



THE TORCH (CRTP NEWSLETTER) JUNE '17

The Civil Rights Team Project

We help schools think and talk about issues related to race and skin color, national origin and ancestry, religion, physical and mental disabilities, gender (including gender identity and expression), and sexual orientation.



Here's what you can read about in the June edition of *The Torch*:

From the Teams: Our civil rights teams are doing a little bit of everything; check out news from three elementary and three high school teams.

From the Advisors: This month we profile Sarah Gay, the civil rights team advisor at South Portland High School.

From the Office: The last two months have been two of the most eventful months in the history of the Civil Rights Team Project. Read all about our rollercoaster ride that was the end of the 2016-2017 school year.

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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 our schools.

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Janet Mills—Attorney General



From the Teams:

At **Cheverus High School** in Portland, the civil rights team is engaging their staff in some difficult conversations. The students on the team identified

adult comments as something that might make students feel unwelcome based on their race, gender (including gender identity and expression), and sexual orientation. They

What Cheverus Students Hear

created a simple and direct presentation, “What Cheverus Students Hear,” sharing some of these adult comments and framing them in the context of the school’s mission and philosophy. They have shared this presentation with small groups of adults, leading discussions that conclude with “What can we do to engender a safer learning environment here at Cheverus?” Adult response has been positive.

Hey, Cheverus civil rights team... one of the hardest things you can possibly do is ask someone in a position of authority to examine their own behavior, but that’s exactly what you are doing. You chose to do so appropriately rather than antagonistically. The conversations might still be uncomfortable or even awkward, but your focus on the “we” and what students and adults can do together to create a safer learning environment will make Cheverus a better place for students of all identities. (And thanks to their advisors, Kalynda Beal and Greg Szkarlat, for sharing.)

At **Falmouth Elementary School**, the civil rights team commandeered the school’s lobby display area and created a colorful and engaging art installation. It features the picture books gifted to elementary teams by the Maine Humanities Council (with some other books as well) and team-generated posters with positive messages of family diversity. Teachers have made it a point to bring their classes to the lobby to appreciate the display, it’s been viewed by numerous visitors to the school, and the principal even included a photo of it through his Twitter account.

Hey, FES civil rights team... that is one of the most engaging displays I have ever seen in a school. I would stop to look at that no matter what it is, but what it is makes it even better! You are helping people think about how diversity in families, communities, and our schools is something worth stopping to appreciate, because it is beautiful and enriches our lives... just like your art installation. (And thanks to their advisors, Susan Albertini and Katrina Loef, for sharing.)



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The Falmouth Elementary School civil rights team's art installation

At **Messalonskee High School** in Oakland, the civil rights team and students in the school's Life Skills program are connecting through unified activities. The activities bring together students with and without disabilities for time to enjoy basketball, kickball, and board games. Advisor Kellie Sanborn reports that "What I love most about this project is that I had almost nothing to do with it." The civil rights team members identified the invisibility of students with disabilities in their school as an issue they wanted to address and reached out to teachers and students in the Life Skills program. Soon enough they were spending time together in unified activities. They hope to expand the offerings to include more students in the future, although this is already happening informally. Students who aren't on the civil rights team or in the Life Skills program joined them for their last session of basketball.

Hey, Messalonskee High School civil rights team... too often we think that "projects" require formal structure, snazzy banners, and press releases. You, however, identified an issue and area of need in your school, and quietly went to work to address it. What you are doing is important for many reasons... but it's also just plain fun. We need that in our work, too. (And thanks to their advisor, Kellie Sanborn, for sharing.)



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At **Phippsburg Elementary School**, the civil rights team is sharing a newscast they've created with their school. The newscast is an original production and features:

- an introduction explaining the mission of the civil rights team;
- student interviews with teachers about how they teach the civil rights movement and how classrooms can effectively include individuals with disabilities;
- book reviews for *I Am Jazz* and *Malala*, and how those books relate to the civil rights team's mission; and
- a breaking news segment featuring civil rights team members calling out gender stereotypes on the playground.

The first year team is using the five minute production to share their mission and focus with their school. They also plan on using it next year to recruit new team members.

