Rated R (and R stands for REALLY?)

I’ve had my eye on a documentary film called The Bully Project for some time now, eagerly awaiting its official release. The film offers a ground’s eye view of bullying in American schools. It shows the reality of bullying for those who are living it.

The Bully Project is exceptionally well-timed, and generated a lot of positive buzz at film festivals. The Weinstein Group signed on to distribute the film, putting it in very, very good hands and guaranteeing opportunities for a wide audience.

And then the Motion Picture Association of America got involved, slapping the recently renamed Bully with an R-rating. A documentary film about bullying in American schools has been deemed off limits to anyone under the age of 17 without an accompanying adult.

Apparently the reality of what our kids see in schools every single day is so bad that they can’t be allowed to see it on a movie screen.

How did the MPAA justify their decision? Language... and that’s it. Bully earned the R-rating for bad words; not nudity, violence, adult themes, drug use, or general immorality... but language.

This got me thinking. When I present at schools, I use words like nigger, fag, and retard. There is a real chance that if my presentations were made into a film, the MPAA would put an R-rating on it.

That’s ridiculous. For me to effectively address issues of bias, especially related to language, I need to use the words that the kids hear. You can’t talk about these words without using the words themselves. The words are incredibly hurtful and offensive, but prevention requires acknowledgement of the problem itself. If the language is the problem, and it exists in our schools, I have to take dead aim at this issue. I have to talk about it.

The same is true for our civil rights teams. Our ultimate goal is safe schools, and it’s entirely tempting to get their by highlighting positives. Positivity has its place, but the project exists to prevent bias behaviors, and those behaviors won’t go away unless we address the bias. That’s why my presentations are littered with brutally offensive language. It has support and context; I want my audiences to feel that brutality.

The language in Bully has support and context, too. It is documented and real. It is not celebrated or glorified; it is there to show the reality, the brutality, of bullying in our
schools. This is a film that needs to be seen, and the ideal audience, kids, now has to work that much harder to see it.

If the bad words in Bully earned the film an R-rating, meaning that it’s inappropriate for kids... what does this say about what’s going on in our schools? And how would they recommend that we address these issues, if we can't show the issues as they really are?

The MPAA needs to get real.

For more information on Bully, visit the film’s official site. It opens on March 30.

http://thebullyproject.com/

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

**Team Spotlight:** January's highlights include Martin Luther King Day and No Name-Calling Week. February’s highlights include trying to catch my breath.

**Activity Ideas:** Have you team think about what (or who) they read in school. And if you’re already wondering what to do this spring... start thinking of 2012-2013?

**Talking to Myself:** My dream of becoming a film critic infiltrates *The Torch* when I live-blog the Oscars.

**Pop Culture Winners and Losers:** Just your usual mix of movies, basketball, and retirement planning.

**Relevant Resources:** I almost left this section out this time around... but then I stumbled across a few good short films.

* * * * *

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

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

*Bill Schneider—Attorney General
Debi Lettre—Civil Rights Project Administrator
Brandon Baldwin—Schools/Curriculum Coordinator*
Team Spotlight: Working Together

This year I decided to do something different with my school presentations: connect them with themed weeks and civil rights team activities and events. The idea is that my presentations, rather than be the event themselves, will support the civil rights team with their event. January marked the first event weeks on the calendar with the week leading up to the Martin Luther King holiday and GLSEN’s No Name-Calling Week.

How did it go? Really, really well.

MLK Day

I visited nine schools this year in celebration of Martin Luther King Day. The week before the MLK holiday I lent my voice in support of civil rights teams’ efforts to make King and his work relevant to their goal of increasing safety in their schools.

This is by no means a comprehensive list of what I saw that week, but here are some of the things civil rights teams did that week:

- The Marion C. Cook School presented students with a Martin Luther King Week challenge. Students were able to select from a series of challenges, all aimed at improving school climate by increasing safety.
- The civil rights team at Sherwood Heights Elementary School took the airwaves every morning, appearing on the school’s daily news and connecting King’s words and deeds with the school’s core values of courage and fairness. Students were invited to submit descriptions of their acts of courage, with one lucky winner getting a new civil rights team t-shirt.
- The Park Avenue Elementary School civil rights team worked on a reader’s theater piece that appeared in Scholastic magazine called “Pigtails and Protest.” It was the perfect companion piece for my presentation.
- The civil rights team at East Auburn Community School created and led activities for use in classrooms the day of my presentation. Lesson topics included protest signs, a reading of Martin’s Big Words, and an reading/artwork activity featuring If the Crayon Box Could Talk and multi-colored crayons. The team used King quotes to introduce my presentation that day. These quotes are now on the civil rights team’s bulletin board.
- The civil rights team at Dayton Consolidated School created what can only be described as an epic timeline of the life of Martin Luther King and his work in the
Civil Rights Movement. The timeline included student-selected quotes from King.

