

THE TORCH

CIVIL RIGHTS TEAM PROJECT NEWSLETTER

January 2007

Newsletter Editor: Amy Homans



Racism Is A Grown up Disease. Let's Stop Using Kids to Spread It. Ruby Bridges



"We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness."

Thomas Jefferson

Blacks in America have struggled for equal treatment since they first arrived in this country more than three hundred years ago. Their struggle formed the basis for the American Civil Rights Movement, which took huge leaps forward in the 1950's and 60's. To achieve the level of equality that exists today, black and white people were killed, beaten, attacked by police dogs, assaulted with high pressure fire hoses and rubber hoses wrapped with barbed wire, and jailed by the thousands.

In large part because of the massive non-violent boycotts and protests that took place across this country, the Civil Rights Movement was successful in changing laws that forced black people to be treated as second class citizens in a country that proclaimed in the Preamble to its Constitution that "all men were created equal."

The struggle for equality is ongoing, but today, there are more than 50,600 black physicians, 69,400 college level black teachers, 44,800 black lawyers, and 58,000 black chief executive officers of businesses in the United States. The doctors treat black and white patients, the teachers teach black and white students, the lawyers represent black and white clients, and the businessmen and women hire black and white employees and sell products to black and white consumers. This was not the case in this country fifty years ago. It is that way now because of the enormous sacrifices made by civil rights activists who stood up for what they believed in, often at great physical risk to themselves and their loved ones.

What will be your role in the continued efforts in this country to guarantee equal treatment to all people, regardless of their skin color? For now, your role is as a member of your civil rights team where you learn about the history of civil rights and how things can be changed for the better through the efforts of a group of committed people.

To commemorate Black History Month, The black poet who goes by the name "Award" composed a two and a half minute spoken word poem that is accompanied by a slide show depicting a history of black people in America. The poem and slide show, entitled "Their Lives Are Unfinished" is appropriate for middle and high school students and can be heard at

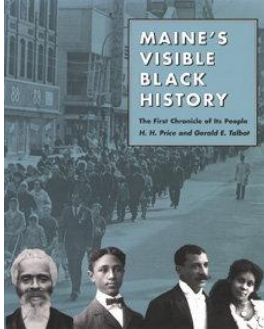
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<http://video.google.com/videoplay?docid=2392760373242013319&q=We+shall+overcome&hl=enp>.



Gerald Talbot: Maine's longtime Civil Rights Leader and newly published author

We read and hear much about the notable figures in the national Civil Rights Movement, but what about the people here in Maine who made a significant contribution?

One of Maine's best known civil rights leaders is **Gerald Talbot**, an eighth generation Mainer who was Maine's first black legislator, a participant in the massive 1963 March for Jobs and Freedom in Washington, D.C. and a volunteer in the effort to register Mississippi blacks on the voting roles in that state. Jerry was the sponsor of a bill to rid derogatory African-American place name usage from the Maine map and was a key figure in the passage of a bill that made it illegal to discriminate against blacks seeking housing. He is also the major donor of the African American Collection of Maine at the University of Southern Maine. A past president of the Portland NAACP chapter, Gerald Talbot has been a

constant presence in Maine's civil rights community for most of his life.

His most recent accomplishment was the publication of a book that he co-wrote with H.H. Price named *Maine's Visible Black History: The First Chronicle Of Its People*. The book documents the life, culture and history of blacks in Maine from Aroostook County to York County over the centuries. This book is the result of seven years of research by the authors, articles by contributing writers, interviews with Maine's black elders, and scores of photographs from family and historical archives. Containing appendices, resources for students, and an index, *Maine's Visible Black History: The First Chronicle Of Its People* is the definitive history of blacks in Maine and one of Gerald Talbot's finest contributions to the State of Maine. To read more about this extraordinary book, go to

<http://www.visibleblackhistory.com/>.

Gerald Talbot was born in Bangor and resides in the Portland area where his daughter Rachel is the current president of the Portland chapter of the NAACP. If he would consent to it, Gerald Talbot would be a fascinating speaker for students of any age.



Eyes on the Prize



Eyes on the Prize is an award winning documentary film series that is considered the premiere historical film account of the American Civil Rights Movement. It was originally aired by PBS and is available in many public libraries and through the inter-library loan system. *Eyes on the Prize* relies

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heavily on primary resources and first hand accounts of the movement from people who were personally involved.

Selecting one of more episodes of *Eyes on the Prize* for showings in your school would be an excellent way to bring to life for your school community the experiences of black Americans during this period of time in our history. Below is a listing of each available episode.