Hey Phippsburg Elementary School civil rights team... this project makes perfect sense to me, because what you're doing is newsworthy! You've found clever ways to show that civil rights issues are *everywhere* in school. We tend to think of these "issues" as problems, but it's also about what we learn, what we read, who we are, and how we interact with each other. There's so much for us to talk about, and you are making it easier to start those conversations. (And thanks to their advisor, Anne Schlitt, for sharing.)



At **Skowhegan Area High School**, the civil rights team successfully advocated for changes to make the school more accessible for individuals with disabilities. The team learned that doorways, including the school's main entrance, were difficult to navigate for a student using a wheelchair. The team accessed the "[Opening Doors for Everyone](#)" reference sheet to learn more the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and investigated doorways in their school. They wrote a detail-specific letter to the school board outlining exactly how the school's doorways were not ADA-compliant and requesting an action plan to make the school fully accessible. They met with school administration, building maintenance was called in, and the school entryway is now accessible and ADA-compliant.

Hey, SAHS civil rights team... this is how you make things happen! You became aware of an issue and then thoroughly researched it so that you could better understand it. You then shared your specific concerns with the people in position to put a plan into action. This may seem like a small change to your school, but the message that an accessible school sends to students with disabilities is clear: *you are welcome here*. (And thanks to their advisors, Donna Irish and Lana Tessier, for sharing.)



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At **Walton Elementary School** in Auburn, the civil rights team was horrified to learn of racist behavior from Red Sox fans at Fenway Park. They decided to write and send the following letter:

Dear Fenway Park,

May 4, 2017

We, as members of our school's Civil Rights Team feel dismayed that you may not do anything about the racist remarks that were yelled at Baltimore Orioles center fielder Adam Jones during the game played at Fenway on May 1, 2017. We think you should remove people that yell anything having to do with Civil Rights violations including anything relating to race and skin color. We are 5th and 6th grade children and we are disgusted in the manner in which the fan was acting and your lack of action. Even at our young age, we know better than to do something so hurtful and horrifying. Even as kids, we would know what to do if something like that happened at our school. We feel that you should do something about this. It is not ok for the fans to yell racial slurs. They should be banned from the park for life. People are taught to hate and to be racist. We need to stand up to this. Adults should be more respectful towards each other because we are watching. Even though we are kids, we are more respectful than this. The world needs to be encased in love, not hatred.

Sincerely,

The Walton Elementary School Civil Rights Team

They received a nice response from Fenway Park, thanking them for their interest and outlining the steps Fenway is taking to address the issue.

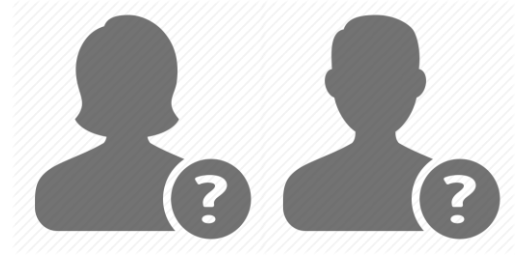
Hey, Walton civil rights team... I loved reading your letter so much that I included it in my opening speech at our statewide conference for middle level and high school civil rights teams. I highlighted it as evidence of how even when something ugly and terrible happens, there is still something positive and beautiful that can come out of it. The fact that you felt empowered to write and send a letter to Fenway Park encourages all of us to keep doing this work. (And thanks to their advisor, Judy Milligan, for sharing.)





From the Advisors:

This month we're featuring Sarah Gay, an English teacher at South Portland High School. Sarah has been advising the civil rights team there for five years.



1. What do you like about being a civil rights team advisor?

My favorite thing about being a CRT advisor is the opportunity to help kids teach others about their culture and identity. I am lucky to live and work in a very diverse community, but mine is still a pretty average Maine suburb. This breadth and depth of cultural variety is still relatively new to our community, so a lot of my team's conversations focus on how we can educate our school about all of the new identities that blend to make us what we are. One of my greatest joys - as a CRT advisor, as an educator, and really, as a human being - is when I see two people from dramatically different backgrounds connect over something they both value, and I am endlessly lucky that the CRT at my school is filled with kids who share that pleasure.