- Students at Coastal Ridge Elementary School worked hard in class in the weeks leading up to the MLK holiday creating poetry, reflection pieces, and artwork inspired by King and his work. This work was bound together in several volumes and presented to the school and town libraries by the civil rights team.

I enjoyed visiting so many elementary schools this week, and look forward to promoting the Martin Luther King holiday next year (with the goal of including more middle level and high schools).

**No Name-Calling Week**

GLSEN’s No Name-Calling Week was a great success for many civil rights teams this year; I visited fifteen middle level and high schools to lend my support to civil rights teams and their efforts to reduce bias-based name-calling in their schools.

Again, this is by no means a comprehensive list of the great work civil rights teams did in addressing this important issue, but here is some of what I saw:

- The civil rights team at Greenville Consolidated School helped with several school-wide activities, including one where students wore nametags to show what they’d like to be called. The idea was clearly communicated: we all have the right to be called by our own name. Students also completed a “Let’s give a hand out” activity, where they used hand cut-outs to write positive statements about their classmates.

- The students at Orono High School had No Name-Calling table tents waiting for them at their lunch tables. (And for the uninitiated, table tents are pieces of paper folded in half and standing on a table like a tent.) The tents were prepared by the civil rights team and included questions and conversation starters related to the week’s events.

- At Reeds Brook Middle School, the civil rights team took the lead in creating and promoting whole school activities. Team members visited homerooms the morning after my presentation to lead discussion groups. They challenged students to sign their own personal pledges related to name-calling, collected the pledges, and hung them in the hallways of the school. They also created a competition between homerooms to come up with slogans for the No Name-Calling campaign. The winning slogan has been printed on rubber bracelets, which are now available to kids. (And for the record, the winner is “Calling names is not our game.”)

- Spruce Mountain Middle School’s team combined elements of school spirit week events with No Name-Calling Week. Each day had a theme that students could represent through their dress. Examples include “Know what to say or just walk away,” where students were encouraged to wear mismatched shoes, and “Sticks
and stones will break our bones but name-calling breaks our spirit,” where students were encouraged to wear their school colors.

- The team at Gray-New Gloucester Middle School showed the Teaching Tolerance film *A Place at the Table* and created a prompt for an essay contest. The prompt asked students to think about their role in making sure that all students feel safe, secure, and accepted. They received a whopping 115 submissions! The team is still reading through the submissions, and will pick a winner soon.

- As part of my introduction at Waterville Junior High School, the civil rights team took a moment to address some homophobic and hateful graffiti that appeared earlier that week. They kept it short and direct, denouncing the act and affirming that their school should be a safe and welcoming place for all people. It took one minute for them to effectively meet our fifth expectation of civil rights teams: Respond when things go wrong.

- Bonny Eagle Middle School’s civil rights team created pledge posters for homerooms to sign and then post in the halls, led students through the “crumpled paper” activity to show that name-calling can’t be undone, and kept a tally of the name-calling they heard during one school day, which they later reported on the school news.

- The team at Bonny Eagle High School offered a different petition/pledge for students to sign every day of the week, asking students to refrain from name-calling related to five different civil rights categories. This is a smart way to move beyond “name-calling” and focus in on bias-based name-calling while avoiding the pitfalls of students not knowing what bias means. The team also gave students who signed the petition small tokens of recognition: raffles, bookmarks, stickers.

No Name-Calling Week was a great success in 2012, and I will definitely visit more schools in 2013.

(And you’ll hear about STAND UP to Bullying Week in the next newsletter!)
Activity Idea: Diversity in Reading?

Anyone who celebrates the power of reading knows that books can serve as a window to other worlds. This is especially important here in Maine, where many of us live in isolated communities without an obvious amount of diversity. Books can help us understand people and cultures different from ourselves.

