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Torch (June 2009)

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Civil Rights Team Project

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THE TORCH (CRTP NEWSLETTER) JUNE '09

You made it. Well, the school year isn't over just yet, but it certainly feels like things are winding down. This means several things here at the Civil Rights Team Project:

1. This is the last *Torch* before the summer.
2. We just had our annual spring conference. (And it rocked.)
3. Our calendars are suddenly *very* open.

And of course, I'd love to comment on all three of those items.

The Torch: Perhaps you may have noticed that *The Torch* hasn't been arriving on its monthly schedule. All apologies, but the lead-up to the May conference occupied a majority of our time this spring, and so the newsletter suffered. We are still committed to a monthly *Torch*, though, and so that's something you can expect next year. For now, enjoy the final version for the 2008-2009 school year, and remember: all copies of our newsletter are backlogged on our Moodle website at www.civilrightsteams.org!

The Conference: What a success! It felt great to even have a conference this year after being forced to cancel in 2008, but as Thom highlights in his contribution to *The Torch* this month, this year's offerings were especially good.

Calendars: Oh, the quiet and the solitude of the summer months. If you and/or your team would like my services for anything this summer, please contact me. This is the ideal time to plan for next year! Of course the beach beckons, but summer offers that most valuable of commodities that we never seem to have enough of during the school year: time. Contact me to schedule something this summer: I'm available!

Thanks to everyone for a great 2008-2009 school year. You're doing great and necessary work in your schools. Enjoy your well-earned summer vacation, and be ready for a big 2009-2010 school year! (For more information on what we have in mind for the next school year, keep reading.)

Brandon Baldwin, Newsletter Editor (626-8548 or 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

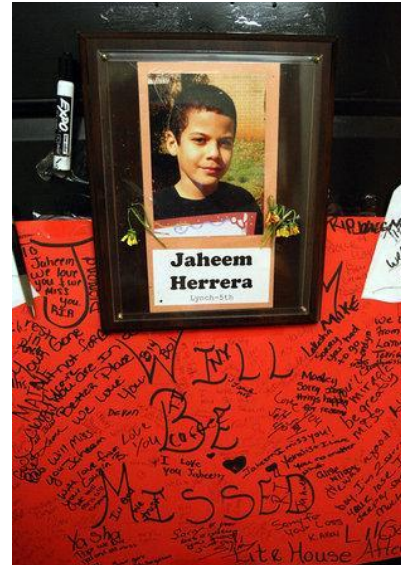
Thomas A. Harnett—Director, Civil Rights Education & Enforcement Unit

Debi Lettre, Civil Rights Project Administrator

Brandon Baldwin, Schools/Curriculum Coordinator



Why We Do What We Do



It's unfortunate that we get these reminders, and even more unfortunate that it usually takes someone's death before people pay any level of attention to what is a very serious problem.

But we can now add the names Carl Joseph Walker-Hoover and Jaheem Herrera to the recent list that includes Lawrence King, Megan Meier, Matthew Shepard, and Columbine High School.

On April 6th, eleven year old Carl hanged himself with an extension cord. Ten days later eleven year old Jaheem hanged himself with a fabric belt. Both had endured constant homophobic taunts at school, though neither is thought to have been gay.

There is so little that one can take from such senseless tragedy. You can only hope that it illuminates the bigger issues we see in school every single day, where we know:

- That students are sometimes targeted and bullied mercilessly.
- That students who are thought to be gay are prime targets.
- That for adolescent males, the very worst insult is to be called "gay" or "fag".
- That we simply can't afford not to see and hear this happening.

In a moving piece for the *New York Times*, Charles M. Blow wrote:

We must teach every child, nay every person, that the greatest measure of our own humanity is the degree of human dignity we afford those from whom we are



THE TORCH (CRTP NEWSLETTER) JUNE '09

different. A smile, a kind word, a handshake, a hug, understanding and compassion -- the simplest acts of goodness can bridge the widest chasms.

It's so hard when you don't see the tangible results, but don't forget the simplest acts of goodness you and your teams do. They make a difference.