Eyes on the Prize: America's Civil Rights Years 1954-1964

- Episode 1: Awakenings (1954-1956)
- Episode 2: Fighting Back (1957-1962)
- Episode 3: Ain't Scared of Your Jails (1960-1961)
- Episode 4: No Easy Walk (1961-1963)
- Episode 5: Mississippi: Is This America? (1962-1964)
- Episode 6: Bridge To Freedom (1965)

Eyes on the Prize II: America at the Racial Crossroads 1965-1985

- Episode 7 - The Time Has Come (1964-1966)
- Episode 8 - Two Societies (1965-1968)
- Episode 9 - Power! (1966-1968)
- Episode 10 - The Promised Land (1967-1968)
- Episode 11 - Ain't Gonna Shuffle No More (1964-1972)
- Episode 12 - A Nation of Law? (1968-1971)
- Episode 13 - The Keys to the Kingdom (1974-1980)

- Episode 14 - Back to the Movement (1979-mid 1980's)

Each of these episodes is emotionally gripping, visually powerful, and historically accurate. If you are thinking of using film resources during Black History Month, be sure and consider *Eyes on the Prize*.

NASA Quest Chats:

Black History Month For those of you with an interest in science and engineering, chat with African-American scientists and engineers from NASA by clicking on <http://quest.arc.nasa.gov/ltc/special/mlk99/>. You can view the archive of chats from 1998 and 1999, or check the schedule to join in on future events. Background text and photographs are included about each of the experts and information about the space program is also provided.

Civil Rights Movement Black and White Photo Project

An interesting activity to commemorate Black History Month is to view the photographs taken by Charles Moore during significant events in the Civil Rights Movement. Have team members each select a photo that strikes them and write a few sentences about what it is about the photo that makes them connect with it and what action the photo makes them want to take. Post the selected photos and the team's writings on your bulletin board or

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around the school. To view Moore's photos, go to

<http://www.kodak.com/US/en/corp/features/moore/mooreIndex.shtml?CID=go&idhbx=civilrights>.

Hit the Virtual Road with the ***We Shall Overcome*** Online Tour!

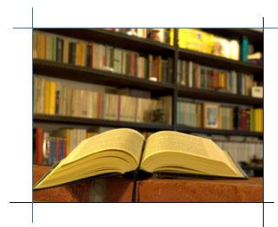
Would you like to see all the places that were important to the Civil Rights Movement and learn about what happened at each site? Then hop aboard the **WE SHALL OVERCOME TOUR**, courtesy of the National Park Service. The National Park Service has created an amazing website of every historic site in America that played a major role in the civil rights movement. Click on <http://www.cr.nps.gov/nr/travel/civilrights/> for the National Register of Historic Places travel itinerary.

In addition to providing a good summary of the history of blacks in America, the Park Service did a tremendous job of summarizing the significance of each site with interesting facts. As you take the tour, from state to state, it is impossible not to get an actual sense of what was happening in our country at that time in history. For example, did you know that, in Birmingham, Alabama, site of a citywide boycott of segregated businesses, when most of the adult protestors had been arrested, the city's black children took to the streets to protest? As a result, more than 1,000 children were jailed by the Birmingham police.

This site also has great information on the Underground Railroad and the places where some runaway slaves escaping to freedom were hidden by families willing to risk harm to themselves in order to provide food and shelter.

The National Park Service and the National Register of Historic Places also has a website dedicated specifically to Black History Month that includes additional historic sites and a section on teaching with historic sites. Click on <http://www.cr.nps.gov/NR/feature/afam/> to find out more about the award winning lesson plans developed for this site.

For a school wide project, post black and white pictures of selected historic sites around your school and include a brief summary of why that site is important to the Civil Rights Movement. Post them in chronological order to give your school community a better sense of the progression of events that took place. You can enhance this project by putting up a big map of the United States with small flags on many of the sites of importance to the Civil Rights Movement.



The Book Corner

Through My Eyes by Ruby Bridges. This book is Ruby Bridge's own account of her year as a six year old who withstood the

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hatred of many adults and successfully integrated her New Orleans elementary school. There have been many books written *about* Ruby Bridges, but this one provides the unique perspective of Ruby's own eyes. A 1999 Parent's Choice Award winner.

