



Lawrence Watson (left) performs a song as members of the Little Rock Nine clap along. The performance was part of the "50th Anniversary Celebration: Integrating Little Rock Central High School," held at Faneuil Hall in Boston on Oct. 24. Also present at the event was Gov. Deval Patrick, who thanked the Nine for all they had done in the face of racial bigotry to open doors for students of color in the years since desegregation. (AP photo/Lisa Poole)

MBTA workers rail against job inequities

Liz Hoffman

For the last 12 years, Joyce Washington has worked as a machinist for the private company contracted by the Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority (MBTA) to run its commuter rail system. When a job posting went up in July for an opening as a foreman, the African American woman applied.

She said she never received an interview, and the jobs went to two white men with less experience.

"It's not what you know; it's who you know," Washington said. "I'd been hearing a lot about how they were trying to change things, and I did have faith that I would be treated fairly. I wasn't."

The question of fairness is now a matter before the federal court. Washington and four other workers filed racial discrimination charges, claiming that they were kept out of the loop when new job openings were announced and passed over for hiring and promotion opportunities.

The plaintiffs argue that attempts to promote workforce diversity in recent years have been derailed by a pervasive culture of racist attitudes, family favoritism and organizational chaos.

The suit, filed Sept. 26, names the Massachusetts Bay Commuter Rail Company (MBCR), the private company that runs the commuter rail division of the MBTA, as the defendant.

The employees are "not an inherently litigious group of people," said attorney Laurie Renea Houle, an associate at Pyle Rome, the law firm representing the plaintiffs. "They want to see that MBCR becomes a good place to work, and right now, there are real problems there with respect to fair employment practices."

MBCR says it has worked over the past three years to address systemic problems it inherited from Amtrak, the rail system's operator from 1986 until 2003, but cautioned that change comes slowly in the railroad industry.

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They kept on truckin'

Little Rock Nine tells Boston crowd how perseverance overcame segregation in the 1950s

Brian Mickelson

Lydia Maxwell wanted to see the face of history.

She wanted to see, in the flesh, the faces of the teenagers who 50 years ago walked brazenly into Little Rock Central High School and became the first black students to integrate a school in the Deep South.

She wanted to see the Little Rock Nine.

Last Wednesday evening, eight of the Nine attended a celebration of their efforts at Boston's historic Faneuil Hall, sponsored by the Charles Hamilton Houston Institute for Race and Justice at Harvard Law School and the City of Boston.

For Maxwell, it was a chance to see those who had suffered to stand up for what was right.

"I wanted to see people who went through a very serious and tough time in order to get a quality education," Maxwell said. "Just to be afforded the same opportunities that other groups got. That takes a lot of strength, a lot of courage."

Malden resident Carrie Peapples, a state auditor and graduate student at the University of Massachusetts-Boston, agreed. As a white woman, Peapples knows she'll never be able to feel what it means to be a person of color. But frequent conversations with a black co-worker have given her better insight into the vital role

that Little Rock Central's integration played in the civil rights movement and beyond.

"I'm just astounded by the courage of [the Little Rock Nine] as teenagers," Peapples said. "The inner conviction that they, too, deserve this; that we are all created equal. I cringe when I see the pictures, when there were only nine of them against nearly the whole town and the National Guard. I don't think I could do that."

Moderated by Houston Institute Founder and Harvard law professor Charles J. Ogletree Jr., the night included award presentations to the Nine by Mayor Thomas M. Menino, state Rep. Willie Mae Allen, Boston

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Heating bills threaten welfare of Hub kids

Brian Wright O'Connor

When temperatures drop and winter winds start blowing, Kettle Leonard feels not just cold, but fear.

Her son Cory, 3, already weak from sickle cell anemia, risks getting even sicker. Keeping the thermostat above 65 degrees is not a matter of comfort — it's a medical necessity.

Paying for that heat on a \$9-an-hour salary while putting food on the table for Cory and her 2-year-old daughter Kayla nearly breaks Leonard's budget

during the winter months — and with oil trading at over \$90 a barrel, she fears it will only get worse.

"When it's cold, I'm so afraid," said Leonard as Kayla, crawling on her lap, reached up to wipe away her mother's tears. "It's heartbreaking. Nobody wants to see a child live like this."