* * *

You can read Blow's *NY Times* piece by clicking here:

<http://blow.blogs.nytimes.com/2009/04/24/two-little-boys/?emc=eta1>

Civil Rights Teams Gather in Augusta to Learn and to Celebrate



Monday, May 18, 2009 was one of those special days for the Civil Rights Team Project (CRTP). Just about 1000 student members of Civil Rights Teams and their Faculty



THE TORCH (CRTP NEWSLETTER) JUNE '09

Advisors from over 70 Maine elementary, middle and high schools came together at the Augusta Civic Center for the Statewide Conference of the CRTP. The Statewide event brought together students in grades 3-12 from schools in all parts of Maine to celebrate, to attend workshops designed to increase their understanding of issues confronting students in Maine schools around bias-based harassment and to honor their courageous efforts in taking action to make their schools places where all students are able to receive an education in an environment in which they feel safe, valued, welcome and respected. The event also provided student members of Civil Rights Teams and their Faculty Advisors the chance to meet with and talk to students and faculty from other schools and to share their successes and challenges.

Attorney General Janet T. Mills provided the Keynote Address to open the day in which she touched on civil rights issues from the past and those that still exist today in Maine and elsewhere. Attorney General Mills expressed her deep appreciation and admiration of the work being done by Civil Rights Teams to bring about real change in their schools and communities. After hearing from the Attorney General and Thom Harnett, the Director of the CRTP, students and faculty attended a variety of workshops including sessions for students in grades 3-5 presented by acclaimed children's book author Fred Lipp of Whitefield, and mime and musician Scot Cannon of Belfast. These workshops touched on issues of diversity, bias, bullying, cliques and other problems faced by students and Civil Rights Teams.

Students in middle and high school chose from wide array of topics including the history of Malaga Island, prejudice, genocide and the Holocaust, gender roles and stereotypes, Maine's newest residents from other countries, harassment of gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender youth in schools and strategies to eradicate it, the treatment of Native Americans in the media and performances of *The Black Jew Dialogues*. Some of these workshops are discussed in more detail in other parts of *The Torch*. The day closed with entertainment provided by acclaimed and gifted drummer Jordan Benissan, a native of Togo. Jordan had the crowd up on their feet and dancing providing a spirited ending to a great day.

Other workshops included:

Media and Sexuality- This session discussed the media's impact on how we think and act with a focus on how the media affects young people and what we can all do in response.

Spindleworks and Art Education- Two workshops were presented with participants drawing portraits to examine and challenge preconceived notions about what disabilities look like.

Beyond Tolerance- Students who attended this session were presented with a look at the common shared traditions of the world's various faiths and discussed the need for peaceful coexistence between tomorrow's leaders today through dialogue.



THE TORCH (CRTP NEWSLETTER) JUNE '09

Equal Protection under the Law- The 14th Amendment to the United States Constitution was the subject of this provocative session that examined constitutional protections of equality regardless of gender or skin color.

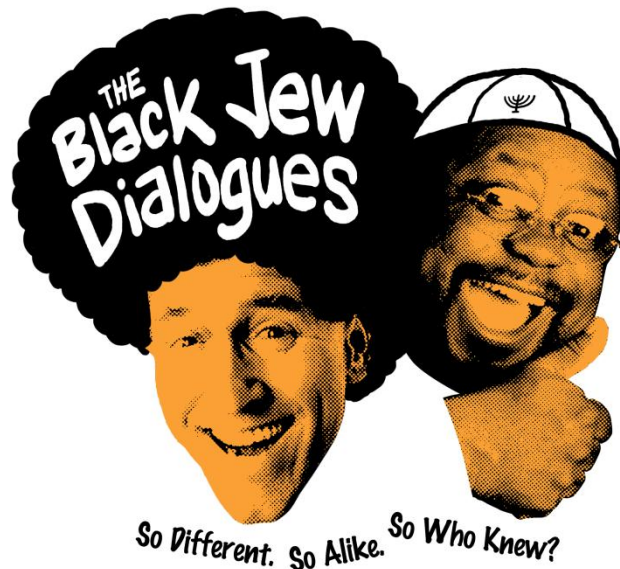
Some of these workshops are profiled in the upcoming pages of this newsletter. A complete list of workshops and workshop presenters can found on the CRTP website at www.civilrightsteams.org! Contact information for all of our presenters will be available on the website, too.