2. What is your favorite moment or memory associated with the CRTP?

Every year, my team plans Diversity Week: five full days jam-packed with film screenings, speakers from the community, panels of experts, and lots of interactive workshops. It's always a blast, but this year was especially rich. We had three completely student-organized panels of only student speakers, and one was focused exclusively on gender and sexual identity at our school. Eight students who represent different and distinct points on the gender and sexuality spectrums spoke openly, honestly, and with no reservations about the challenges they have faced on their life's journey. The nearly 100 students in attendance were captivated, respectful, and asked absolutely spectacular questions. As a teacher, I was immeasurably proud of my school for being such a safe place as to allow this kind of panel to be a success, and as a CRT advisor, I was honored to help these students have a platform for sharing their stories.

After that panel ended, I was approached by a student who is notoriously conservative in many of her views. I had no idea what to expect, but I was not optimistic. To my delight, she asked when the next CRT meeting was, and hoped it wasn't too late in the year to join. Hearing what her classmates had gone through just to feel safe at school, much less comfortable in their own skin, had driven her to rethink how she looks at the LGBTQ+ community, and she was eager to learn how to be an ally. That one moment - face to face with a young woman who our team had frequently discussed as a possible threat to their efforts, but who was now humbly striving to be part of the solution - is one of the biggest reasons why I love the work I do.



3. What do you see as the biggest civil rights issue in your school?

There are certainly some tensions among racial groups, and plenty of stereotypes that are unfairly attached to different ethnicities and religions, but the biggest issue I see in South Portland is around gender roles and gender identity, specifically the concept of masculinity. Many students here express deeply entrenched beliefs that certain behaviors and choices are the only way to “prove” manliness. Unfortunately (but predictably), many of those behaviors are dangerous, harmful, and strong reinforcements of negative stereotypes.

Consider our boy’s baseball team who only considered players to be “strong enough” if they threw up or passed out during conditioning practice, or the young men outside our last school dance teasing one another for wearing “girly” colored ties; at this point in our history, these are basically iconic images of high school life. My CRT

has struggled with how to address these biases, especially when so many are reinforced through the cultures of athletics, politics, and mainstream media. While we have certainly created safe spaces for dialogue (through supported film screenings, community conversations, work with other extracurricular groups and administration, etc.), it’s hard to feel that the work is really gaining traction with so many forces pushing back. This will be a long process with no end in sight.



4. What do you like about your civil rights team this year?

Can the best part ever be anything but the kids? I am truly honored to have worked with my group this year, especially my huge crew of graduating seniors. Many of them are pursuing college opportunities that place them right on the academic front lines of current civil and human rights conflicts. Several have even made the amazingly mature choice to take a gap year in which they will dedicate their energy 100% to one specific effort. There is so much beauty in young people understanding their peers’ choices to devote themselves selflessly to civil rights work beyond the reaches of the CRT, so truly my favorite aspect of my team this year has been witnessing the inspirational influence of teens upon one another.

5. What makes you optimistic about our work in the future?

Honestly, we’re still here! As much as I would love for our hard work to be “done,” I savor the opportunity for my students to develop cultural and social leadership skills through the efforts we put forth every day, and I am grateful that our community still welcomes our work. I believe firmly that our ailing culture will only find relief in the



unified positivity of many well-informed thinkers who inspire and engage in open dialogue, and the fact that I work daily with teens who aspire to these noble goals gives me true hope for not only the future of the CRT, but for the world.

6. What advice or wisdom could you offer to other civil rights team advisors?

If your adult colleagues are not supporting you the way you feel you need, don't give up. I have to remind myself of one of the nuggets of wisdom a former teacher shared with me: you have to create the community you want. Typically, very few other teachers want to jump with me into our seemingly bottomless pool of tough conversations and delicate work, so I try to provide opportunities for my colleagues to learn more on their own, to have low-stakes/no-stakes dialogue with other adults before taking the issues to the kids, and to utilize resources that have already been vetted by me or other civil rights-minded educators. This is still very much a work in process, but as long as I am modeling and practicing the habits of mind and heart that I hope to see reflected in my colleagues, I find tiny footholds nearly every time I really need them.

From the Office:

New Teams!