It’s worth asking, then: what are our students reading in school? History isn’t the only academic field dominated by dead white males; many English/Language Arts reading lists suffer from a narrow view of what’s considered “required reading” or a “classic.” History has heaped such honors on mostly white male writers. Women and minority voices are often excluded completely or token inclusions to the reading curriculum.

Does your school have an inclusive and diverse reading curriculum? Have your students been exposed to a diverse group of voices? Let’s have them find out!

There are two different ways for students to accomplish this:

1. They can list all the books they have had to read in school, working backwards for as long as they can remember. (This will work for any age level.)

2. They can obtain a copy of the English/Language Arts curriculum or reading list for their grade level. (This is better for high schools and possible middle level schools.)

Using the chart on the next page, students can work individually or in groups to record book titles, author names, and then the gender and race for the authors. (I have provided a code for this information.) They will probably have to research some of this information.

What do you do with the final results? Look it over. Talk about it. This chart won’t give a complete picture of the diversity of the school’s reading choices, but it’s a good starting point. If the list is dominated by white males, the civil rights team may want to take action to encourage increased diversity in the school’s reading selections.

At the very least, this exercise can get students thinking about who and what they read.
Is School Reading a Diverse Experience?

This is an opportunity for you to think about the books assigned in school and whether they represent a diverse set of voices.

For gender:

- F = female, M = male

For race:

- A = Asian, B = black, H/L = Hispanic/Latino, N = Native American, W = white

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Book</th>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Race</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Another Activity Idea: Start the Year Right

Here is an activity idea for the final weeks of this school year; get your civil rights team working on the start of the 2012-2013 school year. Schools will often say that they want to “start the year right.” The civil rights team can think about what they can do to make sure the school starts the year right from a civil rights perspective.

I especially like the idea of the civil rights team, administration, teachers, and an outside voice setting standards for appropriate behaviors. The school’s harassment policy could serve as the cornerstone for this communication.

Just imagine a school-wide assembly at the beginning of the year that included:

- Administration offering a voice of authority
- Teachers pledging to take the issues seriously
- The AG’s Office connecting policies with state laws
- The civil rights team making the information relevant and meaningful

That would be a great way to start the school year, and the civil rights team can take an active role in making it happen. If your team is willing and ready to put in the work, we can get your school to take a coordinated and consistent stance against harassment. I am prepared to package this and make it easy for you and your team, but it will require end-of-the-year commitment.

Right now, I’m interested in knowing if there are middle level and high schools who might be interested in this sort of project. The work would start after your April vacations. It would culminate with a launch-off for the 2012-2013 school year in August or September.

It would require real work, but I can’t think of a better way for your school and civil rights team to start the year. Let me know if you might be interested; no commitments or strings attached.
Me, my computer, and stream of consciousness civil rights commentary about the Oscars? What a wonderful way to spend a Sunday night!

Except that I don’t have a Twitter account, and even if I did, you probably wouldn’t be all that interested in reading my 256 character nuggets of criticism, especially in the waning hours of your February vacation.

So instead, you get this...

Live, from my couch, it’s the Academy Awards show!

Before we officially begin tonight’s program, I’d like to offer up my predictions for who will win the major awards:

- Best Supporting Actor: Christopher Plummer, Beginners
- Best Supporting Actress: Octavia Spencer, The Help
- Best Actor: George Clooney, The Descendents
- Best Actress: Viola Davis, The Help
- Best Director: Michael Hazanavicius, The Artist
- Best Picture: The Artist

(We’ll revisit these picks later.)

The Academy has dusted off Billy Crystal and brought him out for another round of hosting duties. I semi-boldly predict he jokes about the following topics:

- plastic surgery
- Republican primaries
- Kardashians (especially Kim’s marriage)
- how nobody understood The Tree of Life
- the physical attractiveness of Brad Pitt and/or George Clooney
- pie baked with human feces (this makes sense if you’ve seen The Help)

I’m pretty sure I’m going to sweep those predictions.

OK... it’s 8:30; time for live-blogging! (Previous segments of this feature may have been pre-recorded due to time constraints.)
8:30: Opening with Morgan Freeman! There’s some welcome racial diversity.

