

11-2012

Torch (November/December 2012)

Brandon Baldwin

Civil Rights Team Project

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.usm.maine.edu/torch>

 Part of the [Civic and Community Engagement Commons](#), [Civil Rights and Discrimination Commons](#), [Education Commons](#), [Gender and Sexuality Commons](#), [Inequality and Stratification Commons](#), [Politics and Social Change Commons](#), [Public Policy Commons](#), and the [Race and Ethnicity Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Baldwin, Brandon and Civil Rights Team Project, "Torch (November/December 2012)" (2012). *Torch: The Civil Rights Team Project Newsletter*. 55.

<https://digitalcommons.usm.maine.edu/torch/55>

This Book is brought to you for free and open access by the Items From the Collection at USM Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Torch: The Civil Rights Team Project Newsletter by an authorized administrator of USM Digital Commons. For more information, please contact jessica.c.hovey@maine.edu.



1899/115/1

As our fall training schedule wraps up, life here at the Civil Rights Team Project takes on some semblance of normalcy. E-mails are read. Phone calls are returned. The November/December edition of newsletter gets completed. (Hey, it's still November!)

Many people would call the fall training season crazy. Of course we'd never do that here at the Civil Rights Team Project, because:

1. The word *crazy* has an element of bias based on mental disabilities.
2. We love the fall trainings.

The 2012 fall trainings featured 1899 registered individuals and 115 schools. That's a lot of people and a lot of schools. In the promotional materials for this year's trainings, I said that I wanted them to be engaging, educational, and inspiring. Seeing so many kids from so many schools engaged in this education leaves me feeling inspired.

So what does the one represent at the top of this page? It represents the one training we had to postpone because of weather. Technically it makes the other numbers inaccurate until our final training session concludes on the afternoon of December 4, but who's interested in such technicalities?

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

Team Spotlight: Responding to bias and civil rights team scarecrows.

Talking to Myself: Imagining a press conference on frequently asked questions.

Pop Culture Winners and Losers: *Elementary*, No Doubt, Dos Equis.

Relevant Resources: Grant funding and stuff inspired by the fall trainings.

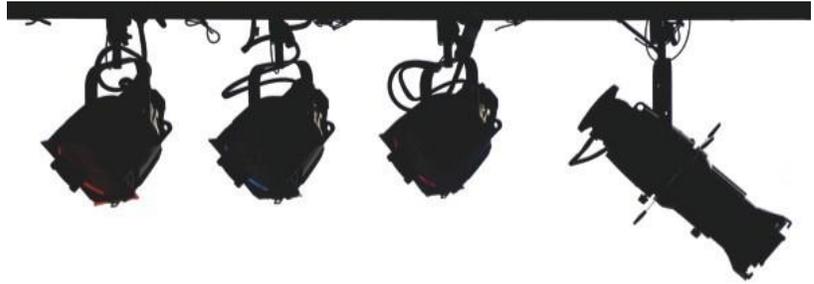
* * * * *

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 elementary, middle level, and high school students by reducing bias-motivated behaviors and harassment in schools.



Team Spotlight:



Responding to Bias

When swastikas appeared in three different Maine communities, school civil rights teams responded. That's exactly what we expect from our teams, as our fifth and final expectation is "Respond when things go wrong." Visible swastikas in a community or school setting create an atmosphere of intimidation and fear, especially for anyone of the Jewish faith.

Here are short description of the three incidents involving swastikas and what civil rights teams did in response:

Incident #1: Bangor

What Happened: Local teenagers spray-painted swastikas on two Bangor synagogues.

Team Response: Bangor High School's civil rights team wrote the following statement and read it over announcements:

The civil rights team would like to send a message of support to members of the Beth Abraham and Beth Israel synagogues and to members of the wider Bangor community who were deeply shocked and saddened by the events of this past Friday. We feel strongly that the actions of the accused teenagers do not reflect the values we stand for here at Bangor High School. The civil rights team would like to invite any and all members of our school community who strongly disagree with the hateful messages of last week to join us on Wednesday afternoons in room A2 to learn what you can do to combat bias and make our school community a safer place.

They also sent sympathy notes and cards offering support to the congregations of the Beth Abraham and Beth Israel synagogues. This gesture was very much appreciated, as the team heard back from both congregations.

