

# CHOOSING TO PARTICIPATE

In an increasingly interconnected world, it is more important than ever to inspire people of all ages to create positive social change. All are encouraged to consider the consequences of our everyday choices—to discover how “little things are big”—and to make a difference in their own communities.



A poster exhibit to encourage  
dialogue, engagement, respect,  
and participation in our  
communities

**Developed by Facing  
History and Ourselves and  
the Smithsonian Institution  
Traveling Exhibition Service**

# “To bigotry no sanction, to persecution no assistance”

George Washington, 1790



How has this idea, from a letter by America's first President, been expressed and debated throughout American history and echoed throughout the world?



# INSIDER OUTSIDER



Photo courtesy of Will Counts Collection, Indiana University Archives

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# DO SOMETHING DO NOTHING

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# US

# THEM

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# THEM

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# » CHOOSE DIALOGUE

EVERYONE  
HAS A STORY

How does sharing  
stories help build an  
inclusive community?

At the age of nine, Arn was separated from his family and taken to a work camp run by the Khmer Rouge, a fanatical communist group. He learned to play the traditional Cambodian flute and perform propaganda songs, a talent that saved his life. Before long, Arn was on the frontlines of battle, forced to fight for the very people who killed his family. Eventually he escaped and made his way to freedom.

In 1979, 14-year-old Arn Chorn, a survivor of the Cambodian genocide, stumbled into a refugee camp on the border of Cambodia and Thailand. A year after his adoption by a United Nations volunteer, Arn was a high school student in rural New Hampshire, struggling to fit in. Today he uses his voice to engage people across the globe in peace and non-violence.

“This is very different from having power with guns. I feel power just standing there and talking for the first time.”

Arn Chorn Pond

“He told us about the suffering he went through . . . He wasn’t a stranger any more after you heard what he had to say . . .”

Boston high school student

From language difficulties to cultural differences, adjusting to life in America was a challenge. While some classmates tried to reach out, others ignored or made fun of him. Gradually, with help from his parents and teachers, Arn began to speak publicly about his experiences and the importance of sharing stories with one another. He has founded several human rights organizations dedicated to rebuilding hope and spreading peace throughout the world.



Arn's engagement with young people often incorporates his boyhood love of music. Preserving Cambodian traditions is one focus of his humanitarian efforts.



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As reporters covered the story, the terrified 15-year-old headed for a bus stop amidst taunts and jeers. The harassment of black students and the few whites who befriended them continued throughout the year.

# » CHOOSE RESPECT

CRISIS  
IN LITTLE  
ROCK

Who is in your  
universe of  
responsibility?

In 1957, nine African American students were accepted for enrollment to integrate Central High, one of three all-white high schools in Little Rock, Arkansas. For 17 days that September, the Arkansas National Guard kept the “Little Rock Nine” from entering the school, but did nothing to disperse the crowd of angry whites gathered outside. Riveted to their television sets, Americans nationwide watched the crisis unfold. Finally, President Dwight Eisenhower sent 1,200 soldiers to Little Rock to protect the African American students and restore order. The next year, the three integrated high schools were closed.

(below left)  
The Arkansas National Guard formed a human fence to keep the students out of the school.

(below right)  
When Eckford reached Central High, she found herself surrounded by a mob of angry students, some of whom she had known since she was 10 years old.

“I remember this tremendous feeling of being alone, and I didn’t know how I was going to get out of there. I didn’t know whether I would be injured. There was this deafening roar. I could hear individual voices, but I was not conscious of numbers. I was conscious of being alone.”

Elizabeth Eckford, one of the Little Rock Nine





# » CHOOSE ENGAGEMENT

LITTLE THINGS ARE BIG

In the 1950s, segregation and ideas about “race” shaped the way Americans in all parts of the nation saw one another as well as the way they saw themselves. As writer Jesús Colón discovered on a subway ride in New York City, those ideas also influenced the choices people made.

Has there ever been a time when your “gut instinct” told you to act but you didn’t?

What prevented you from taking action?

“Suppose I approach this white lady in this deserted subway station late at night? What would she say? What would be the first reaction of this white American woman . . . with a valise, two children, and a baby on her right arm? But here is a promise that I make to myself here and now: if I am ever faced with an occasion like that again, I am going to offer my help regardless of how the offer is going to be received.”

Jesús Colón



Years later, Colón, a chronicler of the everyday lives of Puerto Ricans in New York, continued to regret that he “buried his courtesy” by not lending a hand to a young mother in need.

