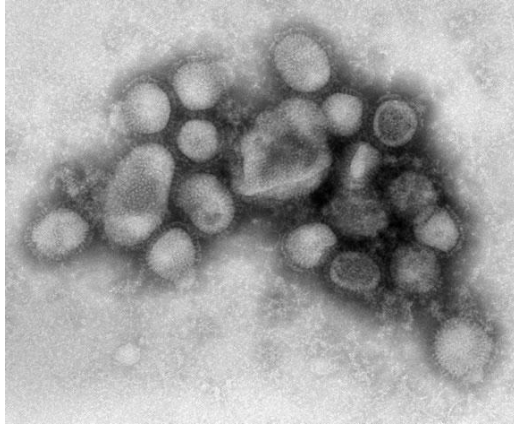




The Nature of Epidemics



Imagine if people took the threat of harassment in schools as seriously as the H1N1 virus. I first had that idea about one month ago during a school visit, where the first order of business during a staff meeting was distributing hand sanitizer to all the classrooms. Since then, precautions against H1N1 have been in every school I visit. I've seen letters sent home detailing the threat and school responses, schedules for immunization, and signs greeting visitors to schools encouraging them to cover their coughs. And it's not just in schools: we have the same posters and warnings here in Augusta. Turn on the tv or the radio, and you're almost guaranteed to hear the latest numbers and stories about the outbreak of H1N1 and seasonal flu.

The viruses themselves are only part of the epidemic: the ubiquitous nature of our response guarantees that the issue remains on our minds.

But consider this: the Center for Disease Control estimates that about 130,000 students stay home from school every single day because of a nationwide epidemic. It's not H1N1 or the flu, though: it's bullying and harassment from peers. *And it's not seasonal.*

Where's the attention for this epidemic? This isn't meant to minimize or trivialize the real threat that H1N1 and the seasonal flu pose; it's a way to think about an issue *we* all know is equally problematic, but receives much less attention.

Unfortunately, American media and people outside of schools don't see bullying and harassment of students as much of a threat, unless and until it escalates to worst case scenario. In the event of violence or suicide, the issues become real, but that increased level of attention and awareness inevitably fades.

Of course there's no vaccine for this epidemic, and maybe that's the real issue. But we can all serve as the figurative shot in the arm, working to educate and advocate for our



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students in school. It's no vaccine, but we can address school climate issues the same way we address H1N1: prevention is everything.

Brandon Baldwin – Newsletter Editor

In your December *Torch*:

Civil Rights Teams in Action: Cony High School holds a successful pancake breakfast in spite of threats of protest.

Activity Ideas: We all know the Ghandi quote about how we must be the change we wish to see in the world. This activity challenges civil rights team members to look inward in addressing issues of school climate.

Pop Culture Winners and Losers: An award-winning book from a Maine author, movie theaters and their reluctance to show two well-received films, a potential positive from a notoriously vilified video game franchise, and what may be the worst public service campaign ever imagined.

FA Issues: The bus. We know that this is a problem zone for issues of harassment, but what can we do about it? A few general suggestions, and an invitation to extend the conversation online.

Relevant Resources: We look at the world of sports and some great resources that highlight the connections between sports and civil rights.

Using Our Website: Information on how to quickly discover updates to the website right when you login.

Upcoming Events: A pretty quiet month for events, but we've got some on the calendar for 2010, and we're eagerly awaiting news on local Martin Luther King celebrations for January!

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



Who's Afraid of a Pancake Breakfast?

Not Cony High School.



Special contribution from the director of the CRTP, Thom Harnett

Like many civil rights teams, the team at Cony High School in Augusta looks for creative ways to raise money to fund its important work. So it was no surprise when the team and its faculty advisor April Fenton-Hulett jumped at the chance to host a Pancake Breakfast at the 99 Restaurant on Sunday, November 15. The team hoped to raise funds to support its Awareness Day and to purchase civil rights related books for the Cony library. Nothing much controversial about that decision and when I learned about it I thought I would try to attend and then write a nice little article about an easy to replicate successful fundraising effort. Wow, was I wrong. Not about the successful fundraising part, but about the *easy* path to getting to the successful result.