Even in the last months of the 2016-2017 school year, we are signing up new schools to participate in the Civil Rights Team Project. We've recently added:

- Gardiner Regional Middle School
- Madison Junior High School
- Maine School of Science and Mathematics in Limestone
- Middle School of the Kennebunks
- Phillip W. Sugg Middle School in Lisbon Falls



That's a total of 40 new civil rights teams this year, making this an extraordinary period of growth! We look forward to working with all of these teams next year, and starting teams in more schools, too.

Welcoming the Newest Member of the CRTP Team!

The Civil Rights Team Project increased its capacity by at least 100% on May 8 when Stacie Bourassa joined the office team, bringing our total staff up to two. Stacie is our new Programs Administrative Assistant, and will serve as the primary point of contact between advisors and our office. Stacie's previous work experience includes specific



focus on prevention, strategic planning, youth, and schools, especially through her time at the Franklin County Children's Task Force, Safe Voices (the domestic violence resource center serving Western Maine), and Mt. Blue Regional School District (as a library/media specialist).

We are excited to welcome Stacie to the Civil Rights Team Project, and she is already integrating into the fabric of what we do. Her "orientation" consisted of working with Brandon to plan and organize our biggest annual event, the statewide conference. Her skill set will undoubtedly bring about some positive changes to the Project as soon as next year. Expect to hear more from Stacie in the fall!

The Civil Rights Team Project Statewide Conference



On May 22, more than 550 middle level and high school students (and another 100+ adults) from 54 schools gathered at the Augusta Civic Center for the Civil Rights Team Project Statewide Conference. This annual event felt especially important this year, as the climate we are operating in often feels difficult if not outwardly hostile. The need for our work is great, and we are met with many opportunities for advocacy, but also cause for celebration. Bringing so many of us together for a day of sharing, education, and encouragement was motivational, and not just for the attending students, but all of us who witness the impact the Civil Rights Team Project has in our school communities throughout the state. That motivation translates to empowerment and action, and there's no better way to end the school year than that.

Here are the highlights from the 2017 Civil Rights Team Project Statewide Conference:

- The winners of the 2017 Civil Rights Team Project Visual Arts and Writing Contests sharing their work. (To learn more about them and see their work, check out pages 12-16 of this newsletter!)



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- Power chords and socially conscious lyrics from Random Ideas, our house punk band for the day. They played a morning set before the official program started, and a few songs to conclude our lunch break. Their lyrics specifically addressed issues of gender stereotypes, transgender identity, anti-LGBT hate crimes, mass incarceration, police brutality towards communities of color... and they *rocked*.



- Civil rights team mini-presentations in our CRT Spotlight workshops. Teams from eight schools presented: Carrabec High School, Connors Emerson School, Cony High School, Greely High School, Lewiston Middle School, Maranacook Community Middle School, Narraguagus High School, and Warsaw Middle School, each highlighting something they did this year to engage their school communities in thinking and talking about civil rights issues.

- The Tripp Middle School civil rights team's facilitated workshop for middle level students, "Shadow to Light." The workshop opened with a dramatic performance utilizing light and darkness to represent the impact of bias-based language on individuals. The team then led a discussion with performers remaining in character for questions from the audience.



- The "Immigrant Voices" panel for high school students, featuring immigrant youth from the Civil Rights Team Project. Panelists with diverse backgrounds in Africa, Asia, and the Middle East answered questions about how they arrived in Maine, things people have done to help them feel welcome and accepted in their schools and communities, and what they wish more people would know or understand about immigrants in Maine.
- Maine Inside Out's powerhouse performances and workshops. They shared a short film framing the work they do, an original dramatic performance of *Do You See Me?*, and facilitated dialogue on times when students have felt seen or unseen and things that civil rights teams do so that individuals feel seen and issues are addressed.



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- Attorney General Janet T. Mills joining us for lunch! She spoke eloquently about our shared interest in engaging in civil rights issues, noting that “harm to any one of us is harm to all of us,” and celebrating how “students all across this state have



invented new ways of speaking up and standing up to injustice, hatred, and bias.” She then stuck around and hammed it up with civil rights teams, talking with students and posing for photos.

- Jerome Bennett delivering our keynote/conclusion for the day. Jerome is the Policy and Technical Assistance Coordinator at the Maine Youth Action Network. He spoke powerfully of the difference between *looking* and *seeing*, and how in the work we do, we need to make the extra effort to truly see the issues and the individuals they affect, because “when we see, we don’t forget.”



