

# CHARACTER



PUBLISHED BY THE CENTER FOR THE ADVANCEMENT OF ETHICS AND CHARACTER  
AT THE SCHOOL OF EDUCATION AT BOSTON UNIVERSITY AND THE ASCD CHARACTER EDUCATION NETWORK

EDUCATING FOR JUSTICE

## THE ROLE OF THE EDUCATOR IN THE JUST SOCIETY By Dr. Richard Oxenberg

*Dr. Oxenberg refers in this article to CAEC Teachers Academies that took place in South Carolina the week of June 11-15, 2007.*

Sometime over the course of my recent trip to South Carolina, Tony Soprano either did, or did not, get what was coming to him. I did not see the final episode of *The Sopranos*, but from what I have been able to gather, the show itself left the ques-

tion open. Some viewers, longing for moral clarity, or, at least, dramatic finality, were incensed at the ambiguity of the ending. I thought it was just as well. We are living in morally ambiguous times. The popularity of a show about a suburbanite man with generally suburbanite sensibilities, who makes his living lying, cheating, stealing, and killing is itself testimony to our moral unclarity.

We don't know

whether to despise Tony's moral turpitude or admire his power and success. A good part of the show's fascination was in the way it played with this disturbing ambiguity itself.

I was in South Carolina to give a presentation on Plato's ethics to a group of South Carolina public school teachers as part of the CAEC's Teachers Academy program. The program's aim is to promote sensitivity to issues of moral character development among teachers of all grade levels, whose interactions with students in their formative years can make such a difference to their evolving views of life. The goal, to put it simply, is to promote a society with fewer Tony Sopranos. To succeed at this, however, we, as a society,

will need to make some progress in resolving the moral ambiguity that Tony represents. How can we do so? That is a big question.

Plato knew all about moral ambiguity. Indeed, his entire philosophy, in one way or another, seems directed at the problems that it poses. He lived in a time with striking parallels to our own. The traditional values associated with the ancestral

religions of ancient Greece were being called more and more into question. In their place a new set of values was emerging, promoted by a group calling themselves 'sophists,' or

'wise men,' emphasizing the pursuit of individual self-interest above all. "Justice," says the cynical Thrasymachus in Plato's *Republic*, "is the advantage of the stronger." In every society, he explains, "each ruling group sets down laws for its own advantage . . . And they declare that what they have set down—their own advantage—is just." Previously, justice had been supposed a transcendent value, administered by the gods for the good of all. But this view is now seen as itself but a ruse of the power elite, designed to keep the masses docile and pliable. Such traditional views may be fine for the

### CONTENT HIGHLIGHTS

1 The Role of the Educator in the Just Society

3 From the Director  
Justice: A Cardinal Virtue

#### ON THE HOMEFRONT

6 *Among Family and Friends:  
Where Is Justice Found?*

7 Justice Claimed

#### CAEC PROGRAMS AND RESOURCES

8 *South Carolina Teachers  
Academies 2007*

8 *Books, Movies, and Quotes  
on Justice*

9 *Spring Institute*

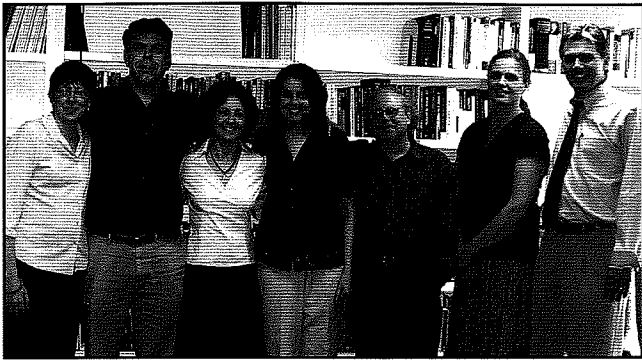
14 Justice—An Elusive Notion?

#### FROM THE TRENCHES

5 *Justice at Ransom  
Everglades School*

15 *Just Justice*

...We, as a society, ...need to make some progress in resolving ...moral ambiguity.... How can we do so? That is a big question.



From left to right:  
Kathleen Fisher,  
Stephen Esposito,  
Bernice Lerner,  
Carol Jenkins,  
Richard Oxenberg,  
Amy Baltzell,  
Ed Orszulak.

seemed  
to  
many  
of them  
wishful  
at best,  
if not  
altogether fanciful.

Where, after all, is what  
should be? Where can

masses, intones Thrasy-machus, as the majority of men have neither the fortitude nor the wit to pursue their own self-interest without compromise, but the clever ones, the strong ones, the modern ones, have now seen through them.

What I found remarkable, and alarming, in my interaction with the school teachers attending my sessions, was how many were ready to echo Thrasy-machus's thought, even while disagreeing with it in spirit. It is not that they agreed that this is what justice should be, it is that they could not help but concede that this is what justice is, and in the face of the overwhelming testimony of what is, any appeal to what should be

## INFORMATION ABOUT CHARACTER

CHARACTER is published by ASCD's Character Education Network and the Center for the Advancement of Ethics and Character at the School of Education at Boston University. The newsletter is sponsored in part by the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD), but is an official publication of ASCD.

For a list of topics covered in previous issues of CHARACTER, contact the CAEC at [caec@bu.edu](mailto:caec@bu.edu) or call 617-353-3262.

## STAFF

*Editor:* Bernice Lerner, Ed.D.

*Managing Editor:* Lauren K. Terry

*Research Associate:* Luke Peterson

Designed and produced by the  
School of Education.

we go to look for it? How will we know it when we find it? How can we assess one person's version of it against another's? Even for those of us inclined to affirm the reality of moral truths, these are difficult questions. Increasingly, in our public discourse, we seem to have lost the conceptual tools with which to address them. We seem caught between philosophies of moral relativism, tending toward nihilism, which deny the legitimacy of all moral judgments, and ideologies of moral absolutism, tending toward despotism, which refuse to submit their moral judgments to critical scrutiny. Both extremes testify to our failure to discover the locus of moral truth.

Plato believed that this locus is only discoverable through a process of vigorous, rational, self-examination. Values exist only in relation to one who values. The reality of what should be, then, is to be found only in the deepest recesses of the human soul. Superficially, we each, quite naturally, value our immediate concerns and desires. More profoundly, as Plato, Socrates, and all the great moral seers have affirmed, we are rooted in that which transcends these superficial bounds. The proof of this, however, is not to be found in the world of the senses. The senses report what we see, but moral reality pertains rather to how we see. Nor is it to be found in religious scripture. Religious scripture can at best alert us to a moral reality that it hasn't, in

itself, the means to verify. If verification is to come it will come only from the one, and for the one, who is able and willing to undergo the difficult process of self-and-world-interrogation. The prerequisites for this process are scrupulous honesty and a capacity for sustained, disciplined thought. To produce people who can satisfy these prerequisites should be, according to Plato, a primary goal of the educational process.

The stakes are high. As Plato well understood, the Thrasy-machan view of justice must lead, inevitably, to a society in which those most adept at consolidating power for themselves will succeed in subjugating those less able or willing to do so. The end of this road is a world in which the virtues of honesty, integrity, trust, fairness, compassion, and simple decency become material liabilities. Human beings divide into two camps: those who exploit and those who are exploited. When these are the only choices left, the human soul is forced to close in on itself for its own protection, and the world becomes a darker, meaner, and ever more desperate place.

We do not know what becomes of Tony Soprano in the final episode of the show. The last frame, I am told, simply goes black. There is considerably less mystery, however, as to what will become of a society of Tony Sopranos. If we wish to avert this, a vigorous, morally attuned education is necessary. What is the role of the educator in the just society, then? A primary one, certainly, must be to prepare students for an exploration of the meaning of justice itself.