Once the Cony team announced its plans, it seemed that not everyone was happy. Who could be unhappy about students volunteering their time to raise money to make their school a safer and better place you ask? Shouldn't such efforts be applauded? Not in the eyes of the Maine Family Policy Council, formerly the Maine Christian Civic League. The MFPC, long critical of the efforts of civil rights teams to create more welcoming school climates, tried to discourage the 99 Restaurant from hosting the fundraiser and tried to pressure the Cony team into canceling the event by promising to have protesters



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attend and turn a pancake breakfast into, at the very least, an awkward situation. The Cony team members and the 99 Restaurant did not back down. In fact, both the team and the restaurant did what we ask all students to do when they witness bullying behavior, they stood up to it and said *no, we will do what is right*.

To its credit, the 99 Restaurant did not waver as it hosted the breakfast on a foggy Sunday morning. They even took the additional step of hiring an off-duty police officer to provide security for civil rights team members, faculty, guests, and any protesters who might show up (incidentally, none did).

And to their credit, the members of the Cony civil rights team went full speed ahead, served breakfast to a much larger than expected turnout of supporters and raised a great deal of money. It was my pleasure to attend the breakfast with my daughter and one of her friends. I saw Cony students and many of their parents and friends beaming with pride as members of the civil rights team happily filled order after order. I was also able to meet Ken Stinchfield, the manager of the Augusta 99 Restaurant, and thank him for his role in a successful day.

So, who is afraid of a pancake breakfast? Certainly not the Cony civil rights teams and its supporters.

The moral of the story: Stand up for what you know is right and in the end others will stand with you.

Editor's Note:

Please contact us with information about what your team is doing. We like to know what's going on, and it gives us good fodder for the newsletter. Invite us to your events, big and small. Take pictures. Share.

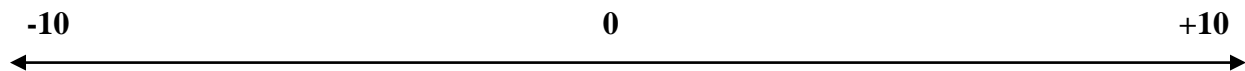
Two projects we're working on right now are accumulating photos and information about civil rights team t-shirts and bulletin boards. Please share them with us, as we'd like to do features on both and then post the pictures on our Moodle site. Send pics to Brandon Baldwin at:

brandon.baldwin@maine.gov

Thanks!



This activity, then, helps identify ways that they as individuals can have a more positive effect on the school's climate. Start the activity by drawing a spectrum on chart paper or the black/white board:



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This should take some time. Try to steer them towards a more civil rights-related understanding of school climate. When they seem ready, have them share what they came up with. A great way to do this is to go around, group by group, and have them share one thing for a category of their choice. You can record what they say under the numbers on the spectrum. Keep going until you have a good number of descriptors for each of the three categories.

Next, explain that the reality is that no one fits the descriptions of the two extremes: we all fall somewhere in between. We all have positive and negative behaviors that influence our final score, and of course that score isn't always consistent. But...

Students need to figure out their overall individual scores, based on how they think they affect the school climate. Encourage them to be reflective, and even critical.

Hand out small papers. Have students record their scores. Have them understand that this is for them: no one else will see these papers.

Next, have them write a negative sign and **one thing they could stop doing** that would have a positive influence on their overall score. (We all engage in some sort of negative behaviors, even the best of us!) It should be specific.

Finally, have them write a positive sign and **one thing they could start doing today** that would have a positive influence on their overall score and the school climate. Again, this should be targeted and specific.

You have two options for what the team can do with these papers. They can fold them up and put them in their pockets, or you can collect them. If you collect them, have them fold the papers and put names on the outside. Again, reinforce the idea that you won't be reading them. This activity is to get them thinking about what they can do individually to influence school climate positively.

A few weeks or months after this activity, give them back their papers. They can then look to see if they have made any changes, and what effect it has had.