This seems like the perfect time to mention that the *LA Times* just published a demographic study of Academy members, who vote for the Oscars.

Are you ready for this? Oscar voters are 77% male, 94% white, with a median age of 62 (and only 2% of voters under the age of 40). So... the voters are overwhelmingly old white guys, which helps explain the common criticism of conservatism of the Oscars.

See the fascinating *LA Times* piece at:


8:33: I got my pie prediction right! And it's in the opening montage, no less... too easy.

8:39: A fat joke about Johan Hill and cupcakes? Really? C’mon, Billy...

8:39: Crystal is singing about *The Tree of Life*: “What’s it all about?” Two down!

8:45: The first two awards of the night, for cinematography and art direction, go to *Hugo*. I adored this movie, but I have no civil rights commentary to offer here. I will say that it’s really nice to see a children’s movie that respects the intelligence of kids.

8:58: The sound is really off. It sounds tinny. (And yes, I’m desperate for something to write about. But the sound really is awful.)

9:01: They just had a lovely montage of big name actors talking about some of their earliest memories at the movies. All but one of them was white: Morgan Freeman. Just sayin’.

9:05: Best Foreign Language Film. I haven’t had the chance to see any of these yet, but everything I’ve seen says that *The Separation* (from Iran) is a wonderful film. Roger Ebert said it was the best film of the year, period. No film from a predominantly Muslim nation has ever won this category... this could be a big deal.

9:08: *A Separation* wins! And the victory speech was a call for tolerance and understanding among different peoples in the world. Wonderful!

9:09: Billy Crystal just made a joke about Super Tuesday! That’s three of my picks!

9:10: Time for Best Supporting Actress...

9:12: Octavia Spencer in *The Help*. No surprise there. I’ll have more to say about race and *The Help* when Viola Davis wins her award later.
9:18: Billy Crystal just said that after seeing *The Help* he wanted to hug the first black person he saw, but since he lives in Beverly Hills, that would be 45 minutes away. Not sure how I feel about that joke.

9:22: Crystal just told George Clooney’s date that he was a good kisser. I take half-credit for a joke about Clooney’s physical attractiveness. We’re up to 3 ½ out of 6 for my predictions!

9:28: *Hugo* is cleaning up in the technical awards! Does this mean it might win awards for directing and best picture? (No... but I’d be pretty happy with that.)

9:39: Crystal is doing a bit about age, pointing out some of the older nominees. This seems like a good time for a plastic surgery joke... nope. Missed opportunity!

9:42: Best Documentary category. I just want to point out that two of the nominees were at the Camden Film Festival. That’s pretty cool.

9:45: Chris Rock presenting for Best Animated Film. He made a great joke. He said that the glory of animation is that you can play something you’re not. If you’re a fat woman, you can play a skinny princess. A short wimpy guy can play a muscular hero. A white guy can play an Arabian prince. A black guy can play a donkey or zebra. This joke is funny because it’s true... he just got a good jab in at Hollywood casting decisions.

9:48: A segue to advertisements just highlighted the many different countries that the acting nominees hail from; an interesting effort to highlight diversity. It’s worth noting that none of them were from African or Asian countries, though...

10:01: Christopher Plummer wins Best Supporting Actor for this work in *Beginners*, where he plays a gay man who only comes out after his wife of 44 years dies of cancer.

He deserves this award, but it’s interesting to note that heterosexual actors get a lot of credit for playing gay and lesbian characters. Why is that? Are gay and lesbian people that different from heterosexual people? Do gay and lesbian actors get this credit when they play heterosexual characters?

10:14: I think I just noticed something interesting. The women who win awards get an escort up the stairs and onto the stage. The men do not. Now there could be a practical reason for this with the women’s elaborate gowns and shoes creating a real tripping hazard, but it seems just a little paternalistic and sexist, doesn’t it?

10:31: Another montage segment on the power of movies, featuring more actors. This one included Gabourey Sidibe. That’s now two actors of color out of about... twenty?
10:42: The nominees for Short Film: Documentary include The Barber of Birmingham, which is about the Civil Rights Movement. I haven’t seen it, but want to.

10:43: Saving Face, a film about reconstructive plastic surgery, just won. Perhaps this is why we haven’t had my predicted plastic surgery joke tonight?