*Dr. Richard Oxenberg is an Assistant Professor of Humanities in the College of General Studies at Boston University. He received his degree in philosophy from Emory University and specializes in Platonic thought.*

## WHEN LIFE IS UNFAIR By Dr. Bernice Lerner

At the beginning of Plato's *Republic*, Socrates meets with Cephalus, his friend's elderly father. Socrates inquires as to Cephalus's wisdom on life, given his ripe vantage point. Cephalus explains that in reflecting on their lives, old people who have acted justly are at peace, whereas those who have been unjust fear what awaits them. He leaves it to the younger generation to ponder what living a just life means, which takes the entire rest of Plato's tome. And which consumes philosophers and

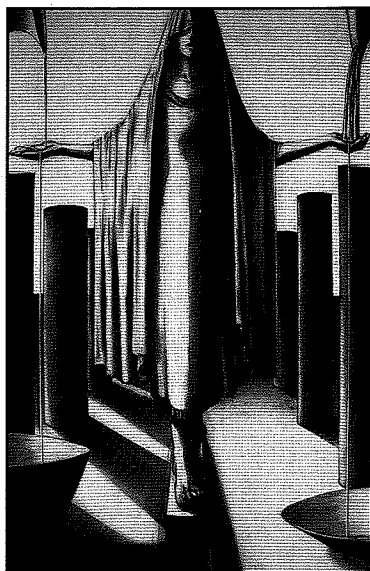
educators for millennia.

How can we help young people to become just, to lead noble lives? We might, for one, help them realize the importance of responding rightly to injustices they may experience. Though a subject worthy of study, I speak here not of cataclysms (e.g., war, natural disasters, etc.). Nor am I addressing causes for sorrow, such as being struck with a debilitating illness or losing a loved one. I am focusing, rather, on more ubiqui-

tous, less earth shattering injustices. These include being covertly discriminated against, defrauded, having to deal with unreasonable demands on one's time and/or energies, or being denied what one is entitled to. There is no limit to the docket of injustices that could be brought before small claims cosmic courts. And few among us — no matter how privileged or accomplished — escape some such situation in the course of our lives. In fact, in studying and writing about lives, I have learned



Fortitude



Justice



Temperance



Wisdom

### JUSTICE: A CARDINAL VIRTUE

*Deborah Morris, a Visiting Assistant Professor at the Department of Art and Art History at Skidmore College in Saratoga Springs, NY, explains what inspired her artistic renderings of the four cardinal virtues (above).*

Justice is one of four cardinal virtues (as depicted above). These drawings started with a trip to Padua, Italy, to see the Scrovegni Chapel and the paintings of Giotto. From 1303 to 1310, Giotto did a series of the seven vices and seven virtues in black and white along both sides of the main chapel — virtues on one side and their opposing vices on the other. They are stunning and powerful and were intended to educate the viewer about the rewards and consequences of such behaviors. I am certain that Giotto was successful at that time. However, I loved them for their directness and formal simplicity. I was inspired to do my own contemporary/idiosyncratic interpretations of these vices/virtues — concepts of which we are well aware but tend to take for granted and seldom elevate through isolated elaboration. My interpretations utilized traditional iconography and my own invention.

how good, hard working individuals; caring, altruistic people; talented and consummate professionals, invariably — through no fault of their own — suffer some mistreatment.

How can we teachers and parents prepare young people for this cold, cruel world?

One way is to let nature take its course. School and after-school life offer plenty of opportunity

for practice with unjust situations.

Ask any kid. A ninth grader told me about his poorly organized, irritable chemistry teacher. He much preferred the “insanely strict” teacher he had had first term. (Though this teacher made a boy who put his head down on the desk bring a mattress to school the next day, she “knew the information and taught it well.”) An eighth grader observed how his gym teacher punished a girl who had just come from the nurse’s office. Though she was not feeling well, he made her run a mile around the

track. Many of the kids in the class would not exert effort (i.e., they would walk rather than run), but this girl always participated fully. A fifth grader described how her teacher disproportionately calls on, talks to, and helps the kids he likes. Other injustices: a classmate fails to do her part in a group project; a coach only cares about the top scorers on the team; a friend betrays a confidence.

How can we teachers and parents prepare young people for this cold, cruel world? One way is to let nature take its course.

School and after-school life offer plenty of opportunity for practice with unjust situations.

Even elementary school students can... imagine how a person might under-react or over-react to a particular scenario, and that a person of sound character will always respond with decency and in an intermediary way.

To the extent that we can help those in our charge choose wisely from a range of responses to unfair situations, moral education is underway.

For starters, young people need to know that options exist. Where possible, it might be prudent to anticipate possibilities and act accordingly (e.g., one can try to get to know a teacher who tends to favor certain students). Beyond readying oneself, just responses to injustice

may be properly channeled outrage, acceptance, counting blessings, or redoubling one’s efforts toward some appropriate and achievable aim.

How to choose well from among various options? According to Plato’s student, Aristotle, by paying attention to what we feel and striving to display these feelings in the most excellent way. How can we locate this way?

By realizing that it exists somewhere between two extremes: one of defect, and one of excess. Even elementary school students can grasp this “doc-

trine of the mean.”

They can imagine how a person might under-react or over-react to a particular

scenario, and that a person of sound character will always respond with decency and in an intermediary way. Older students are able to give the

matter further consideration. They might note their own inclinations. In striving for right action an individual might consciously lean toward her opposite tendency. She might ask what the wisest, most judicious person she knows would do in the same situation. And what will cause the least damage—to oneself and others.

When there is no time to reflect, we respond to injustices in our usual way. This is why it is crucial for young people to develop good habits of heart and mind; i.e., to practice dealing constructively with injustice. This may mean directing attention to disadvantaged or needy others, speaking out against unfair practices, lobbying for a noble cause, or working toward positive, concrete goals. Given their natural tendencies, given the situations in which they find themselves, young people will thus be equipped to respond to various incarnations of injustice. ■

## JUSTICE AT RANSOM EVERGLADES SCHOOL By Michael R. Ferguson

According to the *American Heritage Dictionary*, "justice" is defined as "the principle of moral rightness, equity...righteousness." At Ransom Everglades School, where I am the Director of the Upper School, we expect all of our students to develop a similar understanding of justice. They have to conform to the School's values as expressed through our Honor Code and Student Handbook, which lays out behavioral expectations. We also read a letter from our Founder, Paul Ransom, that he read to the first students he taught. In it, he writes about strong character and students belonging to a class of people "...who give back more than they take from the institution." A quote by Mr. Ransom also hangs in our Pagoda, the historic first building on campus, which reads: "Obedience to the Unenforceable." He established the principles of morality, ethics, and character that we believe in and live by from year to year.

In my position, these principles get sorely tested each year. Whether it is dealing with a parent who strongly disagrees with a disciplinary action or honor sanction, to a faculty member who thinks students are "getting away with murder" if not suspended, I have the dubious honor of meting out justice. Just this past spring, I had to explain to parents of a student found "guilty" of an honor violation why the punishment was fair and warranted. Even though their son admitted that he sought an advantage on a test, they tried to explain away his action as innocent and blamed the teacher for not being more specific in her instructions. It took me an hour to bring them around to accept the Honor Council's recommendation of a grade

penalty on the test and placement on Honor Code Violation Status for the remainder of the year.