There are also other good sources of Ruby's first hand accounts of her year as the only student in an entire elementary school building that was boycotted by all but one teacher and by every student. In 1997, Ruby Bridges was interviewed on PBS's online News Hour about that year and she provided some amazing recollections of her experience. To see the interview, go to http://www.pbs.org/newshour/bb/race_relations/jan-june97/bridges_2-18.html. You can also visit Ruby's own website and contact her personally at www.rubybridges.org.

Warriors Don't Cry by Melba Beals. This book is Melba Beals' account of her year as a member of "The Little Rock 9," a group of black students who integrated Little Rock Central High School in Little Rock, Arkansas. *Warriors Don't Cry*, recipient of the Robert F. Kennedy Book Award, is a first hand window into what desegregation was like for those black high school students with the courage and conviction to be the first to cross the color barrier that existed in our public schools. You can also read Melba Beals' answers to a whole list of questions about her experience that year by going to <http://pbskids.org/wayback/civilrights/buzz/>. For a good online summary of "The Little Rock 9's" year at Central High School, go to http://pbskids.org/wayback/civilrights/features_school.html.

Ms. Beals, who was nominated for a Congressional Medal of Honor for her role as a civil rights pioneer, chronicled her years after Central High School in a book entitled *White is a State of Mind*.



Super Bowl XLII: A Milestone in Black History?

Who would have thought that the 2007 Super Bowl football game would be a milestone event in the history of black Americans, and during Black History Month, no less. This year, for the first time, a football team coached by a black head coach WILL win the Super Bowl? How do we know that? Because for the first time, not only is this the FIRST Super Bowl where one team will be coached by a black coach, it is also the first Super Bowl where BOTH teams are headed by black coaches! This year, either Tony Dungy, coach of the Indianapolis Colts or Lovie Smith, coach of the Chicago Bears will bring home the Vince Lombardi trophy and both Dungy and Smith are black. Stay tuned to the Super Bowl to find out whether Coach Dungy or Coach Smith takes top billing in black history as well as at the Super Bowl.

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Nina Simone: High Priestess of Soul and A Voice of the Civil Rights Movement

A child prodigy who played piano at age 4, Nina Simone took a job playing popular music in a bar in order to pay for her music studies. Born Eunice Kathleen Waymon, she took the name “Nina Simone” because she did not want her mother, who was a minister, to know that she was playing “the devil’s music” in a bar. A trained classical pianist who studied at the renowned Julliard School of Music in New York, Nina’s long career as a popular pianist, singer, and songwriter began with that job. She later added civil rights activist to her credits as she became involved with the struggle for equal rights for black Americans.

Through her music, Nina Simone’s voice put words to the feelings of many black Americans during the Civil Rights Movement. Her song *To Be Young Gifted and Black*, an anthem of the American Civil Rights Movement, is elegantly simple and to the point. Through the wonders of Youtube, you can watch and listen to her live performance of this song at the 1969 (yes, 1969) Central Park Harlem Festival at http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jDNaz2HrI_o. For an added bonus, take a close

look at Nina’s and the band members’ clothing and hairstyles to get a first hand look at how some black Americans expressed themselves and their African roots during this period in time.

Over the course of her career, Nina Simone became known as the “High Priestess of Soul”, but she also sang jazz, blues, gospel, pop, folk, and R&B. Although extremely popular, she was also controversial at times. When she wrote and sang *Four Women*, a song about four black women, the song was banned on Philadelphia and New York radio stations because it was considered “insulting to Black People.” Nina Simone eventually left the United States, in part to escape racism, and settled in the South of France where she died in 2003.

And That’s A Fact: Did you know that the greatest number of refugees in the United States from the Dafur region of Sudan reside in Portland, Maine? Maine also is home to many refugees from Somalia, Ethiopia, the Congo, Ghana, Rwanda, Nigeria and other countries on the African continent.



AFRICAN AMERICAN WORLD FOR KIDS

Looking for some fun and interesting activities for elementary age

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students? PBS Kids has a great website called *African American World for Kids* that is perfect for Black History Month activities. The site has a civil rights quiz, E-Cards with age appropriate, interesting facts, and a Kid Talk section where some young black students who attend an after school program in Harlem talk about who their heroes are, what they want to be when they grow up and the things they like to do in their free time. There is also a "My World" section that is the result of PBS Kids sending cameras to four schools in Africa so the students could take pictures and tell about where themselves and where they live. If you have little racial or no racial diversity in your school, this is a nice opportunity for your students to see that kids are kids, no matter the color of their skin or where they live. Go to <http://pbskids.org/aaworld/> to explore this site.