- Our first-ever attempt at a CRTP group photo... and to make it a true CRTP group photo, we arranged ourselves in the letters: C-R-T-P. This was not easy or entirely successful, but Stacie Bourassa showed her acumen in organizing and troubleshooting, cleverly getting four individual shots we could blend together into a cohesive whole. As is so often the case, it may not be exactly what we set out to do, but we like the results!





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We would like to thank all of our student and outside presenters and participants, as well as our friends from the Maine Humanities Council and the Maine Youth Action Network for their assistance in making this event such a success.

It is impossible to effectively capture the energy, enthusiasm, and engagement for such an event like our statewide conference. There is great meaning in getting together in such a large group. We get to see that the work we do is connected with work that's happening all around the state. We aren't just individual civil rights teams; we are part of the Civil Rights Team Project. We get to share and celebrate who we are and what we do.

One of the great ironies and byproducts of such an event is that while it's retrospective and focused on the 2016-2017 school year, participants inevitably leave feeling excited about the future. That's because we know that the structure and support that goes into everything positive our civil rights teams do during the school year will be there again next year, and that we'll have plenty more to celebrate one year from now. No matter what happens in the rest of the world, that knowledge will always be exciting.



Civil Rights Team Project Contest Winners

In April we announced the winners of our Civil Rights Team Project Visual Arts and Writing Contests. The contests were open to all middle level and high school civil rights team members. We received some wonderful artwork and writing, but ultimately felt that four students did especially good work. Our four contest winners for 2017 are:

- Visual Arts, Middle Level: Alexandra Stavnesli, Connors Emerson School
- Visual Arts, High School: Olivia Baldacci, Bangor High School
- Writing, Middle Level: Delaney Crocker, Maranacook Community Middle School
- Writing, High School: Sophia Williams, Westbrook High School

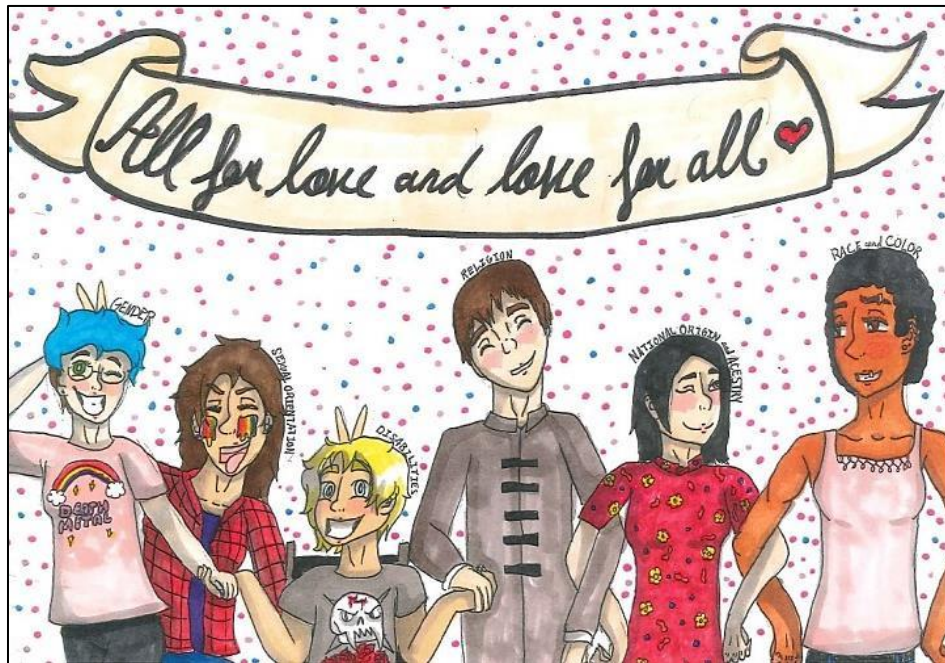
All four contest winners shared their work at the statewide conference. The visual arts contest winners' artwork was framed and on display in the main auditorium. The writing contest winners read their work as part of the welcome to the day's program.