Incident #2: Stockton Springs

What Happened: Someone vandalized a local church and spray-painted a swastika on its front door.

Team Response: The Searsport District Middle/High School civil rights team wrote the following announcement and had it read during afternoon announcements:



The Searsport District Middle/High School civil rights team is shocked and saddened to learn that the Stockton Springs Community Church has been vandalized. A large swastika was painted on their double doors. The swastika is a Nazi symbol that was used in World War II and represents the Holocaust and the killing of 6 million Jewish people as well as other targeted groups. The Searsport District Middle and High School civil rights team is here to raise awareness about bias based discrimination and prejudice. We send our best wishes to the Stockton Community Church and hope that this kind of vandalism that could also be a potential civil rights violation is resolved soon.

The statement was also posted in online comments at the *Bangor Daily News*, *Village Soup*, and the *Republican Journal*.

Incident #3: Hall-Dale High School

What Happened: Bias-based graffiti, including swastikas and KKK, appeared on desks and in bathrooms at Hall-Dale High School.

Team Response: The Hall-Dale High School civil rights team worked with the student senate and organized an assembly followed by small group breakout sessions. They used it as an opportunity to spread awareness of the effects of bias-based behavior and language in and around the school. The assembly included a teacher whose family had survived the Holocaust. The students put together a script and a series of activities, culminating with a pledge entitled, "I am a person who will SPEAK UP against bias."

The Takeaway

There are three important things we can all learn from these three incidents and the civil rights team responses:

1. Response needs to be swift. All three teams responded in a matter of days, not weeks or months.
2. The bias component of the behaviors must be rejected.
3. There is no one right way to respond: three civil rights teams had three very different reactions. The most important thing? They responded; they did *something*.

To the students and advisors of the civil rights teams at Bangor High School, Searsport District Middle/High School, and Hall-Dale High School: Your actions are a credit to the Civil Rights Team Project and the ability (and necessity) of good people everywhere to speak out against bias and hatred in our communities.



Bias Beware!

We've got some civil rights team scarecrows in our schools!

The civil rights team at Cascade Brook Elementary School created a scarecrow to help them address bias behaviors based on physical appearance and specifically disabilities.

The team at Fairview Elementary School in Auburn created a scarecrow for a Saturday school/community event, Harvestfest. The scarecrow helped “distribute” information about the civil rights team and the Maine Civil Rights Act.

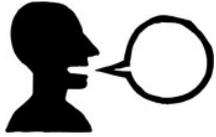


Activity Idea: Present to Staff

Let's keep this short and sweet. Civil rights teams tend to think that their target audience is kids... but adults deserve our attention, too.

You can build up the credibility of the team and increase staff awareness about bias and bias behaviors in your school by having the team present to staff. Specifically, students can alert adults about specific bias behaviors, where and when they happen, and what sorts of adult responses are effective or ineffective.

Those can be powerful messages coming from kids. Feel free to contact me if this is something you and your team are interested in doing, because adults play an important role in addressing bias and bias behaviors in our schools, too.



Talking to Myself: FAQ Edition

I get to travel all around the state in my work with the Civil Rights Team Project. I interact with students, teachers, administrators, parents, practitioners... and almost everywhere I go, I get asked questions.

Some of these questions are so common they've become predictable. The fact that they're asked so frequently must mean that other people have them, too.

So, then, let's set the stage for this Talking to Myself segment of the newsletter. I'm holding a question and answer press conference, and the room is filled with the types of people I meet in my travels around the state.

CRTP Press Conference

Me: OK... any questions?

Student: How did you start doing this?

Me: Seriously?

Student: Yeah.

Me: I used to be a teacher, and I was the civil rights team advisor in my school... but that's not what you meant, is it?

Student: I don't know.

Me: You wanted to know why I'm interested in this stuff, right?

Student: Yeah.

Me: Well... I don't know why. I think that a lot of people instantly assume that there's some specific reason why someone does this kind of work. They assume that bias needs to be something that's personally meaningful to the person. Like I experienced bias as a kid, or I've seen it directed at members of my own family, or something like that. But that's not true for me. For some reason I've always cared about these issues and found this stuff interesting.

Student: OK...