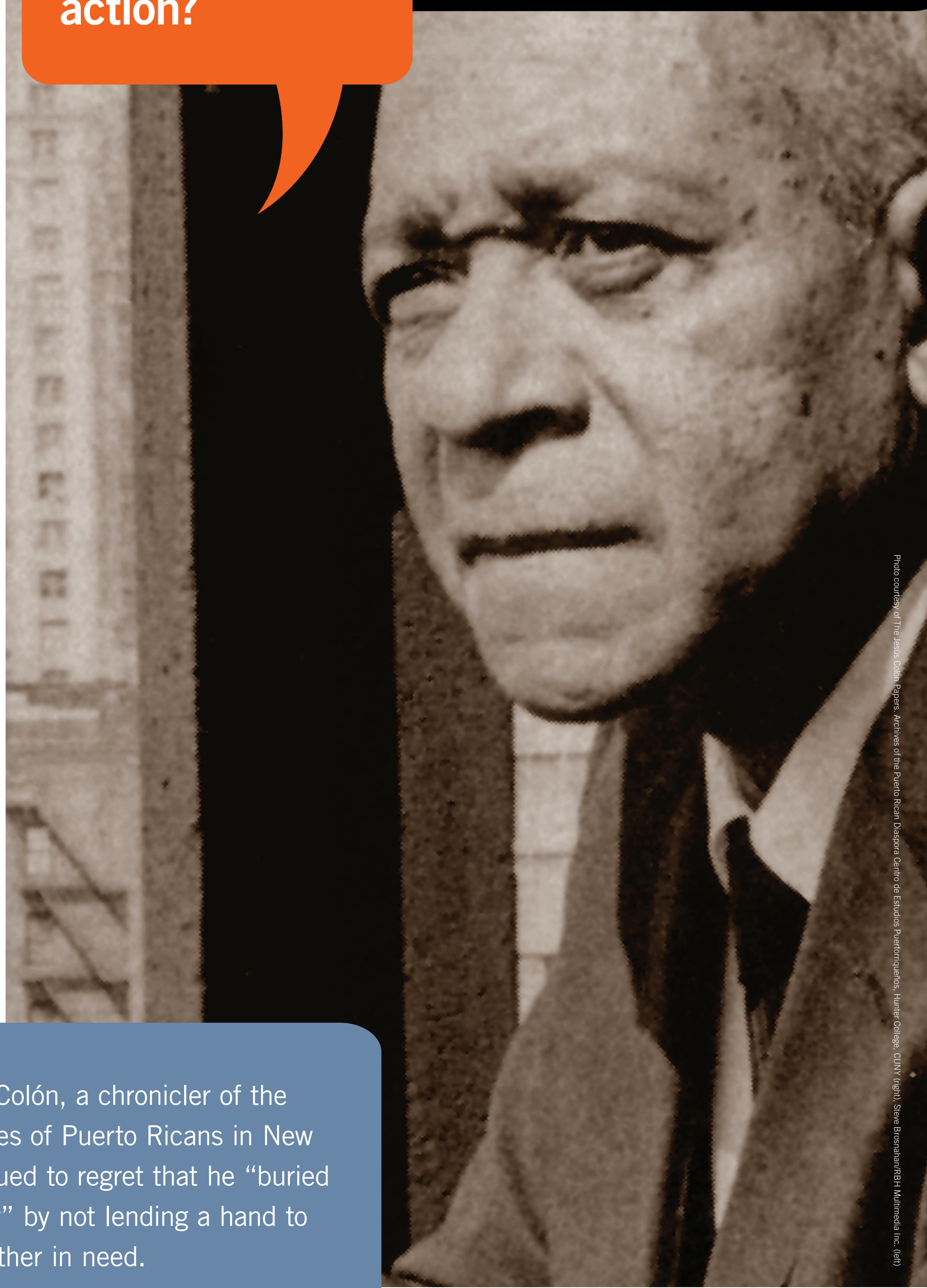


Photo courtesy of The Jesús Colón Papers, Archives of the Puerto Rican Diaspora, Centro de Estudios Puertorriqueños, Hunter College, CUNY (right), Steve Broshman/BH Multimedia Inc. (left)



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Scores of Billings, Montana citizens assembled holding menorahs in solidarity.



NOT IN  
OUR TOWN

Why do some people  
stand up to help  
people in need while  
others stand by?

“Hate crimes are not a police  
problem. They’re a community problem.  
Hate crimes and hate activity flourish  
only in communities that allow them  
to flourish.”

Former Police Chief Wayne Inman, Billings, Montana

# » CHOOSE TO PARTICIPATE

Hate-filled fliers marked the start of a campaign to make Montana and other western states a “white homeland.” Then came intimidation—racial slurs, death threats, and the harassment of Jews, Hispanic Americans, Native Americans, and African Americans. And then, on December 2, 1993, the hatred turned into violence. Someone hurled a cinderblock through a child’s bedroom window decorated with Star of David decals and a menorah, the symbol of Chanukah. As the attacks escalated, people in Billings began to take a new look at their community and themselves. As an act of solidarity, people across Billings displayed menorahs in their windows, kicking off a powerful campaign that forced the hate groups to back off. The story was documented in a film *Not In Our Town* (niot.org) and soon inspired an international movement against hate.

Members of the local painters union volunteered to repaint a neighbor’s home defaced by racist graffiti.



Officers Protecting Antisemitic Acts, Billings, MT, courtesy of the Howard Greenberg Gallery © Frederic Brenner (top), photo courtesy of the Billings Gazette (bottom)



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Are you someone  
who speaks out?

Do you take a  
positive stand on  
behalf of others?

Are you an  
upstander?

Or are you a  
bystander?

# HOW WILL YOU CHOOSE TO PARTICIPATE?



“Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful  
committed citizens can change the world. Indeed,  
it is the only thing that ever has.”

Margaret Mead (1901-1978), anthropologist



“The world is too dangerous to live in—  
not because of the people who do evil, but  
because of the people who sit and let it  
happen.”

Albert Einstein (1879-1955), scientist

Do you make  
the world a better  
place?



Facing History and Ourselves ([www.facinghistory.org](http://www.facinghistory.org)) is an educational organization whose mission is to engage students in an examination of racism, prejudice, and antisemitism in order to promote the development of a more humane and informed citizenry. By studying the historical development of the Holocaust and other examples of genocide, students make the essential connection between history and the moral choices they confront in their own lives. The Smithsonian Institution Traveling Exhibition Service ([www.sites.si.edu](http://www.sites.si.edu)) creates tangible connections to the Institution through traveling and virtual exhibits that present the full breadth of Smithsonian scholarly and collection resources that engage, educate, and inspire. Special thanks to the Walmart Foundation ([www.walmartfoundation.org](http://www.walmartfoundation.org)), the National Sponsor of *Choosing to Participate*.