That meeting was followed by one with the teacher and the three faculty representatives of the Honor Council. Feeling the punishment too light, the teacher told her colleagues that "he wasn't punished at all." When asked what punishment she thought was fair, she said suspension or expulsion. How then can the Director reconcile both points of view and get all to agree that the decision was "just?" In this case, my "Solomonesque" qualities, experience of thirty-four years in education, and belief in the values of the School assisted me in bringing the parents and the teacher around to what I believe was a just position. The student accepted his punishment, and the principles of the School were upheld.

A more difficult situation occurred at the end of last year when a junior student on a drama trip to New York decided to sneak out of the hotel after curfew. She was caught by the chaperones and placed in front of the Disciplinary Committee when she returned to school. They recommended disciplinary probation status, grade reductions for the quarter, and a five day suspension. I accepted the recommendations and also informed the parents that she would most likely have to report the suspensions to the colleges she applied to in the fall. They reacted strongly in protest. They thought the decision most unjust and sought an audience with the Head of School to lodge an appeal. Eventually they had to accept the decision and

waited impatiently for the results of their daughter's early decision college applications. Lo and behold, she was accepted at her first choice school even though she had to tell them about the suspension. I always thought the decision was just and fit the "crime," but a whole process had to be "played out" for the student

Justice doesn't happen because we believe in it as an abstract concept. We have to practice it, discuss it, teach it, and model it.

and her parents to accept it as well.

Both of these cases are indicative of situations that school administrators face each year. We are expected to rule fairly, and perhaps a little more

fairly when a parent's own child is concerned. That is why I believe a school must have a clear sense of its mission and values. It must have procedures in place that allow for due process. Justice doesn't happen because we believe in it as an abstract concept. We have to practice it, discuss it, teach it, and model it. We do all of those things at Ransom Everglades School through our advising system, student leadership training, Honor Council, and Disciplinary Committee. In addition, we promote social justice by offering a great many community service opportunities for our students. It is only through high expectations, reinforcement of wise choices, and practice of the values that lead to just decisions that students will embody the moral and ethical characteristics that will serve them for a lifetime.

*Michael R. Ferguson is the Director of the Upper School at Ransom Everglades School in Coconut Grove, FL. ■*



## AMONG FAMILY AND FRIENDS: WHERE IS JUSTICE FOUND? By Kristina Nilsson

Those of us blessed with close family relationships take very much to heart the requirement to "do justice and righteousness,"<sup>1</sup> as we make our way through the perils attendant upon anyone trying to rear children or run a household or fulfill the duties of caregiver. I grew up with three siblings, and throughout our growing-up years, my parents made prodigious efforts to grant equal endowments of attention, affection, opportunities, and even material benefits to each of us. Only one exception is etched in my memory: a family summer trip took us to Colorado where, on a fine cloudless day, we were treated to a ride in a narrow gauge steam-train on a mountain. After we four kids had chosen our seats and the train whistle had announced our departure, the engineer came running back to our open-air car and whisked my brother away. Where was he going? My parents had arranged for him, the only boy among us, to sit up in the engine car and help "drive" the train. I knew instantly that only his gender marked him for this privilege, and I burned with jealousy. That was the only example of inequity that I can remember in my family. (Perhaps my siblings would remember others.)

Because we four did not substantially differ from one another in our interests, talents, level of self-discipline, or demands for attention, my parents were largely successful in their valiant honoring of this equality principle as the primary servant of justice. But this earnestly imparted legacy has proven but an unwelcome burden during my own parental journey. Our two lovely adult daughters live away from home now. But what was true of them as tiny tots remains so today: in tempera-

ment, interests, and most other salient traits, they are as unlike each other as are night and day. My husband and I, no less conscientious than many parents, find ourselves in a veritable quagmire as we question every day whether justice reigns supreme as we attempt to apply principles of equality, fairness, and mercy in our parenting of these two souls, these Children of God. It is that last appellation that soothes my worries, for ultimately I know that although as a parent I'm flawed and sometimes unwise (if not downright benighted), these daughters have a destiny to fulfill, and we the parents do not constitute the only agency through which justice—or at times perceived injustice—will touch their lives.

Nor is it my place to ask "Where is the cosmic justice?" in the fact that my husband—a person of the most ineluctably sweet disposition, a human being most ethical and humane, a husband who daily exhibits an attitude of gratitude—should have fallen prey to the ravaging physical disabilities imposed upon his body by the seemingly intractable evils of primary progressive multiple sclerosis. I have been blessed with the insight to perceive that this enemy's invasion of our lives has served only to render our marriage stronger, our love for each other deeper, our days together more precious.

During the past year, cancer halted the lives of two of my dearest friends (one my roommate in college, the other my dear high school classmate and comrade). Their deaths caused me to engage in deep reflection. They were similar in several respects. Both lived every minute of

life fully aware, fully involved. They gave love generously, but each was able to accomplish so very much because of exemplary self-discipline and superior organization of their time, their households, the products of their thought and labours. I, on the other hand, too often squander

Is it just, that these lovely women, who never took time for granted, have had their lives seemingly abbreviated, while I get to go merrily along my path, taking all kinds of detours and sometimes living in a sort of daze?

the many moments granted to me on this earth, as if I had lots of "padding" in my life, lots of time to waste. Is it just, that these lovely women, who never took time for granted, have had their lives seeming-

ly abbreviated, while I get to go merrily along my path, taking all kinds of detours and sometimes living in a sort of daze? But recently I had an epiphany and realized that perhaps I have it all wrong—that they have now attained a peace achieved through their earnest hard work, and that I am required to stay put, continuing my mundane struggles, until I finally learn something. Who am I to decide what justice is?

<sup>1</sup>References: Jeremiah 22:3

*Kristina Nilsson received her M.M. from the New England Conservatory of Music and her J.D. from the New England School of Law. She is a member of the Massachusetts Bar, and one of the Boston area's busiest freelance violinists. She plays regularly with the Boston Ballet, Boston Pops, and Pro Arte Chamber Orchestra, a group she co-founded over 25 years ago and for which she still serves as concertmaster. She also serves as a volunteer reader at the Boston studio of Recording for the Blind and Dyslexic.* ■

# JUSTICE CLAIMED SARAH ROBERTS, LINDA BROWN, AND RUBY BRIDGES: STEPPING STONES ON OUR NATION'S CIVIL RIGHTS JOURNEY FOR JUSTICE By Barbara Henry

*Through her personal attributes of character, and her public victory over racism, Ruby Bridges serves as an active, powerful force for social justice in our children's lives. For us all, she is an ever present reminder of our obligation to grow in our understanding and appreciation of our differences.*

Perhaps no American painting of the twentieth century is today more universally recognized, its message of the injustice of racism more instantly internalized in its poignant and symbolic rendering, than in Norman Rockwell's iconic work (below), *The Problem We All Live With*.

Herein Rockwell's genius gave a face to America's pervasive injustice—racism—symbolized by the arresting crimson stain of prejudice splashed on the school wall; and he's kept ever present for us the moment that singed America's conscience on November 14, 1960 when racism was rending our nation. Yet, at that very moment, there is offered a recognition of justice about to be claimed in the presence of the Federal Marshals, representing the full commitment of our nation to the rule of law, protecting and escorting a little black girl, representing our nation's discriminated minority: The Marshals and the child going forward, together as one, to claim that justice—equal-

ity before the law—promised nearly a century earlier to all of America's citizens in our Constitution's 14th amendment. The rightness of this moment—this effort—is symbolized in the pure-white rendering of the little girl's dress. *The Problem We All Live With*, profoundly provocative, overwhelms to stunned introspection.

