

TEAM Westport Meeting Minutes
May 7, 2013, 7:30 AM
Room 201
Westport Town Hall, Westport, CT

Attendees: Brett Aronow, Judy Hamer, Harold Bailey (Presiding), Bernicestine McLeod, Susan Ellis, Steve Daniels, Maggie Mudd, Catherine Onyemelukwe, and Dolores Paoli

The meeting was called to order at 7:30 AM.

Approval of Minutes: Catherine moved that the minutes for the April 2nd, 2013, meeting be approved. Maggie seconded. The minutes were approved.

New Business

What's Up:

- 1) Catherine wrote a letter to the editor of the NY Times in reaction to an article by David Leonhardt in *Capital Ideas* in the Sunday Review section on the difficulty of young people finding jobs. He did not talk about the black and brown men who can't find jobs because of factors discussed at length in the book The New Jim Crow by Michelle Alexander. They are caught up in the national trend to privatize the prison system; consequently, more prisons are built, and the economic benefits to municipalities are significant while the repercussions to black and brown men are serious – they lose the right to vote, as well as access to services. Families fall apart because they can't get jobs.
How does this affect Westport? We should have a discussion about it here. Harold mentioned a Task Force at the state level that is looking at the criminal justice system and how it affects teens from the suburbs vs. those in the cities. There are two distinct systems; in urban areas, the tendency is for more teens to go into "the system" and to go to jail. The presumption in the suburbs is that the kids are good and they made a mistake. Parents keep getting them out when they get in trouble. Even in the suburbs, kids of color are more likely to end up in "the system" because they and their parents are not accustomed to talking to the police.
A possible outline for a discussion or conversation here:
 - a) The topic can be restricted to drug offenses and the prosecution thereof: cocaine (generally suburban) vs. crack (generally urban).
 - b) First talk about the difference in the systems (what you're charged with and the sentence delivered by a court) – letting people know how the kids are different.
 - c) Then have a subject matter expert talk about the disparity.
 - d) Next show differences between local suburban/urban settings (Westport and Bridgeport/Norwalk).
- 2) Susan recommends the book Sugar in the Blood by Andrea Stuart. It's her memoir about Barbados which was a more popular destination for slaves than Virginia. In discussing her family history, she talks about the importation of slaves from Africa under control of the British. Note also that the first slaves from England were not African, but were English "undesirables".
- 3) Steve mentioned The Robin Hood Foundation – a new idea in philanthropy – as seen on 60 Minutes.

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Programming Strategy and Gameplan

- 1) James Basker, the editor of American Antislavery Writings: Colonial Beginnings to Emancipation, will be appearing at the Westport Library on Thursday, May 9th, at 7PM. He is the President of the Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History which should be a marvelous resource for our school system.

Action: Send reminders to our list. We are now using 'Vertical Response' to get the word out.

- 2) *Clybourne Park* starts next week at Long Wharf in New Haven. The Artistic Director at Center Stage in Baltimore has written another extension to *A Raisin in the Sun* entitled *Beneatha's Place*. The new play is interesting and is just premiering in Baltimore.

Action: Harold will get the info out to everyone about *Clybourne Park*.

- 3) *Oblivion* – about family values – will be at the Westport Country Playhouse in September.
- 4) Joan Hume has set aside 2 hours for 7 weeks starting in September for the Westport Library to show the PBS civil rights series "Eyes on the Prize". We can shape how to use the time/space to allow for discussion as well as viewing.

Action: We need to determine the format for these sessions – whether half viewing and half discussion. We can think about using online methods to keep the discussions going. This might be a way to interconnect with the schools. Do we want a framing question for the whole series? It would be helpful to have people who lived through this period comment. People don't see how 'civil rights' affects them and not just people of color. 'Civil rights' is an umbrella that has affected everyone, but not much has been written about how – including rights for women.

- 5) One thing to consider adding to our program agenda is a discussion about the Marathon bombing in Boston and the perception of terrorism. In the Boston event, religion was conflated with violence and terrorism was attached to being Muslim. It is much more complicated than being a matter of religion. We reacted by shutting everything down. By contrast, the events in Newtown were not tied to religion; we hear that Adam Lanza was from a dysfunctional family. How do we bring it home to Westport? How do we break the link or question the link between Islam and terrorism? How do we feel we are affected by this? What goes on in your head when incidents like this happens? Think about this. Should we do a community conversation?

Education Committee:

- 1) We have one nominee thus far for this year's Staples Award. We are currently reading applications.
- 2) James D'Amico, Social Studies Curriculum Coordinator for the school system, will come to our next meeting.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:10 AM.

Respectfully submitted,

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Bernicestine E. McLeod, Secretary