* * *

Check out the *Bangor Daily News* coverage of the conference at:

www.bangordailynews.com/detail/106370.html

Civil Rights Education as Entertainment? Absolutely!



Civil rights education is serious stuff, but some people seem to confuse serious with solemn. Two of our spring conference workshops made sure no one would suffer from such confusion: Scott the Mime and *The Black Jew Dialogues* garnered rave reviews from students for their ability to amp up the entertainment. Both performances are especially successful in finding humor in serious and potentially dry material.



THE TORCH (CRTP NEWSLETTER) JUNE '09

Scot Cannon, or Scot the Mime, has recently relocated to Maine from Massachusetts. His shows have strong civil rights connections as they effectively address issues bullying, tolerance, and conflict resolution. Scot uses mime and music to engage his audience, and encourages plenty of participation, too. He also draws on his personal experience in overcoming a stuttering problem in his youth.

We have seen Scot perform. His years of experience, both in the classroom and as a performer, are obvious. It is an educationally appropriate and professional performance that engages audiences and addresses important issues.

For more information on Scot's shows, including booking information, visit:

www.scotcannon.com

Whereas Scot the Mime opts for silence, *The Black Jew Dialogues* is a loud and brash two-man show examining race relations in America. Performers Larry Jay Tish and Ron Jones don costumes and props, but the heart of their humor lies in simple truths. They see the ridiculousness of racism and stereotypes, and they invite the audience to laugh along with them as they lampoon everything.

But don't think that it's not serious. Tish and Jones know that laughter is the best way to cut to the truth, and many of the truths they explore are very serious. The show is simultaneously entertaining and educational, but also insightful. It's more than just an opportunity to laugh and learn; it's an opportunity to ask questions and reflect.

Indeed, this is exactly what Tish and Jones want. They have created a curriculum to accompany the show, and offer discussion time after the show. While they operate out of Massachusetts, they have now traveled to Maine several times, and hope to coordinate schedules and do multiple Maine shows with each future trip to the northeast. Their show is appropriate for high school and college audiences. You can book them yourself, but we'll also be sure to keep you updated on their future Maine performances.

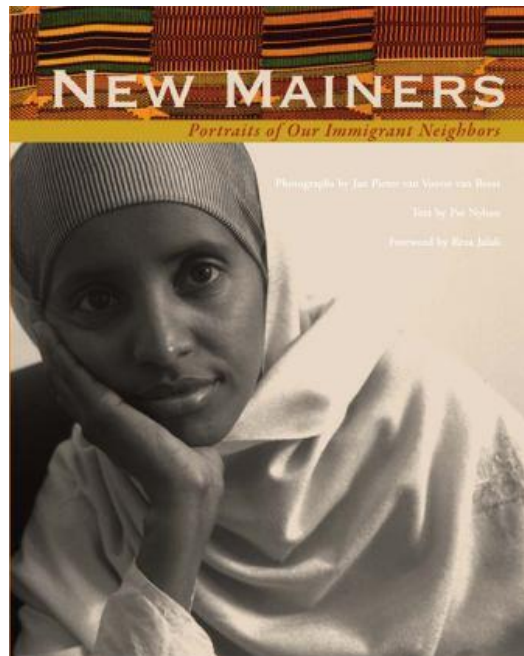
The website for the show offers much more information than we can provide here. It includes reviews, press releases, and video clips from the show. We encourage you to check it out, not just online, but whenever you get the chance to see the full show.

The official website for *The Black Jew Dialogues* is here:

www.theblackjewdialogues.com



New Mainers: Portraits of Our Immigrant Neighbors and Anti-Immigrant Sentiment



One of our guest presenters at the recent spring conference was Reza Jalali, coordinator of Multicultural Student Affairs at the University of Southern Maine. He wrote the foreword for the recently published book *New Mainers: Portraits of Our Immigrant Neighbors*, and spoke about Maine's new and burgeoning immigrant population. Jalali is himself an immigrant Mainer, having grown up in Kurdish Iran and moving to the United States in 1985.

New Mainers offers valuable insights into Maine's immigrant populations through twenty-five profiles. The twenty-five new Mainers chosen for the book are a diverse group. They come from Central and South America, Europe, Africa, and Asia. They are young and old. They are political refugees and educated professionals seeking employment.