In one confined space Rockwell encapsulated the symbolic beginning

and suspected end of the seemingly boundless divisive struggle for America's black student

citizens to be freed from the egregious injustice of a racially segregated education. Such a trenchant story is beheld here, for the background to the story is a richly colored tapestry of earlier sacrifices and struggles; in ascending the steps to the front door of New Orleans William Frantz School, Ruby Bridges was standing on the shoulders of the noble giants for justice who came before her, and, to quote Nelson Mandela, "on those victories whose only glory lies in the fact that they are known to those who won them." Those heroes and heroic efforts made possible Ruby's final little steps, yet indeed giant ones for all of America's students, black and white. As abolitionist Charles Sumner, in arguing on behalf

... Ruby Bridges was standing on the shoulders of the noble giants for justice who came before her....

whites themselves are injured by the separation, who can deny this?" Who today would not concur with Sumner that all of our nation's students are made more whole and our national tapestry richer by the threads of diversity and inclusion woven in 1954 and 1960. The richness of Rockwell's iconic work presents as a catalyst for educators to engage students on the theme of Justice as it relates to their

education—in respect to the all-inclusive racial, ethnic and culturally diverse settings where they now learn and are enriched, without such

discriminatory distractions.

The jewel of a story that shines so brightly, its glow magnetic in capturing hearts and engaging reflection is *The Story of Ruby Bridges*: tender, touching, transformational. In her pioneering mission to desegregate the New Orleans William Frantz School, Ruby Bridges became its lone student when the school's all-white, pro-segregation parent body withdrew their children at her arrival. Unaware of the mantle for change she wore that day, Ruby's singular achievement signaled the nation-wide recognition that racially segregated public schools neither could nor would be accepted or legally justified in any quarter of the United States. The primacy of the 14th Amendment, reaffirmed in the 1954 Brown vs. Board of Education decision, would reign supreme for all of America's students.

Transformative as *The Ruby Bridges Story* can be in awakening all of its discoverers to its extraordinary legal and political history—heart wrenching as well as heart warming—the story in its simplicity creates a sense of wonder for the youngest of learn-

*continued on page 10*



*The Problem We All Live With*, 1964. Story illustration. Collection of The Norman Rockwell Museum at Stockbridge, MA. © 1964 The Norman Rockwell Estate Licensing Company.

BOOKS, MOVIES, AND QUOTES ON JUSTICE

BOOKS

*To Kill a Mockingbird*  
by Harper Lee

*Freedom Walkers: The Story of  
the Montgomery Bus Boycott*  
by Russell Freedman

*Counting on Grace*  
by Elizabeth Winthrop

*Let Me Play: The Story of Title IX,  
the Law that Changed the Future  
of Girls in America*  
by Karen Blumenthal

*The Butter Battle Book*  
by Dr. Seuss

*Delivering Justice: W. W. Law and the  
Fight for Civil Rights*  
by Jim Haskins

*Spinning Tales, Weaving  
Hope: Stories, Storytelling  
and Activities for Peace,  
Justice, and the Environment*  
by Ed Brody, editor

MOVIES

*12 Angry Men*  
(MGM, 2001)

*A Civil Action*  
(Walt Disney Video, 1999)

*Batman Begins*  
(Warner Home Video, 2005)

*Erin Brockovich*  
(Universal Studios, 2000)

*High Noon*  
(Republic Pictures, 2002)

*Mr. Smith Goes to Washington*  
(Sony Pictures, 2000)

*Robin Hood*  
(Walt Disney Video, 2006)

*The Insider*  
(Walt Disney Video, 2000)

*The Ox-Bow Incident*  
(20th Century Fox, 2003)

QUOTES

Justice is conscience, not a personal conscience  
but the conscience of the whole of humanity. Those  
who clearly recognize the voice of their own con-  
science usually recognize also the voice of justice.  
—Alexander Solzhenitsyn

Moral excellence comes about as a result of habit.  
We become just by doing just acts, temperate by  
doing temperate acts, brave by doing brave acts.  
—Aristotle

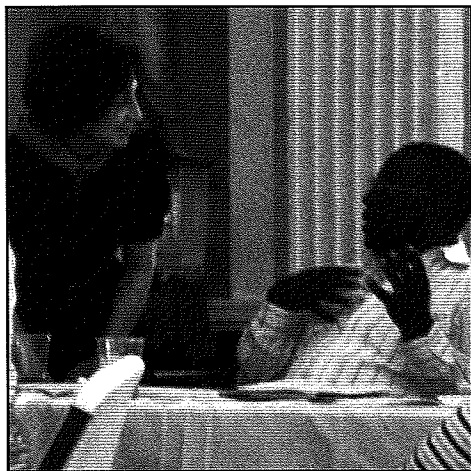
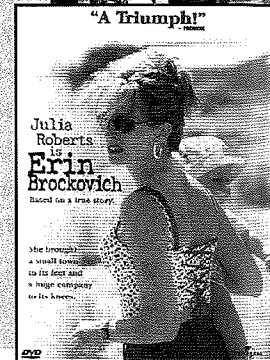
You can only protect your liberties in this world by  
protecting the other man's freedom. You can only be  
free if I am free.  
—Clarence Darrow

When will our consciences grow so tender that we will  
act to prevent human misery rather than avenge it?  
—Eleanor Roosevelt

The good we secure for ourselves is precarious and  
uncertain until it is secured for all of us and incorpo-  
rated into our common life.  
—Jane Addams

True peace is not merely the absence of tension: it is  
the presence of justice.  
—Martin Luther King, Jr.

Justice without force is powerless; force without jus-  
tice is tyrannical.  
—Blaise Pascal



SOUTH CAROLINA TEACHERS  
ACADEMIES 2007

This past June, the CAEC con-  
ducted three Teachers Academies  
at the following sites: University of  
South Carolina at Beaufort;  
South Carolina State University; and  
Coker College (at which the photo-  
graphs to the right were taken).



# CAEC SPRING INSTITUTE: EDUCATING FOR JUSTICE

April 28-29, 2008

The CAEC's Spring Institute is a stimulating retreat that cultivates the intellectual lives of educators. CAEC Associate Scholars will present a range of philosophical and practical principles and ideas, shedding light on various aspects of the virtue of justice. Educators will come away with strategies for helping students of every age to pursue justice and a deeper understanding of what it means to strive for right action in their own lives.

Plenary presentations will be given by:

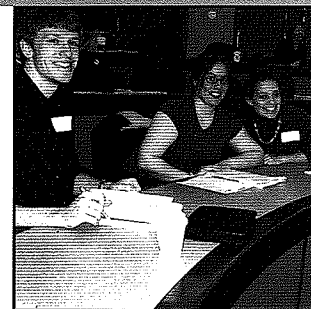
Richard Young,  
Project Director,  
"Pursuing  
Justice,"  
Teaching Ameri-  
can History Grant

BOSTON UNIVERSITY FACULTY AND LEADERS:  
Thomas Cottle, Ph.D., Professor, School of Education  
Kenneth Elmore, Dean of Students, J.D., M.A.  
Charles Glenn, Ed.D., Ph.D. Dean *ad interim*, School  
of Education  
Michael Grodin, M.D., Professor, Health Law

Bernice Lerner, Ed.D., Director, CAEC  
David Lyons, Ph.D., Professor, Philosophy & Law  
Richard Oxenberg, Ph.D., Assistant Professor,  
Humanities  
Virginia Sapiro, Ph. D., Dean, College of Arts and  
Sciences

Directions to Boston University facilities,  
a list of area hotels, and parking information  
will be mailed to all registrants.

