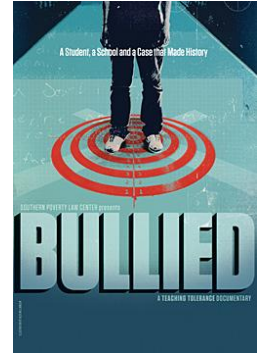
Some of you are new *Torch* readers. You'll continue to get copies of the newsletter through e-mail, but it's also available online. In fact, every single edition of *The Torch* is available online! That's five years of newsletters!

Once you access the site, just scroll down until you see “Our Newsletter: *The Torch*,” which is surrounded by pictures of the Statue of Liberty (holding her torch). They are organized by school year, and we've even included an index of past issues.



Relevant Resources:

We Must Address Harassment Based on Sexual Orientation



School can be a brutal environment for any of our students who are gay, lesbian, bisexual, or transgender. The same can be true for any students who are *perceived* to be any of the above.

This should come as no surprise, but whenever we work with students, they regularly report that harassment based on sexual orientation is prevalent in their schools. Words like *gay*, *fag*, and *queer* are common insults that poison our school climates, and yet many balk when we even dare to mention the words “sexual orientation.”

But we have to. If it’s a common basis of harassment in our schools, we have to talk about it, and we have to be direct. We have to talk about what every student already knows, and communicate that harassment based on sexual orientation is not OK. *And it can break the law.*

Two great new resources, released just last month, can help us combat this problem. The first comes from GLSEN, the Gay Lesbian Straight Education Network. Their research has consistently found that the single most important factor in making our LGBT students feel safe in their school environment is a relationship with a trusted adult. Put simply, they need allies.

GLSEN’s new Safe Space Kit is a comprehensive guide for adults interested in becoming allies to LGBT students. It effectively establishes the need for such allies, and includes useful information for anyone interested in fighting issues of bias and harassment in our schools. Highlights include:

- A great guide to responding to bias-based language related to sexual orientation. This includes segments from one of our favorite resources, GLSEN’s “How-To Guide to Addressing Name-Calling in Schools,” which we regularly feature in our staff and in-service presentations. It also models effective responses to the omnipresent “That’s so gay.” (“Responding to Anti-LGBT Language and Behavior” is on pages 16-17.)



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- Thoughtful analysis of school practices that can unintentionally encourage anti-LGBT bias, and ways to promote inclusion. This includes information on school harassment policies, which are sometimes incomplete and often an under-utilized resource, as well as other policies and practices deserving our attention. (Pages 27-30.)
- A useful glossary of LGBT-related terms. Even civil rights team advisors and allies might be a bit shaky on terms like *intersex* and *genderqueer*, or the difference between *transgender* and *transsexual*. That's OK, as long as we're willing to learn and understand that these words don't just represent ideas and concepts, but people. A basic sign of respect for people is learning what they'd like to be called. (Pages 40-42.)

And now for the big news: there will soon be a Safe Space Kit somewhere in your school! These kits are scheduled to mail out to every public school in Maine with middle level or high school aged students. Keep an eye out for it, or...

You can download the whole Safe Space Kit at GLSEN's website at:

www.glsen.org/cgi-bin/iowa/all/news/record/1641.html

The second available resource is a new film from Teaching Tolerance. *Bullied* tells the story of Jamie Nabozny, a gay student who filed a federal lawsuit against his school. Like all of the other Teaching Tolerance films, it's exceptionally well made, but we think that this might be their best effort yet.

Here's what we love about it:

- This is about what happens *in schools*. Other Teaching Tolerance films focus on social movements that happened somewhere else in the past; this is about what happens in our schools everywhere.
- The focus of this film is student safety. It's a great tie-in with the mission of the Civil Rights Team Project, and a safe way to introduce the topic of homophobia in our schools.
- The story shows how bias and bullying behaviors escalate when we don't interrupt and intervene. Things don't get better; they get worse.
- The film is equally intended for student *and* staff audiences. By focusing on the Ashland schools and their lack of response to Nabozny's complaints of harassment and bullying, this film can be an effective conversation starter for adults and their role in preventing such behaviors. Even adults who are uncomfortable talking about homophobia in our schools need to understand the language of lawsuits and liability.



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- It's short: just 40 minutes. This means it can be shown in one class period. Teaching Tolerance is really smart in marketing their materials for classroom use. (And to this end, they include a viewer's guide with the film.)
- It's free. Teaching Tolerance will send you and your school one copy of *Bullied* at absolutely no cost.