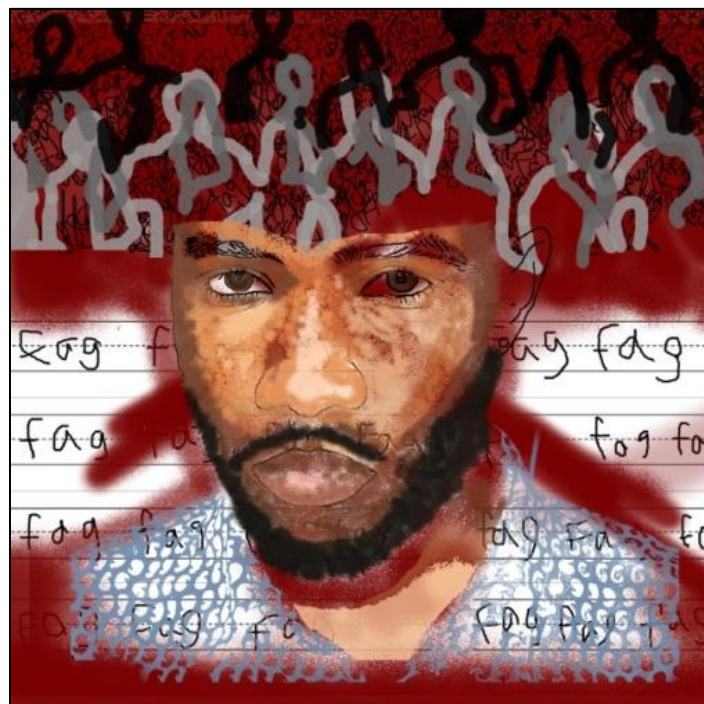
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We are pleased to share the contest winners' work here in *The Torch*. Congratulations to Alexandra, Olivia, Delaney, and Sophia, and everyone who submitted artwork and writing for the 2017 Civil Rights Team Project Visual Arts and Writing Contests.

All for Love, by Alexandra Stavnesli



Perceptions of Hate, by Olivia Baldacci





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I Didn't Choose This, by Delaney Crocker

I didn't choose to feel these things,
They crept upon my soul slowly and consumed all I am.
I was scared,
I thought I was losing myself,
When in fact I was simply on my way to a beautiful place.
Another source of happiness I didn't know was always there,
Waiting for me to look hard enough to find.

I didn't choose this,
It chose me.
It waited for my most vulnerable moment.
I didn't know until I needed it most.
These people once outcast are my people.
Liberated, Great, Becoming Transcendent,
In this time and place we are free to question
Who we are, the people who surround us.

We didn't choose this;
Why would we?
Ignorance of others kills us.
It's so much easier to simply fit in.
But why hide when we can make change?
So many have died in this war against fear and intolerance.
We must stop this.
We must fight to end hatred directed at us,
For justice and equality.

I ask all of you, civil warriors,
Fight for the flag of all colors.
And if you are part of the groups you fight for,
Know that these labels don't have to define you.
You didn't choose this,
It chose you,
Because you are meant to be in this room;
Safe, represented, loved and welcomed.
There is nothing wrong with questioning
What you think you know.

What you can choose:
Whether you blend in or stand out,
How you act, the way you express yourself
Whether you love or hate is up to you,
But choose wisely, and choose kindly.



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An Open Letter to the American Ghetto, by Sophia Williams

Today, I write to the child whose attendance at the third funeral this month has become hollow. Whose heart, at this hour, is filling up with fear, churning inevitably into hate. Whose variations of melanin create a feeling of unconscious inferiority. The child who can no longer walk down the street without holding paranoia's hand. The American boys and girls who have been forgotten, left running behind the bus. The same children caught in the loophole of the 13th amendment. You are the casualties of a broken nation, and I write to you.

Our roots are as one, our skin, a coat in which we share. However your home, the 405, the OKC, falls defeated to the ground, blood pouring from the bullet wound, American boy in blue holds steady aim. My home, the 207, the vacationland of red white and blue, applies the duct tape to my mouth, for the brotherhood of the good ol' boys runs deep. I will not lie to you. I know not of the feeling of losing my father, my brother, mother, or friend, and I will not sit here and tell that I do. In this world, I am seen more as a fetish of flesh than a threat to society. I can walk outside my home without the overbearing cloud of hoodlum society.