Boston University Photonics Center  
8 Saint Mary's Street, Room 906  
Boston, MA 02215



## REGISTRATION FORM

Names(s) and position(s) of  
participant(s) (indicate contact  
person with an asterisk)

1. NAME	SCHOOL DISTRICT
POSITION	ADDRESS
2. NAME	CITY STATE ZIP
POSITION	PHONE FAX
3. NAME	E-MAIL
POSITION	
4. NAME	
POSITION	
5. NAME	
POSITION	

## FEES

Fee includes continental breakfast, lunch, materials, and a \$40 nonrefundable processing charge.

Early rate (before December 31, 2007):

\$350 each (\$310 for three or more teachers  
from the same school/organization) \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Regular rate (after December 31, 2007):

\$390 each (\$350 for three or more teachers  
from one school/organization) \$ \_\_\_\_\_

x number of attendees \_\_\_\_\_

TOTAL \$ \_\_\_\_\_

☐ Check/s enclosed (payable to CAEC at Boston University)

Payment type: ☐ Visa ☐ Mastercard ☐ Discover

CARD # \_\_\_\_\_ EXP. DATE \_\_\_\_\_

NAME AS IT APPEARS ON CARD \_\_\_\_\_

I hereby authorize Boston University to charge my credit card the amount specified above. I agree to pay the total credit card amount listed above according to the card issuer agreement.

AUTHORIZED SIGNATURE \_\_\_\_\_ DATE \_\_\_\_\_

REGISTRATION DEADLINE: **APRIL 18, 2008**

Return this form to:  
CAEC at Boston University, 621 Commonwealth Avenue,  
4th floor, Boston, MA 02215 or fax to 617-353-4351.

For more information, call 617-353-3262 or e-mail [caec@bu.edu](mailto:caec@bu.edu).



Ruby Bridges, 1960.  
Gelatin silver print.  
New York World-  
Telegram and Sun  
Collection, Prints and  
Photographs Division  
(148).

ers, who identify with a true American hero. Diminutive in appearance, her delicate

demeanor exuding uncommon courage and exemplary grace and dignity, Ruby became transformed into a towering figure.

Awed to silence for a few stunned moments by the enormity of the story's implications of personal character for them—"She was my age," "Could I ever be such a hero?"—the rapt young audience, as if touched by that starry magical Walt Disney wand, assume the persona of Ruby—Ruby, the unjustly treated—and then, spontaneous are the myriad outpourings of compassion and sympathy for the recognized and internalized injustice of exclusion and loneliness. Indeed, feelings toward which young hearts are naturally acutely sensitive. These outbursts are the fertile seeds for beginning and developing what may be for some children their first focused considerations of what is embodied in the concepts of justice and injustice.

Just as quickly as children are to become one with Ruby, The Victim, so too are they ready to recreate themselves as Ruby, The Hero—assuming the right of peer identity with aspects of her abounding strengths of character. Upon some introspection, then reflection, the mood becomes spirited, uplifting, as the "new Rubys" proudly offer their perceived special moments of courage, kindness, and honorable commitments to duty or

responsibility. What a wonderfully warm, caring community appears! What a golden moment for enhancing the empowering effects their worthy acts have for both themselves and the receivers. Would that children be

awakened to the magic of kindness; that most often it is nothing less than that character—quality most prized—courage—just differently dressed.

Just as Ruby's story offered the experiencing of compassion in planting seeds of concern for Justice, may it also allow children to see courage as the root for kindness, and that kindness can become a powerful force for ameliorating the effects of injustice—from their becoming one with their admired peer, would that children come to own and live the paradigm; courage in our own lives, kindness towards others.

That the *Ruby Bridges Story* continues to flourish so bountifully springs from that rich well of inspirational personal heroism, evidenced daily from her first tiny steps to the then-segregated Frantz school's front door to the desegregated school's final June day when her mission's goals were gloriously realized. Having daily partnered with Ruby as her teacher, I feel worthy to attest to her meriting all the honor and admiration that continue to be extended. I well know of her infectious indomitable spirit that helped to empower us and brighten our days.

I came to see in Ruby the personification of that powerful dictum: Duty First, Honor Always, Self Last, that reigned over my actions from its early imprinting over many years from its position high up on a double-decker blackboard in my Latin class. It was that very chalk-white towering bea-

con that guided me on that unforgettable, now historic "D" day, in making my way through that tumultuous sea of angry racist protesters to the newly-designated desegregated school's front door. I had given my word; I had to fulfill my commitment to the New Orleans' School's Superintendent that I would be there for that federal-court ordered desegregated first-grade classes that Monday morning.

Inside the school, safe it was; but that was the only difference from the outside I had just escaped. The same hostility of prejudice that ruled outside, ruled inside, but mutedly.

Robert Frost appropriately describes that world of November 14, 1960, New Orleans, in "Fire and Ice":

*Some say the world will end in fire  
Some say in ice/ I think I know  
enough of hate*

*To say that for destruction*

*Ice is also great/And would suffice.*

Charles Sumner's words are apt:

"Prejudice is sure to prevail where people do not know each other."

Indeed, generations of racial segregation has wrought its insidious effects

in prejudice, wildly or quietly expressed; however executed, they were hurtful and destructive.

Ruby Bridges had to daily experience both manifestations

of such injustice. Each day in making her way to the school's front door, she had to walk a path sharply edged with the cutting cruelties of hate and racism being shouted at her, a shining example of innocence; and then, she entered a place where she was a lone student amid a number of teachers who offered no recognition of her, ever.

Yet, with her unique qualities of character, Ruby was able to rise above

such adversity. She would appear before me in class as if from some Pacific place a guardian angel just had gently taken her, and she would slowly walk to greet me with her sweet smile and her beautiful eyes filled with a sense of wonder for whatever adventure our trip for two would offer that day. Alone and together we created our own oasis of love and learning, shutting out the peripheral hurts designed to diminish our mission. All possible, because Ruby and I shared that gift—having hearts free of prejudice; that connecting magic that let me fall in love with her when I first took her hand from the protecting hand of the Federal Marshal, and then hand in hand we together began our loving, lifelong journey. Ruby, the embodiment of courage and dedication, is indeed a model worthy of emulation and a guide for those very special times that beg for a bit of heroism.

While this story may be one's initial awakening to our nation's history of the injustices of racial inequality in educational opportunities, it is a story that represents an end point, real and symbolic, of the closing of the doors of racially segregated public schools.

Appropriate for this story are the words historian Barbara Tuchman applied to significant stories: "They are lighthouses in the sea of time." Only by refocusing out attention from the "lighthouse" to the "sea of time" will we discover the riches of a history we should explore; the names, faces, places, the stories that gave shape and direction to the stepping stones along the circuitous path to the victories of 1954 and 1960.

In the early 1800s the eloquent abolitionist Charles Sumner argued, in a suit to end racial segregation in Boston's common (public) schools, that "a school exclusively devoted

to one class must differ essentially in spirit and character from the public schools known to the law; it is a mockery to call it an equivalent." True equality, he claimed, could only be realized in full acceptance to the common (public) school. Sumner's claims were refuted by the highly esteemed Judge Lemuel Shaw, who while justified the idea of "separate but equal" as there was no law forbidding such separation or segregation.

In the late 1860s in Louisiana, a new constitution had to be written for it to be readmitted as a state of the Union. A number of the leading Creole activists in New Orleans passionately wrote into the new Constitution the provision for free public education for all, ages 6-21, regardless of race and color. However, not long after this milestone of justice, evidence of re-segregation in schools became apparent. A leading Creole newspaper editor/equality advocate, Paul Trevigne, filed a law suit to stop this reemergence of segregation. His claim, echoing Boston's Charles Sumner's thesis, argued that "racial segregation in public schools works an irreparable injury to the entire colored population of the city in that it tends to degrade them as citizens by discriminating against them on account of race and color."