More than anything, though, the book is timely in that it humanizes Maine's immigrant population. Anti-immigrant sentiment is running high right now on the national and local levels. There is a tendency to dehumanize immigrants and see them only as a group; this book, by simply telling their stories, shows the diversity in Maine's immigrant community, and shows that it is a community composed of individuals. By affirming their individuality, *New Mainers* gives voice to the struggles and successes that our immigrant neighbors face in living their daily lives. And many of those



THE TORCH (CRTP NEWSLETTER) JUNE '09

struggles and successes are universals; something all Mainers can easily identify in our own lives.

We highly recommend looking at this important book. It is a valuable teaching tool in showing that Maine is a diverse state, but also in learning about immigrant experiences. Finally, it's worth noting that it profiles three individuals with strong Civil Rights Team Project connections:

- Shamou, who performed at our fall trainings several years ago
- Pious Ali, who presented two excellent workshops at our conference this year
- Oskar Mokeme, founder and director of the Museum of African Culture in Portland, which is featured in our "Places" section of our resource guide online

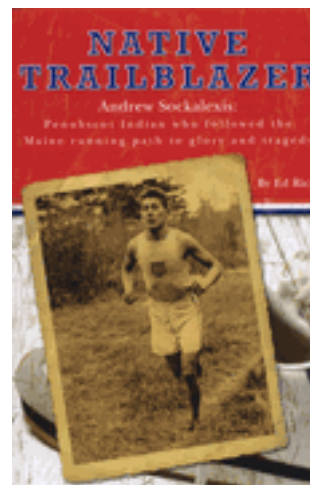
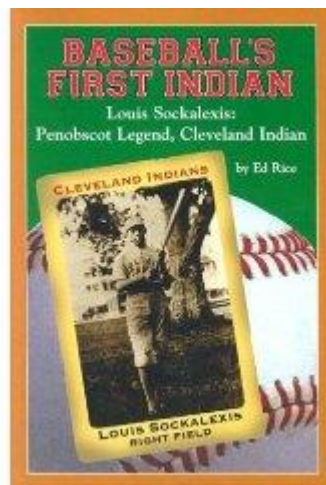
Learn more about the book at Tilbury House Press:

www.tilburyhouse.com/Maine%20Frames/me_new%20mainers.html

The book's three authors talked about *New Mainers* on 207 last year. See it here:

www.wcsh6.com/life/programming/local/207/story.aspx?storyid=100930&catid=50

Local Author/Educator Ed Rice and the Sockalexis Cousins



Two of Maine's all-time greatest athletes are virtually unknown, even here in our own state. Cousins Louis and Andrew Sockalexis rose to national prominence in the late 1890's and early 1900's. Louis was a baseball player, good enough so that the a major league team changed its name in his honor. Andrew was a distance runner who placed fourth in the marathon at the 1912 Olympic Games.



THE TORCH (CRTP NEWSLETTER) JUNE '09

So why has virtually no one heard of these two great athletes? It's hard not to think that it might be racism, as Louis and Andrew Sockalexis were both Penobscot Indians. But local author/educator Ed Rice is doing everything he can to educate Mainers and Americans about their incredible accomplishments and legacy, and using their stories to illuminate issues of racism against Native Americans.

He has published two books (*Baseball's First Indian* and *Native Trailblazer*) about the Sockalexis cousins, travelled to Cooperstown in an effort to include Sockalexis in the National Baseball Hall of Fame, and petitioned Sports Illustrated to include both cousins in SI's list of Maine's 50 greatest athletes.

Rice has basically taken every opportunity he can get to talk about Louis and Andrew Sockalexis, and that included our spring conference. He is willing to travel around the state to speak on this topic, and we have included his contact information on our Moodle website in the "People" section of our resource guide.

For more information on Rice's recent activities and activism, check out this article from *Indian Country Today*:

www.indiancountrytoday.com/living/sports/43620592.html

You can also check out Rice's webpage about *Baseball's First Indian* and Louis Sockalexis at:

www.sockalexis.info

Two Great Free Workshop Presenters Who Will Travel Anywhere

That's the kind of headline that should make FA's everywhere smile. We have recently reached out to some organizations in an effort to better connect you with potential presenters for your teams and schools. Two of those organizations, Family Planning of Maine and the Maine Civil Liberties Union, were especially enthusiastic about future connections, and worked to specifically create workshops in coordination with the Civil Rights Team Project. These workshops were presented at our spring conference, and yes, they're free and available all across the state!