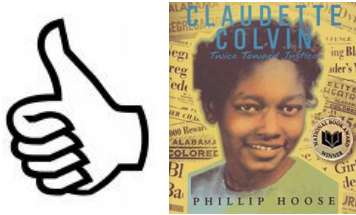
Regardless of what you do with this activity, the emphasis should be that individuals on civil rights teams are not perfect: they can have a negative effect on school climate, just like anyone else. There is value in self-analysis and reflection, and we can always act to improve ourselves.

(This same activity can be done for the team and its *collective* influence on school climate, too.)



Pop Culture Watch: November 2009

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



Claudette Colvin: Twice Toward Justice

Congratulations to Portland-based author Phillip Hoose, whose book *Claudette Colvin: Twice Toward Justice* just won the National Book Award for Young People's Literature. His book highlights a forgotten hero of the Civil Rights Movement. The 15-year-old Claudette Colvin refused to give up her seat on a Montgomery, AL bus, nine months before Rosa Parks gained nationwide attention for doing the same.

Get more information on this well-deserved award-winning book at:

www.philliphoose.com/books.html

See Phillip Hoose and Claudette Colvin accept the National Book Award at:

www.nationalbook.org/nba2009.html#ph



Maine's Movie Theaters Won't Show "Black Films"?

Anyone who attended our student trainings this fall knows that Hollywood and audiences alike routinely ignore interesting stories about people of color. We neglected to mention the impact movie theaters have.

Right now, there are two critically-acclaimed films about African-Americans that we just can't see in Maine. *Good Hair*, a Chris Rock documentary about black hair, and *Precious*, an independent film generating buzz and garnering heaps of praise, aren't



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showing in Maine. It's hard not to think that Maine theaters see these as "black films" and, reasoning that Maine is a white state, opt not to show them.

Granted, economics probably dictate that neither film could show at the mainstream multiplex... but what about the independent theaters? It's not only frustrating not to have the opportunity to see these films, but a bit insulting, too. I'd like to think that there's an audience for both films here in Maine. Oh well... two more movies to throw in the queue at Netflix.

Update: *Precious* is scheduled to show at the Nickelodean Theater in Portland!

And another update: *Good Hair* is scheduled to show at Railroad Square Cinema in Waterville starting December 4th!

Let's get out and support these independent films and the theaters willing to show them.

Visit the film websites at:

www.goodhairmovie.net/site

www.weareallprecious.com



Grand Theft Auto and Gay Rights?

If you know anything about the popular *Grand Theft Auto* video game series, then you'll be shocked to see anything other than a thumb's down sign next to its name here. This video game series has taken a lot of heat for encouraging violence and misogyny.

And now they have a new add-on episode to *GTA IV* called "The Ballad of Gay Tony". How can this be anything other than bad?

Well, it appears that Rockstar Games, makers of the *GTA* series, met with different gay rights groups during the development process. And it also appears that they were pretty careful with this release. The game released on October 31st, and there has been no news of controversy, something that has followed almost all the other *GTA* game releases.



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The title feels a little problematic, identifying Tony by his sexual orientation. And while it's hard to say that "progress" is being made when gay men can be portrayed as murderous thugs, just like everyone else in the *GTA* world, well... including and incorporating gay characters in a popular video game *could* be a positive.



"Hit the Bitch" Online Campaign against Domestic Violence

We've seen some terrible elements of pop culture since we started the Pop Culture Watch in *The Torch*, but this one sinks to a new low. This is a Danish campaign by Children Exposed to Violence at Home designed to raise awareness of domestic violence. What could possibly be wrong with that?

Try everything. The website includes an online game called "Hit the Bitch". There's a picture of a woman, and an apparently male hand. The online user uses a mouse to control the hand, which actually strikes the woman. Domestic violence made into an online game simulation.

And it actually gets worse. The user starts the game with a rating, shown in the corners of the screen, of 100% PUSSY and 0% GANGSTA. With each strike, the rating changes, so that apparently the point of this game simulation is to strike the woman enough times so that the percentage shifts to 0% PUSSY and 100% GANGSTA.