Just as Paul Trevigne was to Sumner, the New Orleans' judge's verdict was to Judge Shaw's reasoning. Affirming the commitment to ensuring both races were treated precisely

Ruby, the embodiment of courage and dedication, is indeed a model worthy of emulation and a guide for those very special times that beg for a bit of heroism.

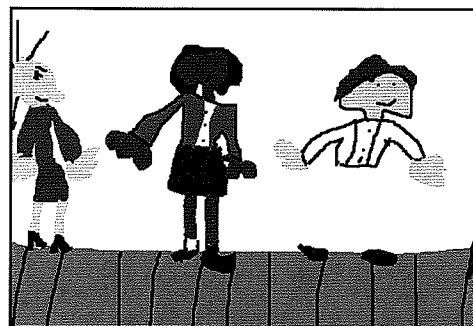
alike, the judge proclaimed "equality of rights did not necessarily imply identity of rights." The terse, final summary concluded: "white and colored children are compelled to attend different schools; that is all." And so it was in New Orleans—from the 1870s to 1960. Sadly, New Orleans

did not follow the Boston model where in 1855 the Legislature voted to end segregated schools.

In gazing over that "sea of time," students are inclined to ponder the idea—wasn't there anyone like our Rosa Parks

to challenge that segregation?—(a segregation that affected all areas of life's public activities.) Yes, indeed there was! That challenger was Homer Plessy, a Creole activist, carpenter by trade, who decided to take a seat on a railroad car reserved for whites. He expected he'd be taken off the car, charged with violating state law, but perhaps his case could eventually have the hoped-for effect. All happened as he expected, except the very last part. After his case lost its appeals in the Louisiana courts, it made its way to the U.S. Supreme Court. Here, once again, the reasoning of Judge Shaw in the 1850s and New Orleans' Judge Wood in 1877 were reaffirmed. The Supreme Court denied Plessy's attorney's claim stat-

Ms. Paula Reber, former first-grade teacher at Kelly Elementary School and current principal of Linntown Elementary School in the Lewisburg, PA, area school district, taught her students the story of Ruby Bridges. Here, two of her former students, Jared and Hannah, represent the story in art and words, respectively.



*Ruby Bridges was the first black girl to go into a white school. There were people who threatened to kill her when she walked by them outside. She was very smart and brave. She prayed for the people who were yelling at her.*

ing that “equality of the races before the law did not infer abolishing all distinctions such as race and color.” This now infamous *Plessy vs. Ferguson* Supreme Court ruling gave legal confirmation, justification to the idea and practice of separate, but equal (facilities). Perhaps in no arena was this decision more insidious than in that of education where its demoralizing, destructive effects were generations-long lasting.

While the Court’s decision is regarded as infamous, from the proceedings emerged two statements, now famous in legal lore. Written in the brief of attorney Albion Toriquee on behalf of *Plessy* were these stunning words: “Justice is pictured blind and her daughter, the Law, aught at least to be color-blind.” This same conviction was proclaimed by Supreme Court Justice John Marshall Hailan in his singular dissent: “Our Constitution is color-blind, and neither knows nor tolerates classes among citizens.” For our well-being and that of our nation, we all, students and teachers, ought to own these bedrock, now legendary, principles, honor and preserve them.

In the 1940s, Charles Hamilton Houston, an Amherst College and Harvard Law School graduate, advocated redirecting the focus of legal challenges to ending races as caste and to eradicating life as second-class citizens for America’s black population. It was to Thurgood Marshall, who as a student at Harvard was among a cadre of legal lions inspired by Charles Hamilton Houston, that a leadership role was given for this new

direction. Marshall, the chief legal counsel for the NAACP, was ready for that high hurdle to be brought down, to reach that major stepping stone to ultimate victory. That transformative marker came in the form of the case called *Brown vs. Board of Education*, Topeka Kansas, to be argued before the U.S. Supreme Court. The challenge was personalized by the compelling story of a seven-year-old black girl, Linda Brown, being refused admittance, because of her color, to the school nearest her home. Her poignant story attracted attention; the magnitude of the suit was of supreme importance to the legal and political world.

How ironic that

the school refusing Linda Brown’s enrollment was named for that legendary Charles Sumner, who a century earlier was the advocate in an identical suit on behalf of Boston’s young Sarah Roberts. Thus, two cases, a hundred years apart, told the same stories seeking the same goals: that of abolishing racially segregated schools.

Thurgood Marshall and his legal team had their claims validated in the Court’s

unanimous decision of May 1954, the most stunning sentence of transformative impact in our country’s becoming whole: “school districts must admit black students on a non-discriminatory basis, with all deliberate speed.” The impediment to securing racial justice was finally overturned. Yet, contrary to the popular assumption that deliberate speed meant “quickly,” its derivation in old English means “thoughtful, or considered.” In

other words, schools would be allowed to take their time in considering, thoughtfully, the implementation of such a judicial rendering.

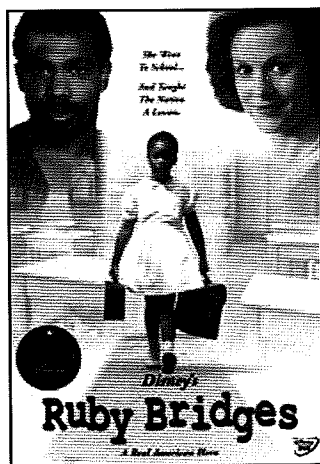
So it was, in those states holding tenaciously to their “States’ Rights” authority over the field of education and its designs, claimed such power from the 10th Amendment of 1791. It was in Louisiana that this charade of justice faced the fiercest, longest-lasting challenges. The state was relentless in its ruthless legal and

political machinations in refusing to comply with the law of the land as ruled in 1954. Segregated schools continued: in New Orleans the injustices were egregious: black children having to attend school in platoon, taking turns,

for there was not adequate physical accommodation for them, as well as being subjected to so many other destructive discriminations.

After nearly a hundred court-ordered rulings by the Federal Court in New Orleans being refused by the state authorities and the state Board of Education, the Federal Court knew it needed the support—the physical support—of the United States Government to have its rulings for desegregating the schools enforced, for justice to be realized.

On November 14, 1960, it was another little girl, Ruby Bridges, who gave face and identity to the nation-wide realization and acceptance of the primacy of the *Brown* decision, when escorted by Federal Marshals she entered the William Frantz School which up to that moment never had admitted a black student. Now, with a far quicker pace than that accepted by “deliberate speed,” school districts began to change. Today, students in their enriching diverse settings ought to know how “this” all happened;



*Ruby Bridges*  
(Walt Disney Home  
Entertainment 2004)

would they not all regard more sensitively, more protectively their world? For students today, Sarah Roberts, Linda Brown, and Ruby Bridges, serve as meaningful, memorable guides illuminating the path of our nation's historic, legal trail for justice.

Martin Luther King, Jr. believed "The arc of the Universe tends toward Justice." I offer the example of the story of Ruby Bridges who in 1960 needed the protection of the Federal Marshals to make her way into a public school.

For students today, Sarah Roberts, Linda Brown, and Ruby Bridges... serve as meaningful, memorable guides illuminating the path of our nation's historic, legal trail for justice.

