



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

From the Teams:

In this edition, read about these civil rights team activities and project initiatives...

- ⇒ LGBTQ+ Ally Day at Bath Middle School!
- ⇒ A welcoming banner at Elm Street School!
- ⇒ #SupportAllPeeps/Day of Silence at Mountain Valley High School!
- ⇒ The Statue of Civility at Penobscot Valley High School/Hichborn Middle School!
- ⇒ A Sistine Chapel-inspired mural at Washburn District High School!

From the Office:

From the 2019 CRTP Statewide Conference (including our writing and visual arts contest winners) to Civil Rights Night with the Portland Sea Dogs, there's so much to share from the office!



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

From the Teams:

At **Bath Middle School**, the civil rights team put together a multi-faceted LGBTQ+ Ally Day for their school. The centerpiece was an advisory group activity the team adapted from GLSEN lesson plans. The activity educated students about the issues LGBTQ+ youth face in schools and what it means to be an ally. For lunches, the team set up a table and encouraged individuals to show their support for the day's message by adding their names to a rainbow flag-themed display. They also shared a slideshow they had created from anonymous responses to a previously conducted survey about student experiences as LGBTQ+ youth or allies.



Hey, BMS civil rights team... all the individual pieces and parts of your LGBTQ+ Ally Day are good, but the sequencing is especially good. By having the educational component come first, you got more meaningful participation for the lunchtime show of support. Students knew why you were there, and why they were adding their names to the display. The student voices captured in the slideshow added in an important reminder that these issues are relevant and immediate in your school community. This is allyship done right. (And thanks to their advisor, Ashley Valentine, for sharing.)



At the **Elm Street School in Mechanic Falls**, the civil rights team recently unveiled their “We Welcome All” banner (above). The banner includes sections for each of the six civil rights categories, as well as one for their

From the Teams:

wildcat school mascot in the center. Team members worked in small groups on each of the seven sections, researching topics and carefully selecting imagery and text to best represent their topic. They created draft versions for approval and put considerable time and effort into the final product, even giving up recess time to work on the banner. At an unveiling ceremony with the whole school, the team used the banner to talk about the civil rights categories and their vision for an inclusive and welcoming school community. The banner now hangs in the entryway to greet everyone when they enter the school.

Hey, ESS civil rights team... You've created something wonderful for your entire school community. Your banner truly welcomes everyone. That's important for first-time visitors as they enter your school, but also for people who are there every day. It's a striking visual reminder of your principles that can guide and ground future conversations. Way to fly the flag(s) for civil rights! (And thanks to their advisors, Andrew O'Connell-Shevenell and Amy Robinson, for sharing.)

At **Mountain Valley High School in Rumford**, the civil rights team raised awareness and support for people in the LGBTQ+ community through their recent #SupportAllPeeps/Day of Silence schoolwide initiative. Students were given the option to participate through their chosen silence, or by wearing a rainbow ribbon. In the week leading up to the event, civil rights team members delivered announcements to raise awareness of the silencing of LGBTQ youth, and to explain how this event would be a way to show support for this community. Posters were hung up around the school, and a crt member went into every homeroom to describe the project. So many students and staff requested ribbons that the team ran out! At the end of the day, many came together to break the silence by filling out a message of support on a printed speech bubble with the candy-inspired and seasonably-appropriate hashtag #SupportAllPeeps. Many took photos with their messages of support, and those messages were then displayed on the civil rights team's bulletin board as a visual reminder of the team's work in their school community.

Hey, MVHS civil rights team... Peeps are delightful and hilarious, but this was no (marshmallow) fluff project. The celebratory aspect of this project is so important in showing support for LGBTQ+ students, because we want everyone to fully embrace who they are. Too often, though, our LGBTQ+ students are made to feel shame, which results in silence and invisibility. You broke that silence with visible support, and Peeps. Power to the Peep-le! (And thanks to their advisors, Jeff Bailey and Marie Russell, for sharing.)