Family Planning of Maine is best known for their work in sex education, but they do much more. They offer educational presentations on civil rights issues including gender roles and stereotypes, body image, and sexuality in the media. Through an extensive network of local organizations, they have education coordinators all across the state. They are excited to expand on the work they most typically do, and we encourage you to



THE TORCH (CRTP NEWSLETTER) JUNE '09

remember your local Family Planning affiliate organization when looking for appropriate presentations for your team or school.

The Maine Civil Liberties Union has done work with civil rights teams in the past, but now they have specifically created a workshop on the issue of equal access to education. It's a lesson in the 14th Amendment to the Constitution that effectively addresses issues of race and gender. It is highly interactive and even features cake! The MCLU has several experienced classroom educators who travel all around the state. Again, we encourage you to keep the MCLU in mind when looking for appropriate presentations.

Contact information for both organizations is available online in our expanding "People" section of the resource guide.

Prom Season in the South: What Year Is This, Anyway?



Ask high school students what the most important day of their young lives is, and you'll get a smattering of different answers, but one that is sure to pop up repeatedly is prom night. It may be hard for adults to look back and remember this as a truly important event. In retrospect, it may in fact seem trivial, but for adolescents who haven't graduated high school or college, held down their first full-time job, moved in to their first apartment or home, gotten married, or witnessed the birth of their first child... well, prom is everything.

So many hopes and dreams are pinned onto prom night like a carnation corsage on an overpriced sequined gown. Need evidence? Think of the myriad of teen movies where the big climatic scene revolves around the prom. It's about romance, mystery, maturation, rebirth, and celebration.

Now just imagine if on this most important night, the ugliness of racism crashed the party. It doesn't fit our expectations, and yet it's a crucial component for many proms.



THE TORCH (CRTP NEWSLETTER) JUNE '09

It may be hard to believe, but at some southern high schools, they have segregated proms, today, in the year 2009. That's right. Many schools have two proms: one for white students, one for black students.

What? You might be wondering how that's even possible. *Brown v. Board of Education* desegregated our public schools 55 years ago. How can the prom be exempt?

Because the schools stay out of the prom business. Prom committees and the proms themselves exist outside of the schools, mainly so that white parents can maintain racial segregation. Students sometimes voice disapproval, but soon discover that tradition is a powerful opponent.

Clearly, the racist parents deserve blame here... but what about those who are silent and thus complicit in maintaining this ridiculous tradition? The schools seem spineless in adopting their hands-off attitude. The students themselves are victims, but are hardly blameless. The prom belongs to the students, after all. If they are serious about wanting integrated proms, they should empower themselves to enact change. Isn't that what we want out of all of our kids?

This is a recurring story that keeps popping up every spring. The *New York Times Magazine* featured a story on segregated proms in May. The issue should also get some extra attention this year as the film *Prom Night In Mississippi* chronicles Morgan Freeman's offer and efforts to pay for Charleston High School's first integrated prom. The film is set to air on HBO in July.

Read the *New York Times Magazine* article at:

www.nytimes.com/2009/05/24/magazine/24prom-t.html?_r=2

The official website for the film *Prom Night in Mississippi*:

http://campaigns.hellocoolworld.com/index.cfm?campaign_id=3

Recent Film Fest Winners Available Online!

Short films, when done right, are great. Film festivals honor independent filmmakers, who often create short works because of budget limitations but also freedom from the major studios. These film festivals are great places to search for short films that tackle civil rights issues.

A popular short film from the Sundance Film Festival has just become available online. *No Dumb Questions* looks at how a family addresses the issue of a relative switching gender from male to female. Specifically, it focuses on three young girls and how the family prepares them for the fact that their beloved Uncle Bill is about to become their Aunt Barbara.