Read the Stories of Former Slaves in their Own Words

One of the many outstanding resources available to the public is the collections of the **National Library of Congress**, many of which are accessible online. Included in its online offerings is a fascinating collection of narratives collected from more than 2300 former slaves between the years of 1936-38 as part of the Federal Writers Project of the Works Progress Administration (WPA). The Library has placed many of the narratives on its website and they are amazing to read.

To read first hand accounts of the lives of slaves, recorded in their own words, go to <http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/snhtml/snho me.html>. Scroll down to **An Introduction to the WPA Slave Narratives** for a comprehensive summary of the entire project and click on <http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/snhtml/snvoices00.html> for a small sample of the faces and voices of former slaves who participated in the project. To **access the full listing** of former slaves and their stories, go to <http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/snhtml/mesn bibnarrindex.html>.

This project is a perfect example of how the actual words of the storyteller tell a story that no one else can possibly tell. It is impossible to read these stories and not have a greater sense of just how far the civil rights movement in America has come.

The mission of the Library of Congress is to make its resources available and useful to Congress and the American people and to sustain and preserve a universal collection of knowledge and creativity for future generations. This online collection of slave

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narratives is a wonderful example of how it fulfills that mission.

Another resource available through the Library of Congress is **From Slavery to Civil Rights: A Timeline of African American History**. The Timeline provides detailed information on every era in the history of African Americans from Slavery to the Civil Rights Movement and includes specific sections on World Wars I and II. For example, the all black 332nd Fighter Group, known as the Tuskegee Airmen, were the most successful airmen of the second World War, having flown more than 200 escort missions without losing a single aircraft. However, they were forced to live in segregated facilities on the ground and were denied opportunities for promotion that were available to white airmen. This site also contains a link for teachers that provides information on how to use the timeline and how to extend its use in the classroom. To access the Timeline, go to <http://memory.loc.gov/learn/features/civilrights/flash.html>.

The Library of Congress Timeline would also serve as a rich source of information and facts for a **Black History Month Trivia Bee**. For information on how to put together a Trivia Bee for your school, check out the January 2006 issue of *The Torch*.



As many of us know all too well, there has been a widespread resurgence of the hateful

racial slur now referred to in polite conversation as “the N-word.” The “N-word” appears with alarming frequency in popular music and in conversations between young people, both black and white. Some argue that using the word in this way “takes the power” out of it. Others argue that it is derogatory and offensive no matter the context.

“**Abolish the N-word**” is a web-based group dedicated to educating our youth about why it believes that it is so important to eradicate this word from everyday usage. The mission of this group is best expressed in this excerpt from its website:

Inspired while listening to a local radio show about the use of the N word, as well as seeing positive images during Black History month yet hearing negative lyrics in songs we experienced conflict, frustration and an overwhelming sense to “do something”. We are using the billboard effect of t-shirts, the internet and the contract idea to pass on information and strengthen the commitment to this movement.

As a small group of Brooklynites who grew up during the original old school era of hip hop, we remember when rap songs never used the “N” word or profanity for that matter. We remember referring to our friends as homeboy and home girl. And we were still cool. We remember the airing of “Roots” and the sting of hearing the “N” word on national television for the first time. Now we ask ourselves what happened. What happened in our community that the “N” word is tossed around freely in everyday language? When the use of it makes you cool, down, accepted.

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Our community has come full circle as we extend an invitation to others to call us the “N” word as well and we answer with a smile. Our ancestors must be rocking in their graves. The “N” word is not a term of endearment. It cannot be reappropriated. We cannot redefine the “N” word or re-spell it to make it positive. Racism is so subtle, we now think that we can embrace the “N” word and take away its power. However, not enough time has passed for this concept to be effective. The word is viewed as a racial slur at large, it will continue to be so until it is put away for a generation, and then maybe it can be embraced at such time in a historical context.

Until the pain of this word no longer lingers in society for any of us, we cannot continue to use the “N” word. Every time we use the “N” word it is a slap in the face of our elders and a blatant disrespect to our ancestors. We have not only lost our minds, but we’ve lost consciousness.

The dependency of this word as a greeting, to complete sentences and start conversations is a total disregard for every movement that gave us the many freedoms we enjoy today. This site is our answer to a call to duty. We now challenge you to make a personal commitment and join us in the movement to abolish the “N” word.