10:54: Whoa! I just told Michael Hazanavicius, who was giving his acceptance speech for Best Director, to thank the dog in The Artist. And he did! This bodes well for my prognosticating skills. (Speaking of which, three for three in the major awards so far!)

10:56: Honorary Oscars go to Oprah Winfrey (humanitarianism) and James Earl Jones (lifetime achievement)! This is good.

11:04: They’re doing the “In Memorium” tribute to those who have passed in the last year, including Whitney Houston. She was in only one film that I’m aware of: The Bodyguard. I haven’t seen it. But looking back, it’s pretty amazing that as a first-time actress she played the lead and had an on screen interracial romance with Kevin Costner... in the early 90’s. This seems bold by 2012 standards in Hollywood.

11:12: Our third montage piece. Lots of white males talking. I guess the montage represents the Academy really well.

11:14: The nominees for Best Actor, starting with Demian Bichir, a Mexican actor who played an undocumented immigrant trying to make it America in A Better Life. I had never heard of him or this film until he received this nomination. I then saw it. It’s a good and very sympathetic film about an important civil rights issue. I recommend.

11:18: Jean Dujardin (not George Clooney) wins the award for Best Actor for his work in The Artist. I was wrong. Oh well... I really liked The Artist, and Dujardin is incredibly charming in it.

11:20: I do worry that Dujardin’s win will lead to a lot of bad jokes about the French. Why do so many Americans think it’s OK to hate the French?

11:23: The next award should be for Best Actress. Before we get to that, let me go on a rant about how Hollywood doesn’t create many good roles for women. This is especially true for 2012. Of the five films represented in the Best Actress category, only one of them is up for Best Picture (The Help). Compare that to the Best Actor category, where three of those films are up for Best Picture.

What’s the point? The films that feature great actresses aren’t considered great films by the Academy. No surprise, because films are dominated by men.
Here’s a great feminist critique of the Best Picture nominees and what it says about how Hollywood treats women in film:

www.youtube.com/watch?v=PH8JuizIXw8

11:30: Whoa! Meryl Streep just won the award for Best Actress. Not Viola Davis, who was favored. This means that everything I had planned to write about issues of race in *The Help* is now irrelevant.

Viola Davis was good, but I didn’t see any of the other nominated performers. I highly suggest you read this piece about why she should win and why her win would be problematic from a race perspective:


11:35: And now for Best Picture, which goes to *The Artist*; a fun film, and very deserving.

11:36: They’ve got the dog up on stage with all the people accepting the award!

Well, it’s time for bed. February vacation is over, and we’re all back in school tomorrow morning. For those of you keeping score at home (I know… you aren’t), I went 4/6 with Oscar picks and 3.5/6 for predicted jokes. Better luck next year!

I hope you’ve enjoyed this live blog… I’ll see you at the theater.

Addendum: It seems that I may have missed the most significant civil rights moment of the Oscars telecast. In the opening movie montage, where Billy Crystal inserts himself in the nominated films, he played Sammy Davis, Jr. I noticed the character in the *Midnight in Paris* segment, but didn’t realize that it was Billy Crystal.

So… Billy Crystal used blackface. Unbelievable. Of course he was playing a specific character, but with Hollywood’s history on race issues, and ongoing dialogue on how the Oscars seem uncomfortable with people of color, how could anyone have possibly thought that this was good idea?

And Sammy Davis, Jr., in 2012? Really?
Pop Culture Watch: January and February

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

Hollywood’s Version of Colonialism

While at the movies recently I saw a trailer for the upcoming Best Exotic Marigold Hotel. This looks like a film I won’t be seeing.

How come? It looks like another film about white people travelling in a strange and foreign land who ultimately discover something about themselves, all while exoticizing the setting and natives. This movie isn’t about India or Dev Patel; it’s about the effects India and Dev Patel can have on white tourists.

www.foxsearchlight.com/thebestexoticmarigoldhotel/

Lin-sanity Strikes

For those of you who don’t follow sports... in the world of basketball, second year player Jeremy Lin of the New York Knicks is blowing up. The previously unknown and unheard of point guard set an NBA record for points in his first five starts. He has energized the previously moribund Knicks franchise. He has become an internet/ESPN/Twitter/blog/global news sensation.

