



**TEAM Westport Meeting Minutes**  
**April 3, 2018 8:00 AM**  
**Room 201, Westport Town Hall, Westport, CT**

**Attendees:** Catherine Onyemelukwe, Dolores Paoli, Maggie Mudd, Judy Hamer, Ramin Ganeshram, Zoe Tarrant, Catherine Lewis, Harold Bailey (Presiding), Bernicestine McLeod, and Rev. Alison Patton

**Guests:** Foti Koskinas (Chief of Police), Rebecca Marsick (Staples High School), and Julie Heller (Westport Public Schools), Jarret Liotta (Westport Now)

The meeting was called to order at 8:06AM.

**Approval of Minutes:** Judy moved that the minutes from our March 6<sup>th</sup> meeting be approved. Catherine Onyemelukwe seconded the motion. The minutes were approved unanimously and will be posted accordingly.

**What's Up?:**

1. Media reports (including those by local outlets) contribute to racial stereotypes by the pictures and captions that are used especially when articles appear about people of color. Perhaps we should invite local editors to talk about this.
2. There is a report in the New York Times about lynching. Elizabeth Woodson from Westport has invited us to the opening on April 26<sup>th</sup> of the **Legacy Museum: From Enslavement to Mass Incarceration** in Montgomery, Alabama, that highlights slavery and lynching. She now works with Bryan Stevenson and attended our February TEAM Westport meeting.
3. Look at the New York Times article on the differential later in life between wealth among black males and white males who grow up with the same economic and educational backgrounds. Not surprisingly, black males are worse off.

**Programming:**

1. **Essay Contest Planning:** The awards presentation will be April 23<sup>rd</sup> at 6:30. The judges will meet on April 14<sup>th</sup> to decide 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, and 3<sup>rd</sup> places. The winners will be notified on April 16<sup>th</sup> although they will not know which award they have received until they attend the awards presentation. The suggestion was made that going forward we should consider announcing the essay topic earlier and that topic chosen should be one to which students have some personal relationship.
2. **Policing:** Chief Koskinas, in remarks about policing locally and around the US, stated that very few of the officers and leadership in our force grew up here and currently still live in Westport. So it can be a learning curve to understand Westport's culture and to deal with visitors to town. Our officers are being trained more and more by way of "situational scenarios" in order to try to avoid the instinct to pull a gun. The mantra is to think first with the intent to deescalate encounters. Westport's force is highly educated. We would tend to think that a military background (which officers here do not necessarily have any more) would lead to more use of force. Alison pointed out that in actuality the military do not go after civilians whereas police in being militaristic can justify a shooting based upon being afraid for their lives (for example, Sacramento as a recent case). Europe is more stringent and will indict police officers. Also there are fewer weapons at play in a lot of other countries. Body cams are voluntarily used by members of our force and have proven to be effective especially when there is a complaint about an officer.  
Westport Schools is recommending the addition of School Resource Officers (SROs) to provide coverage at the schools.
3. **TEAM Westport Book Club:** The purpose of the book club is to expose and unpack racism and how it impacts us all. Waking Up White, by Debby Irving, is the next book that will be read and discussed on May 14<sup>th</sup> at Saugatuck Congregational Church. The March 26<sup>th</sup> session on Citizen by Claudia Rankine was very good. Let's see if we can get her to come here.



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Actions: Information about the next session will be put on FaceBook. Maggie will check with Cody to see if the Library can help in getting Ms. Rankine here.

4. Conversations: CONECT –Harold has received the discussion guide with social justice components from CONECT.  
Action: We are in the process of identifying a model and format. Perhaps we can write a grant request to supplement the funds collected after the MLK celebration event.
5. Interfaith Clergy / Interfaith Council: Harold and Bernicestine met with the Interfaith Clergy to let them know about the intent to have coordinated discussion groups around town on an ongoing basis prompted by our discussion with CONECT and in accordance with our theme of “anti-racism”.
6. MLK Planning Committee: The committee will resume meeting to plan anti-racist training. Harold also communicated with Professor Kendi again. His center at American University is planning to launch anti-racism training initiatives later this year. Harold is now waiting for Dr. Kendi’s response with regard to anti-racism training in town and how his group might lend assistance. Professor Kendi is also working with Jason Reynolds who will participate in the Saugatuck Festival at the Library this fall.
7. Westport Historical Society: Ramin reported that preparation for the exhibit is going well. There is a lot of material and it’s hard to present it. She asked for suggestions for an appropriate name. The opening ceremony is now scheduled for May 11<sup>th</sup>. We are looking forward to this.
8. Playhouse: We are awaiting the opening of *Flyin’ West* on May 29<sup>th</sup> and will be planning programming.
9. Library Partnership/Coming Events:
  - a. Ibi Zoboi, the author of American Street and Pride, came to speak at Staples on March 15<sup>th</sup> and also visited the sixth grade in Bridgeport. She will be back in the fall for the Saugatuck Festival at the Library.
  - b. The next Community Table discussion will be at the Library on May 3<sup>rd</sup>. The topic is “Taking a Knee”.

**Education:**

Strategic Planning: Zoe and Catherine Lewis are scheduled to present to the administrators of the Westport Schools on May 3<sup>rd</sup> at 3:30PM. The intent is to get the teachers to be more comfortable about diversity and discussions surrounding it especially when incidents arise. Zoe and Catherine will eventually give more talks to parents, but initially they are working with the school system itself.

Staples: The English Department at Staples is using lectures from Parkland High School and Chicago with regard to discussions about guns and shootings of young people. Also students are reading The Hate U Give and discussing James Baldwin and Frederick Douglass as voices of protest.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:45AM.

The next meeting will be held at 8AM on Tuesday, May 1, 2018, in Room 201 of Westport Town Hall.

Respectfully submitted,

Bernicestine McLeod  
Secretary