Towards its goal of abolishing the “N-word”, this organization created a contract to be used by people who agreed not to use this word as part of their vocabulary. The contract can be found at its website at <http://www.abolishthenword.com/contract.htm>. It has also developed wallet size

“Educate Cards” that have some historical facts about the “N-word” on one side and the logo for the organization on the other side. The cards are designed to be passed along by teenagers and adults in an effort to educate people about the word without further inflaming an already volatile subject. The cards are for sale at www.abolishthenword.com/educatecards.htm, but if finances are tight, there is no reason why teams cannot create their own cards and pass them out at school. T-shirts with the **Abolish the N-word** message and logo are also available.

If use of “the N-word” is becoming more and more common at your school, regardless of the context, consider taking **Abolish the N-word’s** approach to the issue. Educate students in your school about the history of the word, create your own Educate Cards, and ask students to sign the Abolish the N-word contract or draft one of your own. Advertise the online availability of the **Abolish the N-word** t-shirt at <http://www.abolishthenword.com/buy.htm>.

Without question, the most significant and powerful tool developed by **Abolish the N-Word** is a video it created that is designed to hammer home the hateful nature and cruel history of this word. **CAUTION TO ADVISORS: THIS VIDEO SHOULD BE VIEWED BY MATURE HIGH SCHOOL TEAM MEMBERS ONLY AND AT YOUR DISCRETION. IT IS VERY GRAPHIC AND AS DISTURBING AS IT IS COMPELLING. IT IS ALSO OUR HISTORY. Advisors who place the newsletter on their**

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website should delete this link prior to doing so. To view the video, go to <http://www.abolishtheword.com/>.

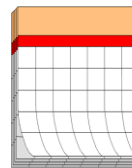
And from the Positive Feedback Corner:

"With much thanks and inspiration to the folks from King Middle School, The Civil Rights Team at the Middle School of the Kennebunks hosted their first ever Season of Diversity Trivia Bee. Prior to holiday break, every student at MSK took an 18 question multiple choice quiz on topics ranging from Yule to Kwanzaa. Our members researched and created the questions based on the procedures shared at the annual kick-off gathering held this year in Saco at Howard Sports. The event was a great success and we are looking forward to hosting the homeroom winners for a really big party!" Ward Willis, FA, Middle School of the Kennebunks,



And don't forget: Check out the January 2006 issue of *The Torch* for more ideas on projects and speakers and for

more information on Black History Month in general. If you do not have a copy of that issue, contact your regional coordinator and one will be emailed to you promptly.



UPCOMING EVENTS AND SIGNIFICANT DATES

January 22-26: No Name Calling Week. For more information, go to www.nonamecallingweek.org/cgi-bin/iowa/home.html.

January 24: Tea and Tour of Maine artist Robert Shetterly's "Americans Who Tell the Truth" exhibition (on display in the Art Gallery at UNE through February 4); 1-3pm. Art Gallery at UNE – Westbrook College Campus, Portland.

January 30: Charles Willie, Ph.D. will speak on the "Montgomery Bus Boycott." UNE's Campus Center – Multipurpose Rooms on the University Campus in Biddeford. For more information about Dr. Willie, go to <http://www.une.edu/studentlife/multi/events.asp#willie>.

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January 31: Speech by Dr. Charles Wille on “Political Thoughts of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.,” followed by The Silverleaf Gospel Singers; Ludcke Auditorium on the Westbrook College Campus of UNE; 1-2 p.m. and from 8-10p.m. with the UNE TABS campus singers in a full length concert. To find out more about The Silverleaf Gospel Singers, go to <http://www.une.edu/studentlife/multi/events.asp#silverleaf>.

February: Black History Month

February 16: Black Indians, An American Story (video) University of Maine, ALANA Center, 7-9 p.m. with discussion to follow. Sponsored by the Wabanaki Center & Women in the Curriculum.

March: Women’s History Month

Editor’s Note: Please email me information about any Women’s History Month Activities taking place in your area and I will include them in the next issue of The Torch.

Monday, May 7, 2007: CRTP Statewide Conference, Augusta Civic Center
Save the date and book your bus now.

that you would like to share with other teams? If we don’t hear about it, we can’t share it with other teams. Send in a blurb to *The Torch* and we will include it in a future issue.

Send your news to amy@maine.rr.com with the subject heading: **Newsletter item.**

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.

G. Steven Rowe --- Attorney General
Thomas A. Harnett—Director, Civil Rights Education & Enforcement Unit
Debi Gray, Civil Rights Project Administrator



“Extra, Extra, Read All About It!” Has your team just completed a successful project, read a great book, had a good fundraiser, listened to an inspiring speaker, seen a compelling video, or done something that was just plain fun