Bullied is Teaching Tolerance's best film because it takes dead aim at a real problem that affects so many of our students today. We highly recommend it.

For information on how to obtain a copy of this film, go to:

www.tolerance.org/bullied

Finally, it's worth checking out a few of the upcoming events in the next section of *The Torch*. Add Verb Production and the USM Dept. of Theater will be presenting the "Out and Allied" project in three locations, and CRTP advisor Lucy Rioux and the Open Book Players will be performing *The Laramie Project* in Gardiner.

Upcoming Events:

Civil Rights Team Trainings:

November 2-3 in Augusta
November 5 in Farmington
November 8-9 in Brewer
November 15-16 in Portland
November 19 in Presque Isle

(Elementary school trainings on Nov. 3, 9, and 16 at the locations listed above.)



Every Wednesday until November 10: Holocaust and Human Rights Center of Maine presents Series 360: In the Shadow of Vacationland

A series of films, lectures, roundtable discussions, and field trips examining Maine's civil rights history. Events are held every Wednesday, usually at the Michael Klahr Center on the University of Maine Augusta campus. All events are free.

For more information, visit:

<http://www.uma.edu/assets/docs/highlights/S360Fall2010Calendar.pdf>



First Thursday of October, November, and December: Abbe Museum Film Series on Native Americans

Bar Harbor, Abbe Museum, 7:00-9:00 pm, free

Each month, the Abbe Museum will feature films about contemporary issues in Native American life. Films will be followed by panels and discussion groups. Scheduled films include *Language of America* on 10/7, *Reel Injun* on 11/4, and *Club Native* on 12/2.

October 18-20: Add Verb Production and USM Dept. of Theater Present "Out & Allied" Project

Gorham, Biddeford, Portland, 7:30 pm, free, suitable for middle/high school students

This production of the Out & Allied Project features performance pieces that center around what it means to be an ally to LGBTQ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, questioning) youth. Most of the poems, monologues and short plays are youth written and take a deeper look at life, love and acceptance.

Performances will take place as follows: Monday, October 18 at USM's Gorham Campus in Russell Hall; Tuesday, October 19 at the University of New England's Biddeford Campus in the Multi-Purpose Room of the Student Union; and Wednesday, October 20 in Portland at the First Parish Church on Congress St. All performances will be held at 7:30 p.m.

October 22: Ernie Weiss Shares Family's Holocaust Survival Story

Portland, Longfellow Books, 1 Monument Way, 7:00 pm, free

Local author Ernie Weiss will be here to share his family's remarkable story of survival. *Out of Vienna* follows the Weiss family's long flight through thirteen European countries to escape the Nazis' iron fist and cruelty. Engrossing from beginning to end, its dialogue and vivid descriptions of places and events are based on personal interviews, research and the author's own personal reflections.

For more information on Out of Vienna, go to: www.outofvienna.net

October 23 and 24: The Open Book Players present *The Laramie Project*

Gardiner, Johnson Hall Performing Arts Center, 280 Water St., 7:30 pm on 10/23 and 2:00 pm on 10/24, \$8 general admission, \$6 for students, special discounted rate of \$4 for civil rights team members!



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This readers' theater production examines the Wyoming murder of Matthew Shepherd and ugliness of homophobia here in America. Each production will be followed by a discussion and question and answer period with our own Thom Harnett and the Center for the Prevention of Hate's Steve Wessler.

For more information, visit: www.johnsonhall.org/

October 26: MPA Conference, Guiding Principles: Creating Safe Schools for GLBT Students

Augusta, MPA Conference Center, 50 Industrial Drive

Sponsored with the Center for Preventing Hate.

October 29: Conference on Coming to America: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives on Immigration
Ellsworth, The GRAND Auditorium, 165 Main St., 8:00 am – 3:30 pm, registration \$50

Immigration represents opportunity for some, escape for others, and for many people, a threat. This one-day conference will explore the past, present, and future of immigration in America and Maine.

For more information, visit:

<http://mainehumanities.org/special-programs/immigration/ellsworth/>

October 30 and 31: *Reel Injun* screening

Portland, Portland Museum of Art, 2:00 pm, tickets \$7.00

Hollywood has made more than 4,000 films about Native people; there is more than 100 years of movies defining how Indians are seen by the world. *Reel Injun* takes an entertaining and insightful look at the Hollywood Indian, exploring the portrayal of North American Natives through the history of cinema.

www.reelinjunthemovie.com/site/

November 9: National Mix It Up at Lunch Day

Learn more about this annual event at www.tolerance.org/mix-it-up/lunch-day