When the user reaches this point, having hit this woman and bloodied and bruised her in the process, there's a grand surprise at the end. Your rating changes from 100% GANGSTA to 100% IDIOT. Is this really supposed to get users thinking seriously about domestic violence? Playing an online game that encourages you to participate in a simulation, and then getting called... an idiot? Not much of a comeuppance, that.

We use this as an example to show that no matter what your cause, execution is important. Poor execution can interfere with and even undermine your ultimate goals. The 100% IDIOT rating best applies to this campaign.



FA Issues: What Happens on the Bus



Whenever we work with students or teachers and ask them to identify “hot spots” for harassment in their schools, the conversation inevitably gets to the school bus. This is no great surprise.

Unfortunately, conditions on the bus are ripe for potential harassment. There are students of varied ages riding together with absolutely nothing to do, and usually one adult in a supervisory position. Oh, and that one adult is back-to-the students, and responsible for driving a multi-ton vehicle and making dozens of stops. Is it any wonder that so we receive so many incident reports and complaints that stem from behaviors on the school bus?

In speaking with bus drivers around the state, we have discovered that when bus drivers try to intervene and do the right thing in terms of controlling student behaviors, they often don't feel supported. If bus driver complaints aren't taken seriously, what incentives do they have for reporting incidents?



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We have a serious dichotomy here. We easily identify the bus as an area of potential problems, but we tend to separate the bus ride and bus drivers from what we consider the integral part of the school day. This is unfortunate. As Thom likes to note, the bus ride, for many students, is really the first and last class of the day.

So what can we do about these issues?

1. Get students to understand that the bus is an extension of the school and that the bus ride is part of the school day. The same rules that apply to school during the school day apply. One way to do this is by including the bus in conversations about school climate.
2. Work to create a more inclusive environment for bus drivers. This isn't easy, as bus drivers operate on a very different schedule from other school employees. But including them in important school initiatives and training is wise. So is seeking their input.
3. Show appreciation. Bus drivers have some of the most difficult, thankless jobs in the school district. A little appreciation can go a long way. The team can be active in this regard. (And we recommend checking out the June 2008 edition of *The Torch*, available online, to see how Winterport's Wagner Middle School launched an initiative to address this issue.)
4. Educate! Share information with bus drivers. Invite them to district trainings, or organize specific sessions for bus drivers and other support staff. (We offer such trainings!)

We really have to address the issue of what happens on the bus. It's not an easy thing to do because of institutional barriers, but it's certainly important. If it's a hot spot for potential problems, we can't afford to ignore it.



So... two questions to consider:

- **What has your team, school, and district done to address harassment issues on the bus?**
- **And what are some things civil rights teams could do to address these issues?**

Both of these questions will be posted online at our Moodle site. Our online discussions have been pretty limited so far this year. We'd really like to see these discussions pick up, so that we can utilize the power of collaboration in the work we do.

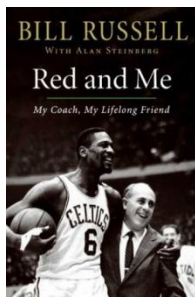


Relevant Resources: The Sporting Life

We here at the Civil Rights Team Project are great lovers of sport. When sports and civil rights connect, then... well, you just can't have too much of a good thing.

Sports are a great way to generate interest in civil rights issues. The two worlds often intersect. Granted, sports are games, even when grown adults play for multimillion dollar salaries, but dismiss them at your own peril. Keep in mind that Major League Baseball desegregated in 1947, seven years before *Brown v. Board of Education* and seventeen years before Congress passed the comprehensive Civil Rights Act.

We won't use this space to wax eloquent on the positive qualities of sports; instead, we'll highlight some great sports and civil rights resources that are out there.