From the Teams:

At **Penobscot Valley High School and Hichborn Middle School in Howland**, the civil rights teams completed their Statue of Civility for the school's entryway. Inspired by the story of the Statue of Liberty in [Her Right Foot](#), a book gifted to our civil rights teams by the Maine Humanities Council earlier this year, the team spent months creating their paper mache version of the statue. They brought in volunteer labor and problem-solved along the way. (How do you get folds to show in the gown, or raise text for the tablet, or create a faded copper-colored green, or fix a broken foot? They figured it out!) The team introduced the statue at an all-school assembly and explained the symbolism behind her creation (including the fact that every single student "contributed" to her creation, as the team collected shredded paper from their school



and town offices and used that in the paper mache). They made special note of the inclusive language on her tablet, connecting that with their mission of creating a school community that welcomes everyone for who they are. Since her introduction, the State of Civility has been busy; dancing waltzes with the team's advisor, patiently posing for selfies with students, and traveling to Augusta to take in the CRTP Statewide Conference, where she was featured in our CRT Spotlight workshops. Future plans include encouraging an inclusively welcoming school culture and inspiring civil rights teams in Howland and beyond.

Hey, PVHS/HMS civil rights teams... like Frederic Auguste Bartholdi, you have created and shared something beautiful. Like immigrants coming to America and arriving at Ellis Island in years past, everyone who enters your school will be greeted with a powerful message of welcome. The Statue of Liberty remains a powerful presence many, many years after her inception. May your Statue of Civility have a similar lifespan! (And thanks to their advisor, Ellen Simone, for sharing.)

From the Teams:

At **Washburn District High School**, after months of hard work, the civil rights team finished a mural celebrating diversity in identities. Inspired by Michelangelo's work on the Sistine Chapel, the piece features six arms pointing at the civil rights categories featured on the CRTP focus sign. Each arm includes visual representation of different identities. The mural is in a high-traffic area of the school, and has brought the team much acclaim. The team presented their project at our statewide conference and were featured on [WAGM Channel 8 news](#) and in their local newspaper, [Fiddlehead Focus](#).

Hey, Washburn civil rights team... this may be artistic heresy, but we like your creation more than the original source material. It is, quite simply, stunning, and it thoughtfully includes civil rights content. Careful examination reveals the intentionality that went into your artistic decisions. We hope that like the Sistine Chapel, it inspires generations of people to celebrate humanity... in all its forms. (And thanks to their advisor, Laurie Moulton, for sharing.)



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From the Office:



On May 17, more than 600 middle level and high school students (and another 130+ adults) from 70 schools gathered at the Augusta Civic Center for the CRTP Statewide Conference. In our introduction this year, we called attention to a simple but powerful idea: *We can do something*. We are faced with a myriad of challenges in confronting bias and prejudice in our school communities and the world at large, but the question is always *what we will do about it?* The day's events and the conference program was a real life highlight film celebrating the many somethings we can do, including:

- The winners of the 2019 CRTP Visual Arts and Writing Contests sharing their work on the theme of identity. Our contest winners were consistently mentioned as one of the day's highlights in our evaluations. (To learn more about them and see their work, check out pages 9-14 of this newsletter!)
- Full-length facilitated workshops with Foxcroft Academy (*Civil Rights Teams and School Policy*), Gorham Middle School (*Embrace Race: The Whys and Hows of Talking about Race in Maine Schools*), and Frank Harrison Middle School (*Enlisting and Engaging Staff Support*). Presenting facilitated workshops for their peers required multi-month commitments from these three civil rights teams. They created their own material, including handouts, outlines, slideshows, scripts, and activities. These workshops are significant undertakings, but all three teams delivered. Their workshops were timely, important, and engaging.
- Civil rights team mini-presentations in our CRT Spotlight workshops. Teams from eight schools presented: Bath Middle School, Greely Middle School, Middle School of the Kennebunks, Penobscot Valley High School, Sanford High School, Veazie Community School, Washburn District High School, and Yarmouth High School, each highlighting something they did this year to engage their school communities in thinking and talking about civil rights issues. Teams left with many ideas and inspiration for next year.