Today, I write to the little boy who grows up to be the American black man. The man who must always say yes sir, no sir, please do not shoot, sir. The man who must dodge profiling, dodge mass incarceration; dodge bullets. The man who is my father, my brother, my friend. The man who is their enemy, another body, another quota. The men who are forced to prove themselves as non-criminals from the moment of their birth. The men who have been seen as cattle, burdens of society, prison commodities, but never truly human. The men who have had to fight the stereotype of being rapists and criminals, the mockery of Griffith's *The Birth of a Nation*, 1915. To the boy: be more than a stereotype, more than a minstrel show puppet. To the man: do not let them tell you that you are a monster, put down your fist and raise your voice: for your words are your weapon.

I write to the little girls with skin of cocoa. Embracing and loving their natural hair and curves. I write to the women they grow up to be, strong, leaders. The women that challenge social constructs, change legislature. The women who must prove their beauty in a porcelain domain. The women who excel in academics, yet get no recognition apart from twerking and weaves. The women who are more than America's comical relief, more than Madea's shadow. The daughters of the Nile and the Mississippi. I write to the mothers who lost their husbands and sons. The women that when their brothers are knocked to the ground and silenced, they pick up the speaker and lead a movement: for their words are their weapon.

Yesterday, I could have offered you no more than a timid plea. A scared child in the arms of my grandfather, Jim Crow. I did not believe in the reality of America, the struggle that so many of my brothers and sisters endure. Today, I offer you my voice, my brain, my soul. I offer to you the thoughts of a lightskin girl living in the community

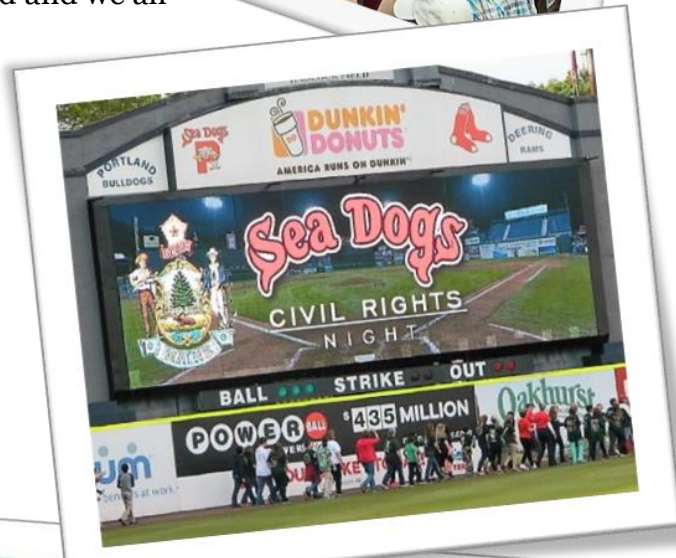
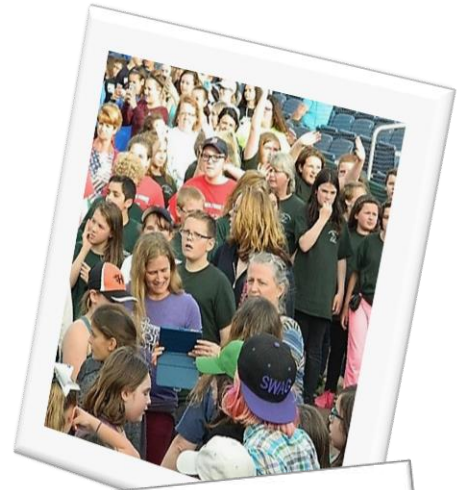


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surrounding Uncle Tom's Cabin. A place without action, without the enthusiasm for change. Tomorrow, I will offer you communication, dialogue. I will offer you the mind of compromise, and the destruction of a system. No longer must you run behind the bus. The fear of your own voice will cease to exist. Give me your hand and I will give you my voice: for my words are my weapon.