In 2000 she was invited to the White House as a guest of the President of the United States, William Clinton, who presented her with the Presidential Citizens Medal.

Ultimately, whatever past generations' heroic efforts for justice achieved will be measured by the degree to which today's and future generations made the most of theirs.

References:  
*The Second Battle of New Orleans: The Hundred-Year Struggle to Integrate the Schools* by Liva Baker (HarperCollins, 1996)

*Sarah's Long Walk: The Free Blacks of Boston and How Their Struggle for Equality Changed America* by Stephen Kendrick and Paul Kendrick (Beacon Press, 2006)

Barbara Henry as teacher, Ruby Bridges, as first-grade student, uniquely alone and together, shared the year 1960-61 at the William Frantz School in its initial and now historical desegregation of the New Orleans school system. After a many-year teaching career, Ms. Henry now shares with students her life experiences with Ruby Bridges during that seminal event with significant aspects of its political and legal background, in the hope that students will more fully appreciate and further the gifts of a dearly won legacy.



The White House staff honors Ruby Bridges nearly forty years after being escorted to school by Federal Marshals.

## TO OUR READERS

We want to hear from you! The strength of this newsletter depends on your active participation. Our readers want to learn what is happening in your school or community—that's what our "From the Trenches" section is all about.

We welcome submissions of any kind, including letters, articles, and anecdotes. What has worked in your classroom, home, or school? What has inspired your dedication to character education? We also encourage recommendations for our Selected Bibliography, Movies, and Character Quotes.

**Our next issue will spotlight "CITIZENSHIP." The deadline for submissions is January 11, 2008.** Please address all correspondence to: Newsletter Managing Editor, Center for the Advancement of Ethics and Character, 621 Commonwealth Avenue, Boston, MA 02215.

## MEMBERSHIP FORM

Please use this form to initiate, renew, or update your membership.

### Friend of the CAEC\* (\$60):

Biannual newsletter, occasional mailings

### ASCD Character Education Network (\$20):

Biannual newsletter, occasional mailings

- ☐ NEW membership  
☐ Renewal

- ☐ NEW membership  
☐ Renewal

☐ Additional contributions \$ \_\_\_\_\_

\*NOTE: \$40 of each Friend of the CAEC membership is tax-deductible. We are a nonprofit organization and rely on grants and the generosity of our members. Any additional tax-deductible contribution you make to the CAEC is both needed and greatly appreciated.

TOTAL \$ \_\_\_\_\_

NAME \_\_\_\_\_

MAILING ADDRESS ☐ work ☐ home \_\_\_\_\_

OCCUPATION, TITLE, OR POSITION \_\_\_\_\_

PHONE ☐ work ☐ home \_\_\_\_\_

E-MAIL ADDRESS \_\_\_\_\_

Please make checks payable to CAEC at Boston University.

Return this form to:  
CAEC at Boston University, 621 Commonwealth Avenue,  
4th floor, Boston, MA 02215 or fax to 617-353-4351.

For more information, call 617-353-3262 or e-mail [caec@bu.edu](mailto:caec@bu.edu).



## JUSTICE—AN ELUSIVE NOTION? By Kristina Nilsson

Where...when... how does justice prevail? Most would assert that what we deem to be just often falls victim to expedience, indolence, selfishness, or weakness of character. Throughout history and in locations all over the world, countless human lives have come to horrific ends at the hand of evil or oppressive regimes, and we are reminded that "justice labors in extremity" where good people's craven natures provide the predicate upon which the "throne of tyranny"<sup>1</sup> is built.

In the 1600s, Francis Rochefoucauld uttered the maxim that "Love of justice is simply, in the majority of men, fear of suffering injustice," and even in our enlightened American constitutional republic, we read of cries for justice—from an inmate wrongly convicted and incarcerated (where DNA is the only instrumentality of exculpation) or from a murder victim's family, watching helplessly as a jury for lack of evidence declares itself unable to render a guilty verdict against the perpetrator. Victims of miscarried legal justice find their hearts ablaze with the desire for the "wild justice of revenge,"<sup>2</sup> and following hard upon their quixotic pursuit of the squaring of accounts may come the realization of the terrible price that justice sometimes exacts: "In the burrows of the nightmare/Where Justice naked is, Time watches from the shadow/ And coughs when you would kiss. In headaches and in worry/Vaguely life leaks away, And Time will have his fancy/To-morrow or to-day."<sup>3</sup> In our quotidian search to attain justice in an individual and piece-meal way, we argue with the IRS auditor about our tax return, or the police officer about a speeding ticket, or a professor about a lousy grade. Sometimes we echo the thought of U.S. Supreme Court Associate Justice Potter Stewart, who in typical laconic fashion opined that

"Fairness is what justice really is."

It would seem that requesting fairness is not unreasonable and that receiving one's due would lead to peace in one's heart. Yet, though Justice is classically depicted as blind to prejudice and holding the scales that would mete out equality, it (she) is as often described by poets as wielding a sword or "reddening the sky with her terrors"<sup>4</sup> or "feasting while the widow weeps"<sup>5</sup> for "Truth is [justice's] handmaid"<sup>6</sup> and truth is not always easy or comfortable to accept. And careful thought leads to the conclusion that justice is not easily defined in any given instance—it can at times depend at least in part on one's point of view.

Readily observing the injustices that humankind visits upon itself, in frustration we are moved by our fundamental natures to turn to God's power and mercy and love. Surely through God's wisdom, we can expect or at least hope that in the long run ultimate justice will be done, if not in this life, then in the life hereafter. (For the moment we may forget that we are given all by God's grace and not by our just desserts.) We are promised, after all, that "the Lord executes justice for the fatherless and the widow"<sup>7</sup> and that "there is no perversion of justice with the Lord"<sup>8</sup> and that the Almighty is "great in power and justice, and abundant righteousness he will not violate."<sup>9</sup> We are even given hope through the prophet Isaiah that the messianic king's governance shall be marked by "justice and righteousness from this time forth and for evermore."<sup>10</sup>

But our complacency does not long endure, for the Biblical scholar or even casual reader will discover that far more frequently mentioned than these promises are the exhortations and expressions of the strict requirement that God's followers themselves

execute justice. However articulated, the requisite remains the same: "Keep and do,"<sup>11</sup> "execute," "do not pervert,"<sup>12</sup> "do"<sup>13</sup> justice and its natural cohort, righteousness. In turn we will receive: "[The Lord] blesses the abode of the righteous."<sup>14</sup> Do we feel the tasks are unduly onerous? In Micah, our burdens are depicted as light: "What does the Lord require of you but to do justice, to love kindness and to walk humbly with your God?"<sup>15</sup>

Some of us tremble at the anticipation of the Dies Irae or Day of Wrath, when the Lord's own justice may be visited upon us for our failure to execute these simple tasks. With William Wordsworth, we implore, "With justice mark not Thou, O light Divine/My fault...."<sup>16</sup> Yet our passions of concern might be muted as we contemplate words of some of the ageless poets (Dante, Milton and numerous others), who depict God's justice as being paired with and tempered by mercy. "Soothing all passions/Redeeming all errors, Sheathing the saber/And breaking the chain."<sup>17</sup> Perhaps justice is at its most tenable tenacious when tempered with mercy—both in the meting out and in the receiving.