Foxcroft Academy



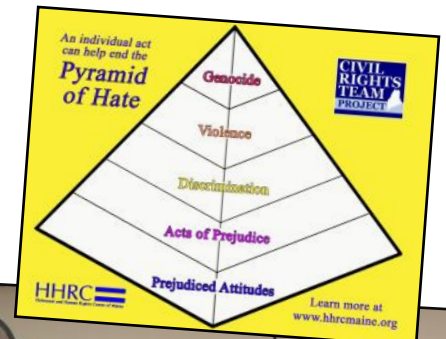
Gorham Middle School



Harrison Middle School

From the Office:

- *Survivor Stories: Lessons of the Holocaust*, an especially moving workshop from the Holocaust and Human Rights Center of Maine, featuring MainePublic’s Robbie Feinberg interviewing Holocaust survivors Edith Pagelson and Charles Rotmil. Students got to hear from the survivors, think about how their stories fit into the framework of the Anti-Defamation League’s [Pyramid of Hate](#), and then met in small groups to discuss what they’d heard and what they can do to help end hate. They left with memories and co-branded magnets from the HHRC and CRTP with an important lesson of the Holocaust: *An individual act can help end the Pyramid of Hate*.

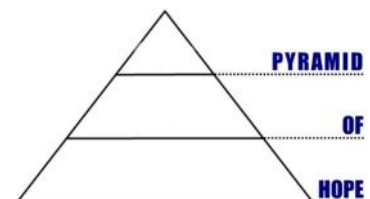


- Attorney General Aaron M. Frey delivering an impassioned and personal speech during the day’s welcome and introduction. He spoke about his role in enforcing the Maine Civil Rights Act and working to create a state where everyone feels safe and welcome for who they are, but also made an appeal to everyone there: *I need your help*. He emphasized the importance of the prevention work we do in our schools, and attended workshops to engage further in our work. The continued support from the new Attorney General and our office is very much appreciated in the Civil Rights Team Project!

Random Ideas 



- A celebratory conclusion with triplet punk rock band Random Ideas. They performed songs about mass incarceration, transgender identity, and other civil rights-related topics before concluding with a rousing call to action, “Do Something.” The repeated chorus of “We’ve got to do something!” was the perfect way to end the day. They rock.
- Students sharing their ideas for how they can help end hate with our Pyramid of Hope activity. The completed pyramid offered a positive counterpoint to the Pyramid of Hate and reinforced the message of (cont.)



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From the Office:

empowerment from the HHRC workshop and our work in general.



- An important question and valuable data from the Maine Humanities Council’s “What Works?” voting activity. Attendees were asked to vote for which resources and communication tools are most useful in getting students to think and talk about civil rights issues. Of the ten options, the overwhelming favorites were **current events/news stories** and **short videos**, with **images** and **comics** receiving a good number of votes as well. We will consider these results as we package and present resources in the future!



- Positive media coverage later that evening from [WABI Channel 5](#) and [Fox 22!](#)

Many thanks to all the students and advisors from our presenting teams, all our outside presenters, and our friends from the Maine Humanities Council for making this event such a success. We’d also like to thank everyone who attended, as getting teams together from all around the state is so important in sustaining this work. Together, we highlight the many important and inspiring ways that *we can do something*.

(And we’re already excited about highlighting our great work *next year* on May 19... save the date!)

From the Office:

ELEMENTARY VISUAL ARTS CONTEST WINNER

“You are You”