THE TORCH

(CRTP NEWSLETTER) NOV./DEC. '12

Me: But unfortunately, I think that a lot of people take the message more seriously coming from me. They think I'm unbiased because I'm white, I'm straight, I'm male, no disabilities, no persecuted religion... it's all about privilege.

Student: (speechless)

Me: Next question!

CRT Advisor: What's going on with the new bullying law?

Me: First I'd like to point out that the Civil Rights Team Project isn't really an anti-bullying program. It's an anti-bias program—

CRT Advisor: Yeah, yeah, yeah. What about the new law?

Me: School attorneys and Maine School Management have released a sample policy. The Department of Education has until January 1 to unveil their policy.

CRT Advisor: So there will be two sample policies?

Me: I guess so.

CRT Advisor: Which one is better?

Me: Well... do you remember the concerns I voiced about the new law at the advisor trainings?

CRT Advisor: Yes. You said that the new law conflates bullying and bias-based behaviors, thus reducing the odds that schools would effectively address bias.

Me: Wow! You were really paying attention!

CRT Advisor: I'm a civil rights team advisor. You should expect nothing less.

Me: Of course. Anyway... I think that one of the two sample policies addresses the concerns that I voiced at the trainings.

CRT Advisor: Which one?

Me: I'm not going to answer that, but I will tell you that I was able to weasel my way onto the committee in the Department of Education responsible for writing their sample bullying policy.

I turn to the camera and wink.



THE TORCH

(CRTP NEWSLETTER) NOV./DEC. '12

Me: Next question!

Concerned Administrator: I've got a student who just doesn't get it. He keeps targeting other students with harassment. He's on the wrong path, and I'm worried.

Me: I get asked this all the time. First of all, I want to point out that it's really, really good that you care enough to recognize this pattern and ask me this question. That's a good sign. I will also say that you need to make sure you are using the right policy to address these behaviors. If it involves bias, use the school's harassment policy and make sure you refer incidents to your Affirmative Action Officer.

Concerned Administrator: We do. I just worry that it's not making a difference.

Me: Just keep addressing the bias component. That's important. I would also suggest that you look at the Civil Rights Act and show how this bias component can lead to something much, much bigger. You might even be able to bring in your local police department's civil rights officer to have this chat. A badge and a gun can help show how serious this stuff is.

Concerned Administrator: We could do that.

Me: But here's the other thing you need to know: don't focus all of your attention on reforming this kid. That may or may not happen. We tend to focus our energy and attention on the perpetrators. It's equally important that we reach out to targets and address the environment. Targeted students need to know that the school cares about what's happening to them. And *everyone* needs to know that bias behaviors are simply not OK in your school.

Concerned Administrator: Hmmm... OK.

Me: Feel free to contact me for more specific ideas. Any more questions?

Enthusiastic Educator jumps up and holds up an impressive-looking box.

Enthusiastic Educator: Have you heard of this program?

Me: Probably.

Enthusiastic Educator: What do you think of it?

Me: It's terrible.

Enthusiastic Educator: What?



Me: Sorry. That wasn't very professional. What I mean to say is *beware of any program that seems to have all the answers*. I recently co-presented at a conference with Chuck Saufier, who has been doing work on school climate for years. He absolutely hates *programs*. He even says that word with such disdain.

But he's right. Programs pretend to have all the answers. They arrive in snazzy packaging. They promise big results.

Enthusiastic Educator: Yes! That's what this one does!

Me: Of course. And it seems really, really appealing because it looks easy. But anything that's going to actually work requires understanding and hard work. Maybe you can get that with a program... but for it to really work, you need individuals to invest in it.

Enthusiastic Educator: Invest? Well, this one costs \$1000!

Me: Ugh. Changing school culture and addressing issues of bias is hard work. That's why I refuse to pre-package the Civil Rights Team Project as a program. It might be easier for our advisors to have a little workbook with a series of activities that they can do in a set order, but it wouldn't be very effective.

Enthusiastic Educator: Oh...

Me: Hey, but thanks for obviously serving as a plant at my press conference and giving me the opportunity to pontificate on why we don't pre-package a plan of action for our advisors! This press conference is over!