THE TORCH (CRTP NEWSLETTER) JUNE '09

You can see this 24-minute film in three installments at:

www.logoonline.com/shows/dyn/no_dumb_questions/videos.jhtml

You can also check out the film's official website at:

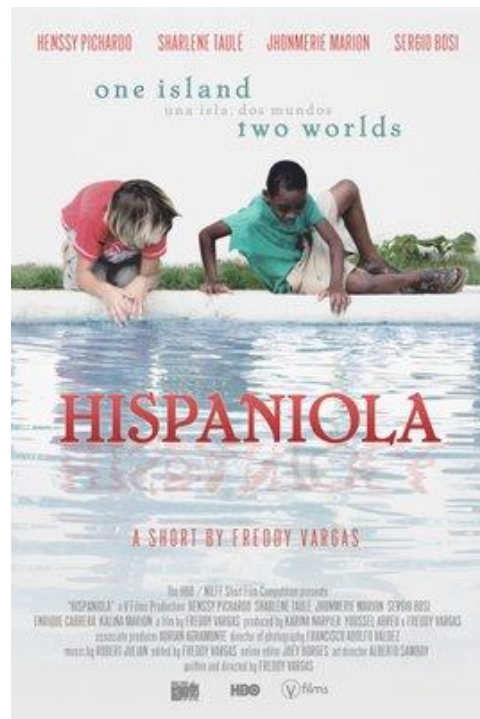
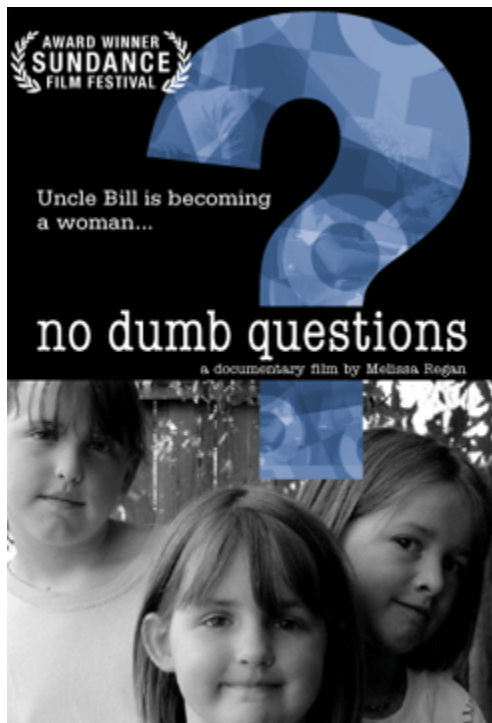
www.nodumbquestions.com

Hispaniola, the recent winner of the New York International Latino Film Festival, is now available on HBO Latino's website. This ten minute film is the one of the best I've found online, and believe me: I've spent a lot of time searching for usable online content to put on our website. This is a real winner.

The film examines issues of race, nationality, and class through the simple friendship of two boys: both Hispanic, but worlds apart in every other way. See this film.

It's available on our Moodle website in the short films section, but also at:

<http://cinedulce.com/cine/hbo/hispaniola.php>





Looking Ahead: What to Expect in 2009-2010

This school year may be winding down, but we're already looking ahead. We have some exciting plans for next year: offerings that we think will really enhance the great work you're already doing. Here is what you can expect next year:

1. A menu detailing our offerings:

If you're interested in having us come to your school and work with students, you can look at the menu to see what we have to offer and then choose the program that best fits your goals. We plan on having a set of options for large group assemblies and small group workshops/class sessions. This means that we'll be aggressively expanding our repertoire this summer and making information available about all our available presentations.

2. Better information on area resources:

We want to connect you with the people and organizations in your communities doing work to reduce prejudice and bias. Expect an impressive list of available contacts in your area and already established relationships between the Civil Rights Team Project and these contact options.

3. Local events catering to area civil rights teams:

We are planning some exciting out-of-school events for next year: opportunities for you and your teams to do more. We are partnering with different organizations and institutions to offer some wonderful educational and enrichment opportunities all around the state. And even better, these events will be student-centered and specifically geared towards civil rights teams.

Perhaps you can see a connecting thread here: it's all about creating connections. We want to be more involved in more schools, know more about what you're doing, get you talking and sharing with each other, and getting you in contact with some of the great resources Maine has to offer. The way to do that is by increasing communication and ultimately creating a statewide network that both facilitates, connects, and transcends the work you do in your schools.

Because in the words of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., "Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere."

In short, we want to create a community. Consider this your first invitation for the 2009-2010 school year. We look forward to the hard work ahead of us...