Mary Auman

Shapleigh School, Gr. 4



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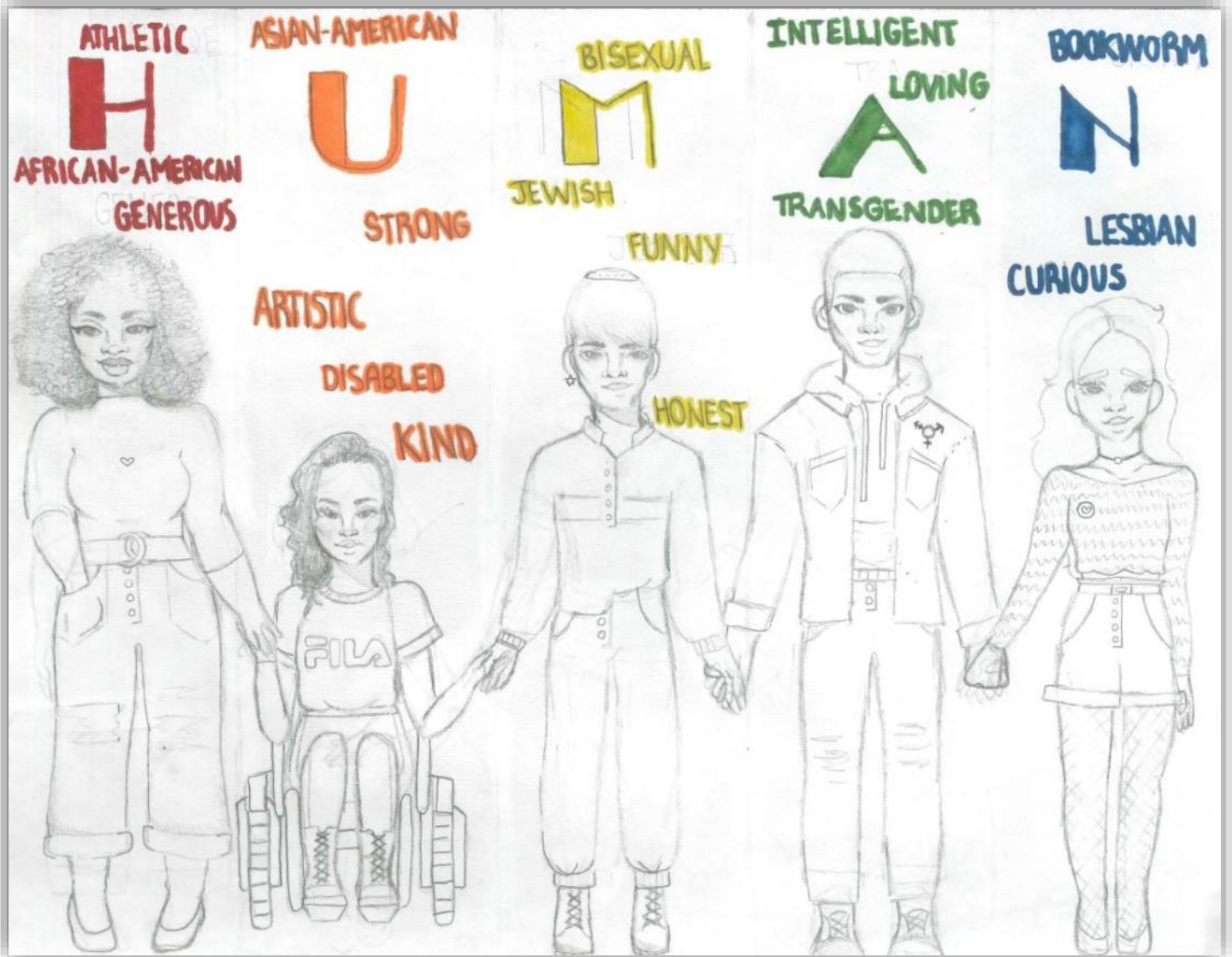
From the Office:

MIDDLE LEVEL VISUAL ARTS CONTEST WINNER

“Human”