***Red and Me: My Coach, My Lifelong Friend*, by Bill Russell**

Celtics legend Bill Russell just released a memoir of his basketball and life experiences with his coach, Red Auerbach. Theirs was an unlikely friendship, as Auerbach first served as Russell's coach, and the two grew up in very separate worlds in a time when separate remained separate. But Russell and Auerbach worked to understand each other, developed respect, and became friends.

Russell's memoir, written in response to Auerbach's death in 2006, highlights some of the racial tensions evident in America and the sporting world through the 1960's, and how the Boston Celtics were active in overcoming some of the prejudices that plagued the National Basketball Association. The Celtics were the first team to draft a black player, field an all-black starting lineup, and hire a black coach. Red Auerbach's leadership was instrumental in all these decisions.



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***Salute* and the story of Peter Norman**

I saw this wonderful film in July as part of the Maine International Film Festival in Waterville. It tells the story of the infamous image of American sprinters Tommie Smith and John Carlos giving the Black Power salute on the medal stand at the 1968 Olympic Games in Mexico City. Captured in that picture is Australian Peter Norman, who won the silver medal and whose life became forever intertwined with Smith and Carlos.

Salute marvelously gives the background information of how the Civil Rights Movement intersected with the Olympic Games, how the Black Power salute was anything but spontaneous, and how Norman offered his own support. All three men suffered for what they did, in spite of the righteousness of their cause. This film highlights the injustice, but also serves as a taut thriller, as the events leading up to the 200 meter finals build an almost impossible level of suspense, even though we already know what will happen. This is documentary filmmaking at its very best.

This film has not yet been released for American audiences on DVD, but it should be soon. Until then, check out the film's website at:

www.salutethemovie.com



National Baseball Hall of Fame Online Thematic Units

The National Baseball Hall of Fame and Museum has an impressive website. It's not the same as visiting Cooperstown; nothing is, but the online experience is a good one.

Of particular note here are some of the online thematic units offered by the education department. They offer sixteen comprehensive units on almost every imaginable subject taught in schools, including science, geography, and fine arts. Four of their units have



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direct civil rights connections: Women's History, Special Abilities, Cultural Diversity, and Civil Rights.

You can access these units at:

http://education.baseballhalloffame.org/experience/thematic_units/index.html



***Invictus*, Inspirational Stories, and Oscars**

And finally, the story of South Africa's inspired run in the 1995 Rugby World Cup. South Africa had just elected Nelson Mandela as president of their new apartheid-free nation. The newly-integrated rugby team helped unify its people, capturing the world's imagination in their improbable success story.

This seems like the type of feel-good story bound for Oscar glory. And those of you who came to our fall trainings and heard me shred Hollywood movies for almost 90 minutes might be surprised to hear that I'm hopeful for this film. Nelson Mandela is the main character, and Morgan Freeman gets top billing. (Incidentally, there's a significant chance that I would pay real money just to hear Morgan Freeman read from the phone book: he is truly one of the great all-time Hollywood voices).

So the film's got an inspirational, uplifting story that celebrates how people of different backgrounds can work together and overcome great odds. It unifies people. It's got a sports tie-in. It's got Morgan Freeman and Matt Damon. But the thing that really makes this movie especially intriguing is its director, Clint Eastwood.

It's almost impossible to believe that the guy who played Dirty Harry doesn't make bad movies, but it's true. You know that any Eastwood film is going to be exceptionally well made: the guy knows his craft.

But whenever Eastwood tackles civil rights issues, controversy seems to follow. He made *Million Dollar Baby*, a wonderful film about a young woman determined to succeed in the male-dominated world of boxing, but disability rights groups protested his treatment of paralysis in the film's final act. He deserves respect and commendation for his willingness to show American and Japanese perspective in *Flags of Our Fathers* and *Letters from Iwo Jima*, but Spike Lee publicly questioned the films' lack of African-



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American soldiers. He deserves credit for showing an underrepresented ethnic Hmong population in last year's *Gran Torino*, but some questioned his racist, bigoted main character serving as the film's hero.

So what can we expect this time around? Our humble prediction: this is the Eastwood film that satisfies everyone. *Invictus* hits theaters on December 11.

