

# 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.



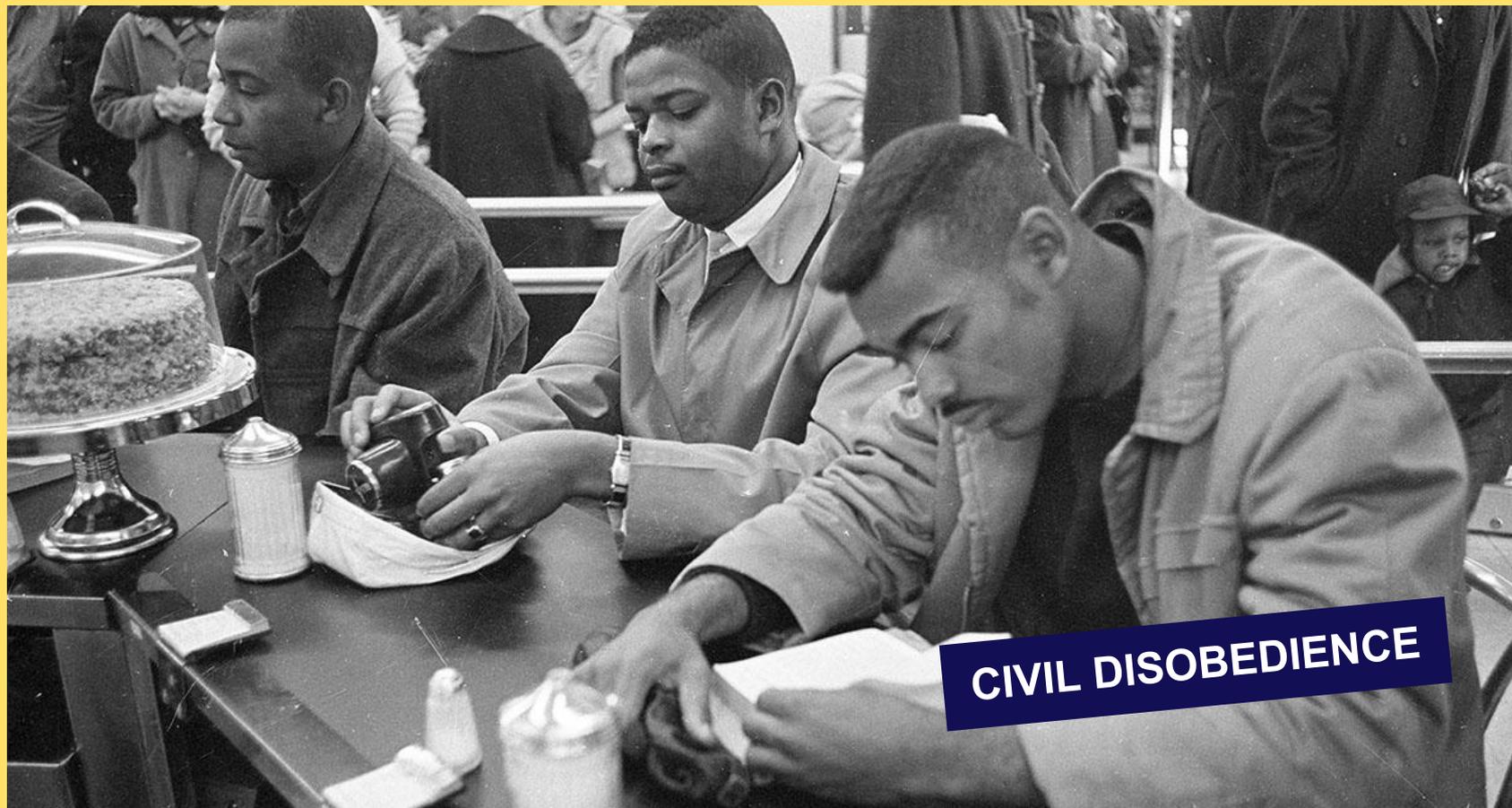
Photo: Fibonacci Blue/Flickr

“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?