CRTP Night with the Portland Sea Dogs

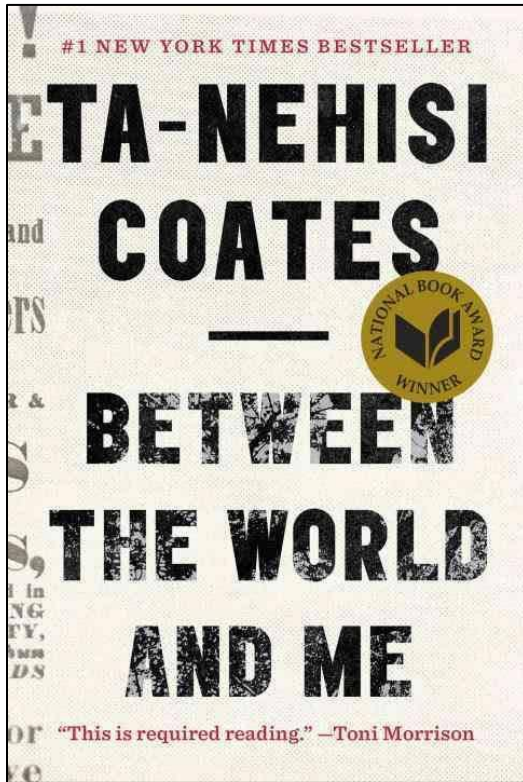
Our sixth annual CRTP Night with the Portland Sea Dogs was extra special this year as we weren't entirely sure it would happen. We had 36 teams and 600 people signed up to attend the event on May 5, but the game was (mercifully) cancelled because of rain. Our friends with the Portland Sea Dogs then worked some magic to reschedule us for June 9, honoring any tickets for the rained out event. Our new date approached and we all eyed the weather reports nervously; rain covered much of the state that afternoon, including Portland, but the clouds cleared in time for our pre-game on field ceremony. We enjoyed surprisingly nice weather, far too many Sea Dogs biscuits, and a 6-5 walk-off Sea Dogs win in the bottom of the ninth inning. I often say that baseball and civil rights are a great combination. We had to wait a little extra for that combination this year, but it was again proven true.





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The Civil Rights Team Project Advisor Book Group



Yet again, our friends at the Maine Humanities Council are creating wonderful and engaging opportunities for the Civil Rights Team Project! Our advisors can participate in the second annual Civil Rights Team Project Advisor Book Group. They sign up to participate, receive a copy of our selected book, commit to reading it during the summer, and then participate in a facilitated book talk next fall during one of our advisor trainings sessions. What could be better than that?

This year's reading selection is National Book Award winner *Between the World and Me*, by Ta-Nehisi Coates. While just two years old, this book already belongs in the canon of American classics. It offers an unsparing look at what it means to be black in a white supremacist society; an important and engaging read for advisors in better understanding our work.

We're excited to share this book, and can't wait to discuss it in September!

The Civil Rights Team Project Targeted in State Budget

May 25 was unnerving. Buried on page 16 of the governor's change package to the proposed state budget was this unwelcome surprise...

"Eliminates two Research Assistant MSEA-B positions and all other related costs."

What exactly did this mean? This was a proposal to eliminate the Civil Rights Team Project.

Information was slow to come out, but our office mobilized a response. Attorney General Janet T. Mills wrote an e-mail to all advisors explaining the proposal and what would happen next: the change package would be reviewed by the legislature's Appropriations Committee the next day. Advisors leaped into action, e-mailing members of the committee and calling the legislative line to voice support for the Civil Rights Team Project. Students took similar action. Other concerned educators, community members, and friends of the Civil Rights Team Project voiced their concerns with the proposal. Word from Augusta is that legislators and their staff were *flooded* with messages of support for the Project.



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One week later, the members of the Appropriations Committee voted 9-3 to reject the proposal to eliminate the Civil Rights Team Project. Things are always subject to change with budget negotiations in Augusta, but this was good news and evidence of bipartisan support for the work we do in the Civil Rights Team Project.

This was a harrowing experience. We have been steadfast in our commitment to remaining non-political in the work we do. That didn't stop politics from entering into our work, though, and there is no guarantee that it won't happen again.

If it does, we know that we will take action. We certainly know how to advocate for what we believe in; it's what we do. The work we do in the Civil Rights Team Project is too important to eliminate: from state budgets, from our schools, and from our lives. It is more than something we do; it is part of who we are. We are all lucky to work with such a passionate and committed group of people.

And this work will continue.