Evie King

Frank H. Harrison Middle School, Gr. 8



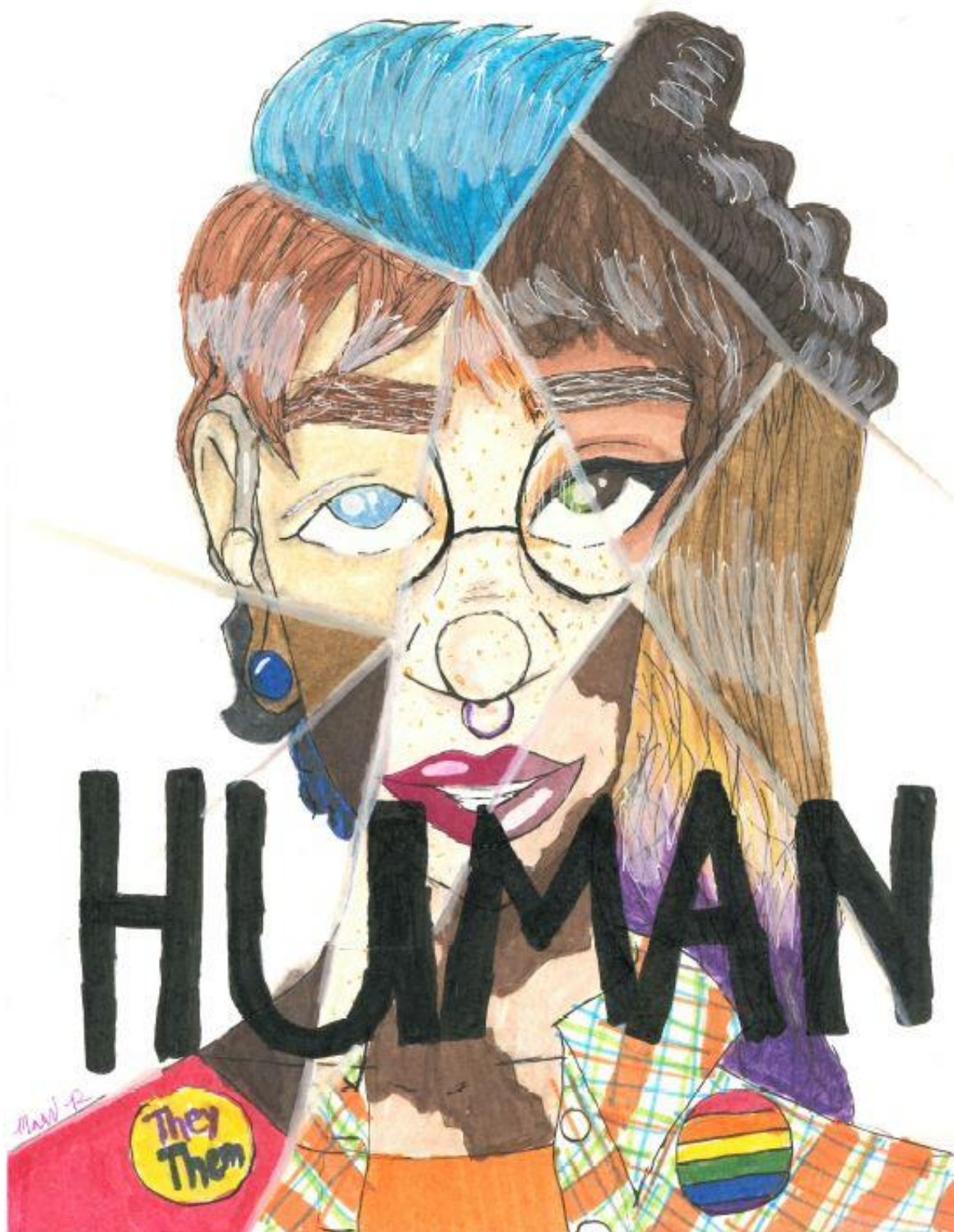
From the Office:

HIGH SCHOOL VISUAL ARTS CONTEST WINNER

“Human”

Mavi Pellegrini

Gardiner Area High School, Gr. 10



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MIDDLE LEVEL WRITING CONTEST WINNER

“I’m a Black Girl, TAKE TWO”

(Inspired by I am a Black Girl by “THEONLYCHASE” on PowerPoetry)

Leila Tati Pambou

Frank H. Harrison Middle School, Gr. 8

I am a black girl too
Black girl
“Emphasis on the word black
It’s not just a race
It’s a lifestyle.”

The other day, somebody in math class
touched my hair NOT like just touched, they grabbed it.
Can you just not do that? I said. They got mad,
and I was like, I always ask to touch people’s hair.
I’m not like just grabbing it.

I am a black girl, too
Black girl

We make it look easy
But baby
it’s not
We work twice as hard
To be perfect
Twice as hard
To cut out the negativity
Twice as hard to be independent,
And twice as hard
To be free.

This is not easy

I am a black girl too
Yes, Black girl

“To be a black girl isn’t just to have darker skin
To be a black girl doesn’t mean I’m harder to approach”
Like me, I’m shy, but we’re not all like that.
We’re not hard to approach.

It doesn’t mean I’m aggressive
Or you have to try harder to teach me something

But
To be a black girl is to be extraordinary
To be special
Black girls are magic
We’re queens
Brown sugar
Cocoa
Honey and
Gold

I am a black girl too
I’ve had to work a little harder to fit in

I am a Black Girl too
Strong and independent

I am a black girl too
Melanin princess

I believed I could so
I did

I am a Black Girl
I am flyy
And I am me.

