

Students: Know Your Rights!

ACLU PEOPLE
POWER



“You have to stand up
for some things in
this world.”

Marjory Stoneman Douglas

HISTORY

1955: Claudette Colvin

- Nine months before Rosa Parks's famous stand, 15-year-old Claudette Colvin refused to move to the back of a bus in Montgomery, Alabama. She was arrested for her protest.



Photo: Wikimedia Commons

HISTORY

1969: Mary Beth Tinker makes Supreme Court law

- In 1965, 13-year-old Mary Beth Tinker and others were suspended for wearing black armbands to protest the Vietnam War.
- She sued, leading to the landmark Supreme Court decision that bears her name.



Photo: Register File Photo

Students **don't** “shed their constitutional rights to freedom of speech or expression at the schoolhouse gate.”

U.S. Supreme Court

But schools do have the power to regulate students during school hours and on school property.



You have the right to speak out

- As long as you're not disrupting the functioning of school.
- The key word here is “disrupting.”



Photo: Bill Clark/CQ Roll Call via AP

What about clothing?

- Schools can impose “content-neutral” rules (like “no hats”).
- Outside those rules, you can wear what you want, as long as it’s not “**disruptive.**” (Watch out for that key word.)



Photo: Pascal Terjan/Flickr

Walkouts

- Even if the school can punish your actions, it can't punish your ideas.
- Punishments for missing class will vary, so find out the policies that govern your school.



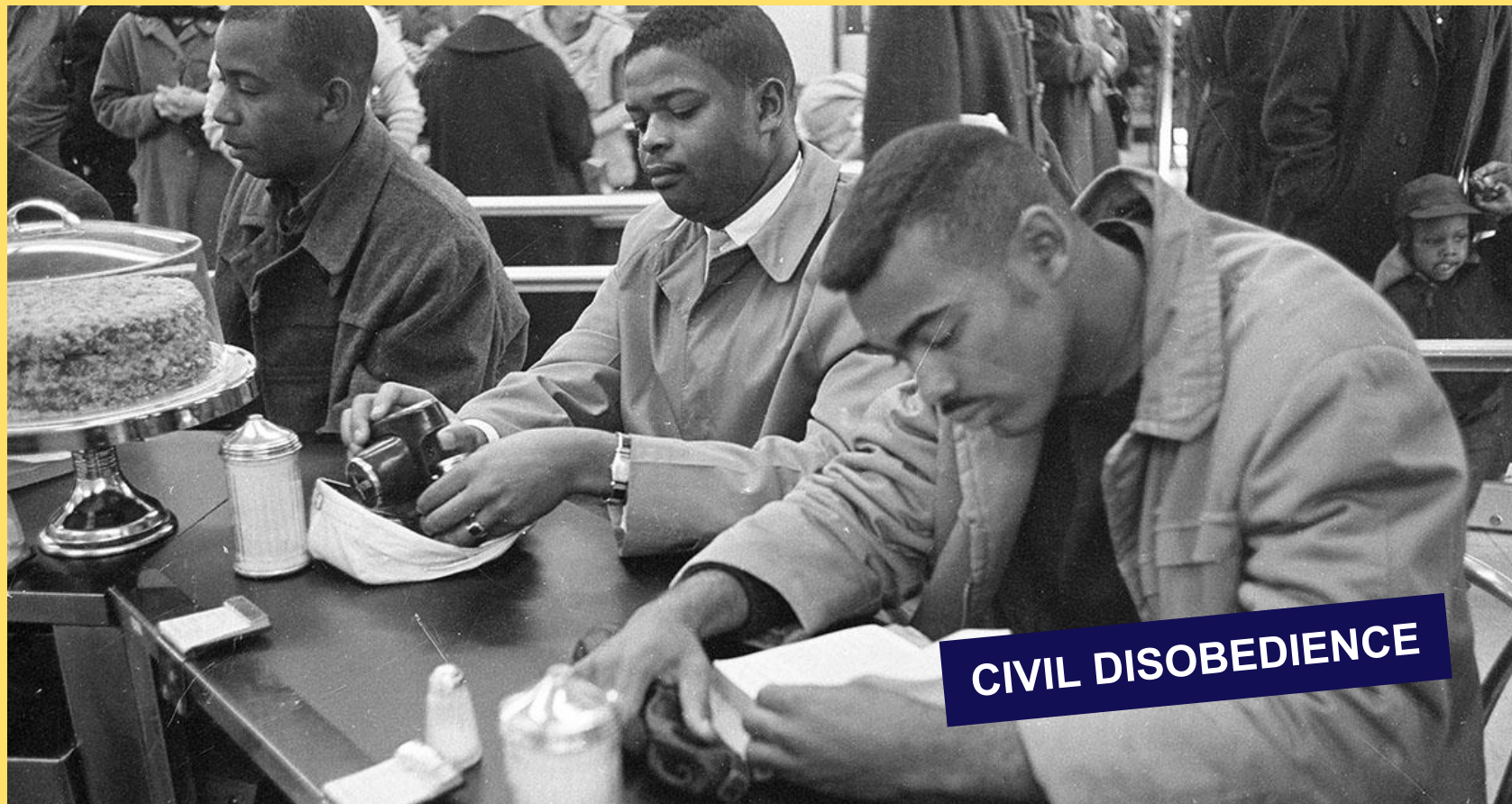
Photo: Fibonacci Blue/Flickr

“Nonviolent direct action seeks to create such a crisis and foster such a tension that a community which has constantly refused to negotiate is *forced to confront the issue*. It seeks so to dramatize the issue that it can no longer be ignored.”