(And if you're wondering what *invictus* means, it's Latin for unconquered.)

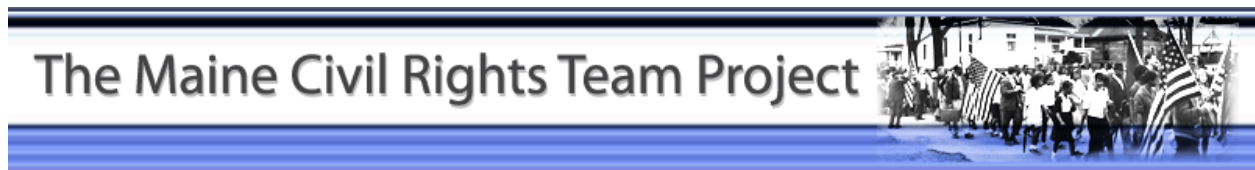
<http://invictusmovie.warnerbros.com>

Update: The controversy has already begun! Many are questioning the authenticity of Freeman's South African accent, and asking the broader question of why African actors don't get more parts. Why are black American actors given African roles? (It's a good question, especially since South Africa has the world's third largest movie business, after America and India.)

Read more about it at:

www.racialicious.com/2009/12/03/why-are-black-americans-playing-roles-meant-for-africans

Using Our Website: www.civilrightsteams.org



Nothing special to report this month, except that I'm adding new stuff. An easy way to quickly find out what's new on the site is by checking the "Recent Activity" box in the lower right corner of the site. It will give information and links for any recent content additions to the site, as well as forum posts. Click on the blue words and you'll be taken there instantly.

One great film clip, which is really a speech, that I highly recommend can be seen at:

<http://civilrightsteams.org/mod/book/view.php?id=145&chapterid=105>

Also, if you have anything you think might be useful for the site, please let us know!



Upcoming Events:



December 13: Project AWARE's Premier of *Influenced*

Biddeford, City Theater, 205 Main Street, 6:00-8:00 pm, free and open to the public

Project AWARE moves forward in its mission to empower young people with the premier of *Influenced*, a student-made film about the influence of adult role modeling on the choices young people make. The night's program includes the film's premier along with special guests, music, and real stories from youth.

For more information go to:

www.influencedmovie.com

January 25-29: No Name-Calling Week

This excellent program from GLSEN highlights the damaging effect that words can have on individuals and the overall school climate. Check out their extensive online resources, including lesson plans, kits, and poster contests at:

www.nonamecallingweek.org

January 28 and 29: *Hairspray*'s Broadway National Tour

Portland, Merrill Auditorium, 8:00 pm, tickets are \$45+

For more information, visit <http://portlandovations.org/shows/2009-10/hairspray/>

February 12: Forum on Malaga Island

Portland, USM, Luther Bonney Hall, Gerald E. Talbot Lecture Hall, 6:00 pm



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A multi-disciplinary panel will discuss Maine's shameful history with Malaga Island, where, in 1912, the island's mixed-race population was forcefully evicted so that developers could build a vacation resort in Phippsburg. Come learn about this important part of Maine's history.

Sponsored by the Portland Branch of the NAACP.

For more information, call 253-5074.

February 27: *Ugly Ducklings* Screening and Panel Discussion

Portland, St. Lawrence Arts Center, 7:00 pm, free

Ugly Ducklings is a film and free kit available about bias-based bullying and harassment of gay and lesbian youth. This event includes a screening of the documentary film, live scenes from the play, and a panel discussion including the playwright Carolyn Gage, director Cathy Plourde, and creative consultants Lyn Mikel Brown and Megan Williams of Hardy Girls Healthy Women.

April 26: Maya Angelou at the Augusta Civic Center

Augusta Civic Center, 7:00 pm

The University of Maine at Augusta's Student Government Association is bringing renowned poet/author and civil rights activist Maya Angelou to Maine!

Tickets are \$25 and available by calling 1-877-862-1234 or visiting the UMA Enrollment Services Center in Robinson Hall.

For more information on this event, call 621-3133.