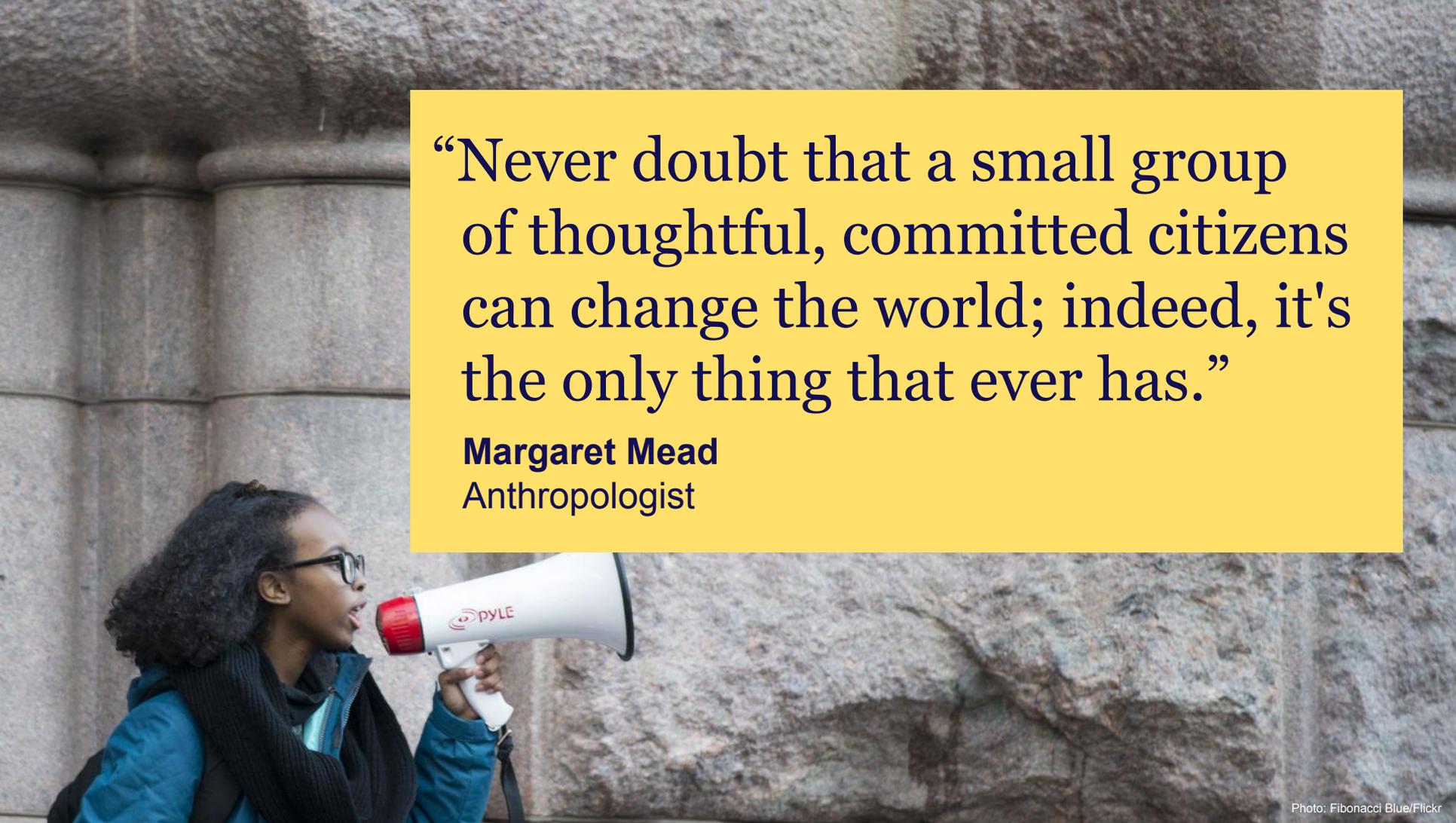
- Discipline or censor non-disruptive speech.
- Discipline non-disruptive clothing that doesn't violate neutral dress codes.
- Discipline you for your ideas, rather than your actions.

# What can schools do?

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

# 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](https://aclu.org/affiliates)

Share a story about  
your walkout:

**Text WALKOUT  
to 82623**