And it’s all so unlikely. Lin went to Harvard. He wasn’t drafted by an NBA team. He was cut by two teams this year before getting signed by the Knicks. Every team in the league passed on Jeremy Lin, and now he’s tearing up the league. This might happen in other sports, but it never happens in the NBA.
What makes this Torch-worthy is the fact that Jeremy Lin is Asian-American; his family is from Taiwan. A look at the history of the NBA reveals that Lin’s ethnic and racial identity make his success even more noteworthy; he is shattering stereotypes every time he succeeds.

Jeremy Lin is a big deal. For the first time, Asian American sports fans see someone like themselves making it in the NBA. Knicks fans love him. His jersey is selling off the shelves. He’s all over the internet, and popular media has embraced him, too.

The best part of this story is how America has embraced Jeremy Lin.

Then again...

**Racial Insensitivity Strikes**

It hasn’t been all positive. Some people just can’t get over the fact that Jeremy Lin is Asian. They haven’t seen this on the basketball court before, but that doesn’t excuse some of the racist garbage we’ve seen in reaction to Lin’s success.

It started online, where internet memes take on a life of their own. Lin’s success sparked all kinds of fandom and backlash, much of it relying on tired racial stereotypes: jokes and witticisms involving the color yellow, fortune cookies, kung fu, driving ability, sushi, and on and on and on. Some was well-intentioned and still racially insensitive, and some just flat-out racist and hateful.

Then the media got into the game with three major incidents:

- Floyd Mayweather, a pro boxer, saying that Lin wouldn’t be getting all this attention if he weren’t Asian, and that there are black players doing what he does every single night
- A *horrible* sex joke from Fox Sports/ESPN commentator Jason Whitlock that I can’t even repeat here
- An ESPN.com headline following a Knicks loss: “Chink in the Armor”

It seems that much of America just can’t handle the fact that an Asian kid is making it in the NBA. It is something new, and his Asian-American identity is a big deal. But why
can’t people understand that while it’s OK to notice Jeremy Lin’s race, it’s never OK to use it to diminish him, insult him, or make jokes about him? Why is that so hard?

I have been reading about Jeremy Lin nonstop for many weeks now; his instant rise to fame in the NBA is this year’s biggest civil rights/pop culture story. This link to an article from Grantland’s Jay Caspian Kang, is the definitive piece on this story and one of the best pieces of sportswriting I have ever seen:


Diversity in Retirement Planning

Prudential has some retirement planning advertisements on tv that have me pretty excited. Of course I’m looking forward to my retirement 50 years from now, but what has me excited right now is the diversity in these ads.

The campaign is called “Day One Stories” and shows Americans on their first day of retirement. One of the ads features a man named Mujahid Abdul-Rashid. His name and face, and his inclusion in Prudential’s ad campaign show how our concept of who is an American is constantly expanding.

Prudential’s choice of people for this campaign really reflects the diversity of retiring Americans. It’s truth in advertising.

You can see the spots at: www.dayonestories.com
Relevant Resources: A Few Good Films

Back in the days of the Moodle website, I had a nice little collection of short films with civil rights themes. Many of those films came from the Media That Matters film festivals.

I recently visited the site to see if the 2011 films were available, and they are. Three of the films were on the topic of religion, and I think they’re worth a look.

**Amen**: This one is fictional and fun. It shows two men of different faiths, Christian and Muslim, who might seem different, but discover that perhaps that have much in common.

[www.youtube.com/watch?v=2mHU5rVFuIs](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2mHU5rVFuIs)

**Article of Faith**: A ten minute documentary profile of Sonny Singh, a Sikh-American activist working with youth to combat bias-based harassment in New York City schools. This has direct connections with our work.

[www.youtube.com/watch?v=BWic5hPZfS4](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BWic5hPZfS4)

**My Fellow American**: A short montage piece featuring some ugly Islamophobic audio from talk radio and images of American Muslims living their daily lives. The discord between the audio and video is powerful.

[www.youtube.com/watch?v=bL86QofhK1s](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bL86QofhK1s)

There are other films, and ten other Media That Matters festivals available at:

[www.mediathatmattersfest.org/](http://www.mediathatmattersfest.org/)

(And, for the record, I still have all the films that were featured on the Moodle site. At some point I’d like to package some of them for use as a Civil Rights Team Film Fest.)