### References:

- <sup>1</sup> William Wordsworth, "Here Pause: The Poet Claims at Least His Praise"
- <sup>2</sup> William Wordsworth, "Sonnets: 'Upon the Punishment of Death' Series, 1839 – VIII"
- <sup>3</sup> W. H. Auden, "As I Walked Out One Evening"
- <sup>4</sup> Oliver Wendell Holmes, "God Save the Flag"
- <sup>5</sup> William Shakespeare, "The Rape of Lucrece"
- <sup>6</sup> Sydney Smith (1771-1845), quoted in "Lady Holland's Memoir" Vol. i, p.29.
- <sup>7</sup> Deuteronomy 10:18
- <sup>8</sup> 2 Chronicles 19:7
- <sup>9</sup> Job 37:23
- <sup>10</sup> Isaiah 9:7
- <sup>11</sup> Isaiah 56:1
- <sup>12</sup> Ezekiel 45:9
- <sup>13</sup> Deuteronomy 16:19
- <sup>14</sup> Jeremiah 22:3
- <sup>15</sup> Proverbs 3:33
- <sup>16</sup> Micah 6:8
- <sup>17</sup> "Memorials of a Tour in Italy, 1837 – XXII: At Florence," M. Angelo.

## JUST JUSTICE By Aaron J. Sinay

Upon entering the room, I ask my students to define justice. A few children immediately head to the dictionary; others stare in bewilderment as to the nature of their teacher's query. Seeking contextualization, some ask, "Can you put that in a sentence?" To elucidate the term, I turn to the dictionary myself. The Merriam-Webster Dictionary defines justice as: "2 a: the quality of being just, impartial, or fair b (1): the principle or ideal of just dealing or right action (2): conformity to this principle or ideal: RIGHTEOUSNESS c: the quality of conformity to law 3: conformity to truth, fact, or reason: CORRECTNESS."

Look in a thesaurus and you will find an exhaustive list of synonyms for just and justice. Scanning the page, I noticed that justifiable and justification are there, too, evoking images of court cases. All of the aforementioned words have an array of definitions. Definitions are nice, but how do we make meaning of them in the classroom, in our everyday lives, in our hearts? All too often children are given definitions, or words in context, to add to their repertoire, yet they walk away never truly understanding their meaning.

Children — and adults — need more than dictionary definitions to make sense of such important concepts. With regard to justice, who determines what is right or wrong? Just or unjust? We often rely on "others" to establish morals. Religion, parents, government, friends, and the media play large roles in this process. In a global society in which we are inundated with myriad opinions and ideologies, the determination of right becomes ambiguous. And what is right for one may not be right for another. Is there a just course upon which all decent people can agree?

Elementary age children often have difficulty understanding that the Golden Rule is not one-sided. We often impress upon our children the value of the Golden Rule from a self-centered perspective. However, "Do unto others as you would have done unto you," adopts new meaning when changed to, "do unto others as they would have done unto themselves."

This semantic shift of purpose implies a more empathetic push to understand how another may feel, and that their desires may be different from one's own. Children can "justify" their actions based on the original maxim because it allows them to treat others in a way that they consider to be acceptable and appropriate. It begs the question: What if the other person is not okay with how you treat him or her? If, for example, a boy bumps into another boy in line, he may be acting in accord with his own culture's acceptable parameters of behavior, but not those of the boy being bumped into. From a literal standpoint, no wrong has occurred; however, what if the boy being bumped into does not see it as such? You get the idea.

Defining truth also weighs heavily in the discussion of justice. Our society's ideological pendulum seems to be swinging back towards McCarthy Era xenophobic ethnocentrism, exacerbated by religious fanaticism in certain parts of America. The ability to appreciate others' just perspectives is clouded by the holding of "these truths" to be the only "truths"; however all "truths" presented in most civilizations have trueness and false-

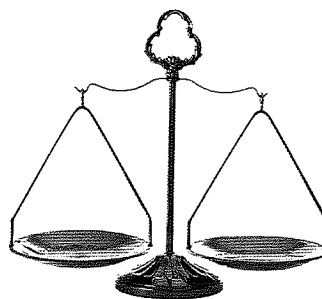
ness. Throughout history, ideals have been twisted to fit national goals; unjust wars have been justified by governments whose leaders evoke the "will of God" in sending their troops into battle. My students struggle to see the world through the eyes of others; with all of the atrocities committed by our own people against Afghan and Iraqi people, their confusion is understandable.

When is wrong somehow right? Where is the justice? With access to tomes of information and images from around the globe, our children's world has become increasingly smaller. From a teacher's perspective, I can see how children are amazed by all that is around them, and because of past and present civil rights work, they are

able to openly discuss ethical issues, and genuinely appreciate diversity of opinion and culture. Yet, this does not make discussions of justice any easier. We need to consider those principles that are universal; that are good for all individuals and societies.

Children, and perhaps more important, adults, can take heart in this fact as we analyze our politicians' comments and actions. Every day, I am inspired when I see my students, tomorrow's leaders, struggle with issues of justice and what is just. Their continual quest to make sense of justice in the world and to act justly toward their peers and within their communities offers hope that just justice will be achieved.

*Aaron J. Sinay is a fourth grade teacher at The Greenwich Country Day School in Greenwich, CT.*





Center for the Advancement of Ethics and Character  
Boston University  
621 Commonwealth Avenue, 4th Floor  
Boston, MA 02215

33-110-914-1383-9

[www.bu.edu/education/caec](http://www.bu.edu/education/caec)

NONPROFIT  
U.S. POSTAGE  
PAID  
BOSTON MA  
PERMIT NO. 1839

## UPCOMING 2007-2008 EVENTS IN CHARACTER EDUCATION

### NOVEMBER 1-3, 2007

#### Arlington, VA

CEP's National Forum on Character Education: Investing in America's Future  
Contact: Character Education Partnership

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

Announcement: The 2008 National Schools of Character (NSOC) Awards are now accepting applications! If your school has done outstanding work in character education and you would like it to be recognized as a NSOC (and win a \$20,000 grant award), please visit [www.character.org/nsoc](http://www.character.org/nsoc) or e-mail [nsoc@character.org](mailto:nsoc@character.org) for more information.

The CAEC is working with Hudson Public Schools and the Massachusetts Department of Education on CEP's State Schools of Character Awards Program (for Massachusetts applicants).

### NOVEMBER 15-17, 2007

#### New York, NY

AME 33rd Annual Conference: Civic Education, Moral Education, and Democracy in Global Society  
Contact: Association for Moral Education

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

On November 15th from 10:00 a.m. to 12:30 p.m., Dr. Bernice Lerner will present a session on *The Essence of Moral Education*.

### JANUARY 2008

#### Hiroshima and Tokyo, Japan

Dr. Bernice Lerner and Dean Linda Wells will be conducting research in Hiroshima and Tokyo, visiting schools of character that currently — or plan to — implement character education programs.

### MARCH 10-11, 2008

#### Singapore

Character and Citizenship Education Conference sponsored by Singapore's Ministry of Education. Dr. Bernice Lerner will be giving a keynote address, *For Love of Country: How Schools Foster Good Citizenship*, and a workshop, *The Theory and Practice of Character Education*.

### MARCH 15-17, 2008

#### New Orleans, LA

ASCD Annual Conference: *Reinventing Schools—Courageous Leadership for Positive Change*  
Contact: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development  
Telephone: 800-933-2723

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

On Monday, March 17th from 1:00 p.m. to 2:30 p.m., Ms. Lauren Terry, CAEC External Relations Coordinator, will give a presentation on *Visions of Virtue: Connecting Character Education and Art*.

### APRIL 28-29, 2008

#### Boston, MA

CAEC Spring Institute: Educating for Justice  
Contact: Center for the Advancement of Ethics and Character

Telephone: 617-353-3262

See page 9 for further information.

[www.bu.edu/education/caec](http://www.bu.edu/education/caec)