Pop Culture Watch: September-October 2012

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



Elementary's Casting Choices

CBS's *Elementary* features Lucy Liu in the role of Watson. *Elementary* is based on an English show that is based on the Sherlock Holmes stories written by Sir Arthur Conan



Doyle. Both the English show and the original stories have Watson as a white man; now Watson is an Asian-American woman.

Colorblind casting is most often used by studio execs as an explanation/excuse for why they cast white actors to play roles originally intended for people of color. It's nice to see a prominent example of true colorblind casting that actually *increases* the racial diversity we see on television. (And it's gender-neutral!)

Since the show strays so far from the original source material, and since that's part of the show's appeal, *why not* cast Watson as an Asian-American woman? If you're already updating stories and characters for the modern world, why not reflect the diversity of our modern society? It seems, ahem... elementary, my dear Watson.

(And yes, I know that Sherlock Holmes never actually uttered those exact words.)



At Last, We Meet

It was only a matter of time before the Dos Equis "Most Interesting Man in the World" campaign found its way into the pages of *The Torch*. The ads have always featured elements of exaggerated masculinity and a tendency to exoticize other cultures, but now...

We've got The Most Interesting Man in the World talking about dark secrets and encouraging us to discover our dark sides while we watch what I can only describe as exotic- and ethnic-looking women fawn over him. Get it? Dark secrets, dark sides, dark people, and the idea that whatever they're doing is dark.

Sorry, but spouting off your fake wisdom while you take in foreign cultures and look at the camera oh-so-knowingly does not make you interesting... it's just a wink towards sexism and racism.

You can watch the ads here:

www.youtube.com/watch?v=CnHGakVSVXk

and

www.youtube.com/watch?v=2ofkV-HIuaA



Doubts about No Doubt

I don't know if anything has ever disappeared so quickly from the internet as No Doubt's music video for "Looking Hot." The video basically featured the band playing cowboys and Indians. It included all the stereotyped images you might expect from anyone who might actually play cowboys and Indians. *Of course* there were native headdresses and tipis.

The backlash against this video was swift, leading No Doubt to bury the video and release the following statement:

"As a multi-racial band our foundation is built upon both diversity and consideration for other cultures. Our intention with our new video was never to offend, hurt or trivialize Native American people, their culture or their history. Although we consulted with Native American friends and Native American studies experts at the University of California, we realize now that we have offended people."

I have no doubt that their apology was sincere. It's just that...



For too many years, Gwen Stefani, No Doubt's lead singer, had an entourage of four Harajuku girls. They were all Japanese-American women posing as non-English-speaking Japanese girls. Their sole purpose was to follow Gwen around and make her look cool.

So the problem here is that we have a pattern of a rich white woman who seems to enjoy borrowing aspects of other cultures to prove how hip she is. And that's not cool.



Relevant Resources:



Who, or what, is Pine Tree Youth Organizing? Let's read their mission statement:

Pine Tree Youth Organizing (PTYO) is a nonprofit organization that works especially with younger people in Maine and New England struggling against oppression, supporting their efforts to take collective action to shape their own destinies. We seek to empower younger people to take democratic leadership towards fundamental social change.

Of particular interest to you? Pine Cone grants! The PTYO has \$5000 in available grants that they'll be awarding to at least five youth-led projects.

Check it out: <http://ptyo.org/>



You might recognize this photo from the middle level/high school student trainings. Many of you have been asking about Dan Niblock's powerful piece he wrote about the use of the word "retarded." You can get it here:

[Dad demands apology from Ann Coulter for using 'retarded' as an insult](#)



THE TORCH

(CRTP NEWSLETTER) NOV./DEC. '12

You might also want to check out Dan's blog about life with his son, Ozzie. He has become a powerful voice in advocating for individuals with disabilities. (Sometimes the internet can be a wonderful thing.) Check out his blog here:

<http://downwithoz.blogspot.com/>

And if you prefer you online content in video format, try this YouTube video from Ellen Seidman about her son, Max, who has cerebral palsy. It's called "Would You Call My Child a Retard?" and it's from her blog, Love That Max:

www.youtube.com/watch?v=16CvxRjx-34



Finally, here are links for the presentations I used at the student trainings. Feel free to borrow and steal at will. Be warned that you may not recognize some parts, as the trainings evolve over time.

[Middle level/high school trainings Prezi](#)

and

[Elementary school trainings Prezi](#)