Leonard's dilemma, and that of millions of parents like her, took center stage at a hearing last week where Dr. Deborah Frank, chief of the Growth Clinic at Boston Medical

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Nobel laureate Tutu trumpets reconciliation

Talia Whyte

Archbishop Emeritus Desmond Tutu spoke to over 700 Boston school students Monday about why they need to take charge of ending violence on the city's streets. The Nobel laureate was the keynote speaker at a youth symposium hosted by Wheelock College called "Bridges to Hope and Understanding: Exploring Truth and Reconciliation."

The symposium highlighted the archbishop's reconciliation tactics that have been used with youth in his native South Africa, and recognized five Boston youth who are "emerging leaders" working in their communities on issues related to violence.

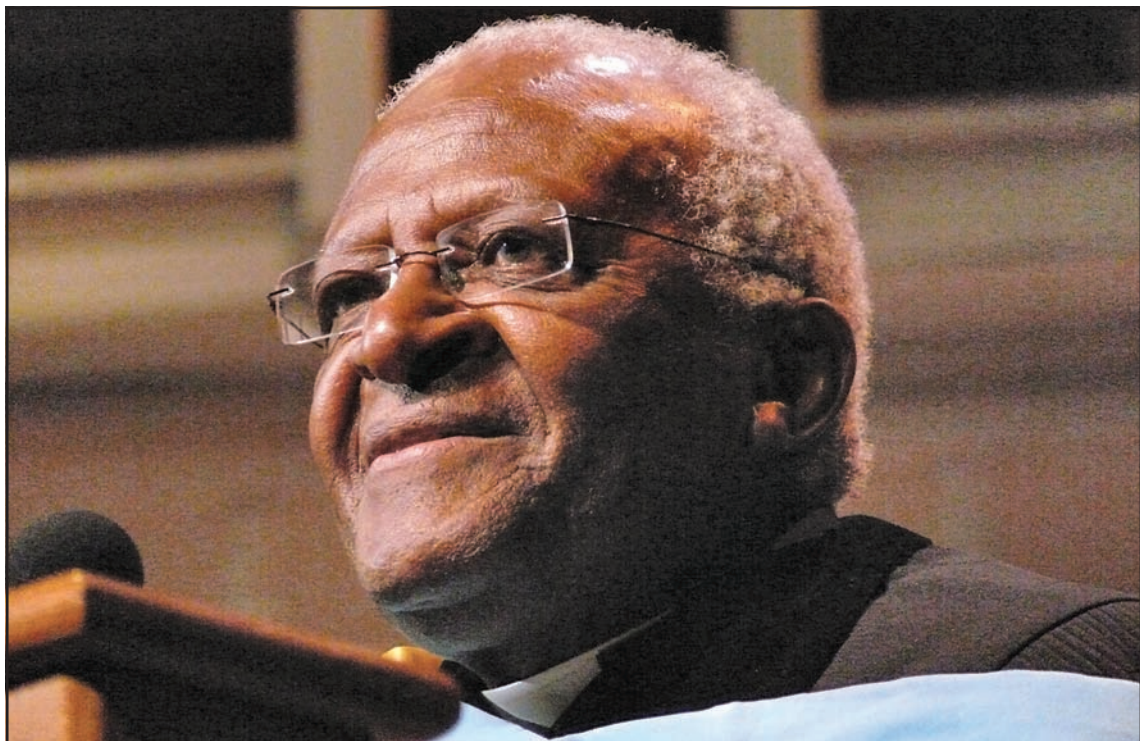
"There are some good things going on with our youth in the city,

and we never hear about the positive stuff they are doing," said Jackie Jenkins-Scott, president of Wheelock College. "We thought it was perfect to invite the archbishop because he loves working with youth. We felt very fortunate that he wanted to be part of this."

The event also brought Boston's youth together with top local political officials, activists and local celebrities, including Gov. Deval Patrick, Boston Public Schools Superintendent Dr. Carol Johnson, City Councilor Charles Yancey and TV anchorwoman and humanitarian Liz Walker.

Patrick stressed to the audience that he and the others were there because "we love you, and we want you to love yourselves."

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Archbishop Desmond Tutu speaks to an audience of over 700 BPS students gathered at Wheelock College for a symposium on truth and reconciliation, Monday, Oct. 29. The archbishop's

visit came at a time when Boston has seen 58 murders over the past year, and the deaths of several innocent youths have stirred community leaders. (Don West photo)

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