Martin Luther King, Jr.

“Letter From a Birmingham Jail”

CIVIL DISOBEDIENCE



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Outside school, you enjoy essentially the *same rights to protest and speak out* as anyone else.

First Amendment Basics

- It's nearly impossible for the government to silence you — outside of school time and school property — in the “big three”: public parks, streets, and sidewalks.
- You're likely to be most protected if you organize, protest, and advocate off campus and outside of school hours.



Photo: Giannis Papanikos/Shutterstock

OUTSIDE OF SCHOOL

Are my teachers following me on Twitter?

- Some schools have tried to punish students for off-campus speech.
- The ACLU has challenged this. If it happens to you, let us know.



Photo: Ben Garver/The Berkshire Eagle via AP

OUTSIDE OF SCHOOL

What can't schools do?

- Discipline or censor non-disruptive speech.
- Discipline non-disruptive clothing that doesn't violate neutral dress codes.
- Discipline you for your ideas, rather than your actions.

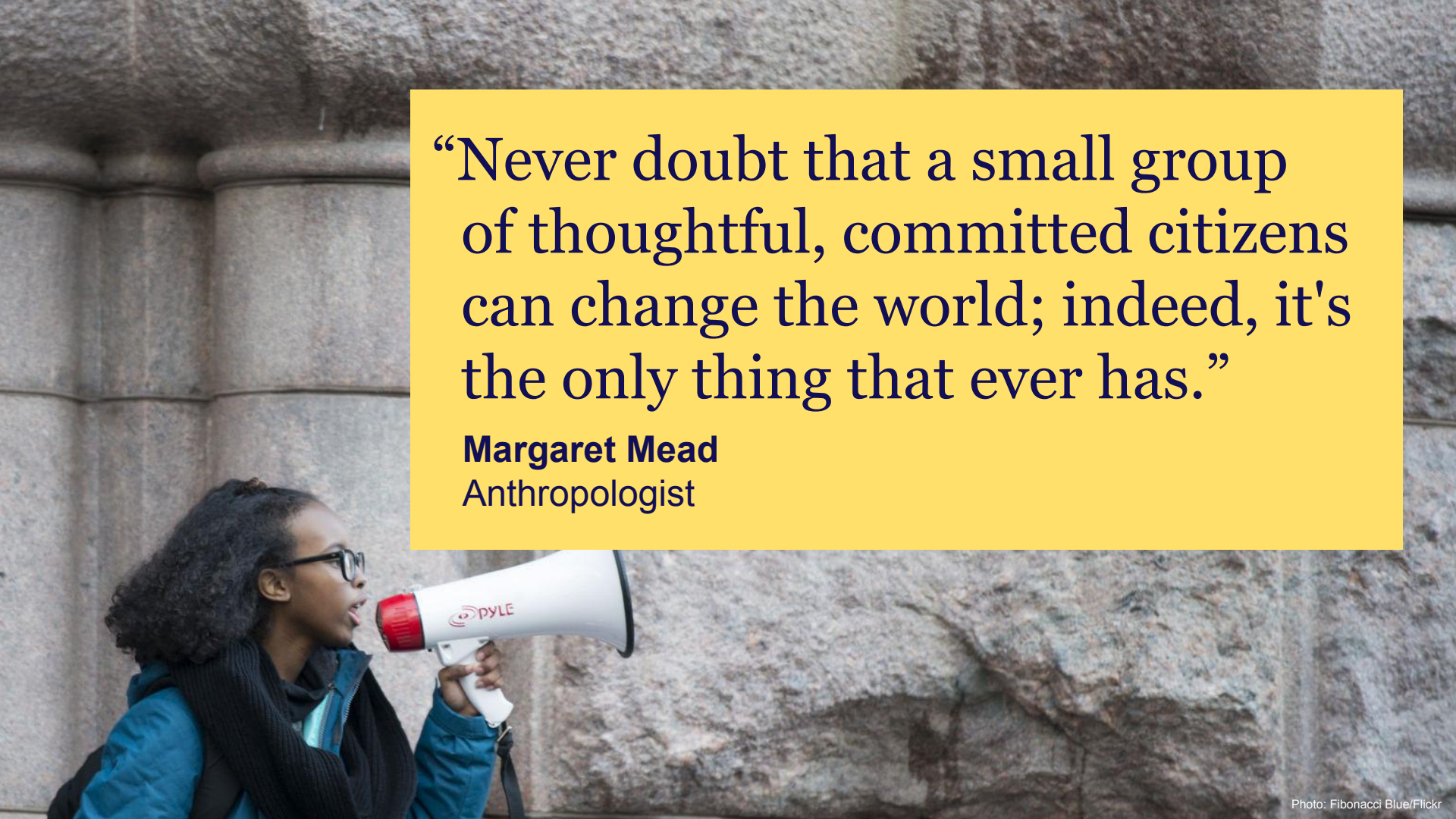
What can schools do?

- Exercise discretion.
- Even when schools can discipline students, that doesn't mean they should.

IN SUMMARY

Now that you know your rights, go out and use them:

- Find out the rules.
- Speak out and dress up.
- Protest all you want outside school.
- Decide what feels right to you.



“Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it's the only thing that ever has.”

Margaret Mead
Anthropologist

If you think your rights
have been violated,
let us know:

aclu.org/affiliates

Share a story about
your walkout:

**Text WALKOUT
to 82623**