HIGH SCHOOL WRITING CONTEST WINNER

“An American Education”

Taylor-Jeffrey Doone

Messalonskee High School, Gr. 11

As a young child, I heard adults use slurs and tell racist jokes, getting laughter and encouragement. I heard them and began to copy them, finding amusement when my friends joined in. However, that changed when I got to high school. Freshman year, I joined my school’s civil rights team and attended conferences to learn more about issues facing our nation and how to address them. Eventually, I would take AP US history, a course that helped me to see history as human, with all its beauty and flaws. This course has enlightened me to our whitewashed history, opening my eyes to the fact that education is the key to becoming more empathetic as a nation.

AP US history presented many instances in which the events were glossed over to erase wrong doing. I learned that as a nation we viewed some people as subhuman, with people of color constituting only 3/5 of a person. This foreshadowed a future of hypocrisy for the nation. This lack of humanity towards people of color would prove Jefferson’s opening line of the Declaration of Independence to be ironic; as “these truths” concerning the creation of man as equal with unalienable rights granted by their creator were clearly not “self-evident.”

And though our creator is cited as the one who grants rights, it was not God that was on the field of carnage known as the Civil War. It was people of color looking to secure their freedom, by their will, standing against the institution that kept them bound. Many Black soldiers would die for the cause of freedom, and many would not meet an honorable end. Countless would be slaughtered like cattle, including the Fort Pillow Massacre, where 300 American soldiers were executed simply for being Black.

Those that did survive continued to have the rights that they had bled for taken from them. Discriminatory laws sought to strip the rights of Black Americans, specifically to vote. If Black Americans tried to vote, they would be met with violence, ranging from lynchings to bombings. The issue of Black voters approached boiling point in 1965 when Martin Luther King, Jr. led a group of non-violent demonstrators on a 5-day march from Selma to Montgomery. In retaliation, Alabama governor George Wallace declared a State of Emergency and raised the Confederate flag, which would not be removed for 50 years after the fact. Even more disturbing is the fact that it took a century from the end of the Civil War for people of color to have voting rights in the US, thus highlighting the hypocrisy of a democratic nation.

Ignorance is becoming increasingly detrimental to the security of our nation, with more teens turning to white nationalism in this age. This takes many forms including silence on issues concerning race or offhand remarks about someone’s race. In many cases, it takes a more violent form, such as the Black church shooting in Charleston in 2015 that left 9 people dead and others wounded. The fact is that we talk about these issues in class with little substance, claiming to have fixed racism. However, the effects of racism in our society are still present. This ignorance causes many to denounce the injustice that they are subjected to, as their history is swept under the rug to preserve White comfort. We often fail to recognize the underlying issues that lead to protests, demonstrating a failure in the education system, as the system promotes a categorical version in which our issues seem fixed and racism defunct. This pervasive ignorance is poisoning the American education system, impeding the enlightenment that education

From the Office:

brings. The federal curriculum is not alone in blame, as varying curricula around the country allow the past to be tailored to personal beliefs, erasing and tainting swaths of history. Ignorance poses a direct threat to our democracy, leaving us with two choices, as famously summarized by W. E. B. Dubois: “Ignorance will either destroy America or America will destroy ignorance.”

But there is hope; through education reform, America may soothe the scars left by racism and extinguish the ignorance that supports it. Education is key to the past, present, and future, a future in which a classification such as race no longer blights our nation. The history of America must be portrayed by those who live in it, as we are the ones that write history, allowing for a brighter and more equitable future for all Americans.

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A Long Night with the Sea Dogs

On May 3, we celebrated Civil Rights Night with the Portland Sea Dogs at Hadlock Field. There were 33 schools and over 500 CRTP participants scheduled to attend, but then we got the worst of spring weather in Maine. Mid-40s temperatures and all-day rain undoubtedly convinced some to stay home, and those who went had to wait for a two hour rain delay. Eventually, though, there was baseball. Cold, wet baseball... but baseball. The Sea Dogs lost to the Binghamton Rumble Ponies 12-5, and our on-field recognition ceremony didn't start until about 9:00.



All that said, though...

- The kids had a great time.
- We made another strong showing in our eighth year of this event.
- We very much appreciate the generosity of the Portland Sea Dogs in providing this opportunity and recognition to our civil rights teams.
- Seeing our logo on the big screen and hearing the words *race and skin color, national origin and ancestry, religion, disabilities, gender (including gender identity and expression), and sexual orientation* over the PA system is something worth celebrating.



The team from Cascade Brook School in Farmington shared this team pic with Sluggo!