

# Planet Playground

## Alternative Heroes Program

Objectives: (1) To expose students to a more ideologically varied and culturally diverse array of role models.

(2) To give more exposure to people whose ideologies have kept them from receiving recognition comparable to other more palatable role models

(3) To broaden the definition of hero in our society to our children

### How?

- A series of one-person programs put on during school assemblies or in smaller groups in which an actor takes on a character, tells their story, and then answers questions
- Afterschool groups or field trips to a particular site at which students will be exposed to up to three performances
- Actors will study their subject's lives in depth, taking on accents, traits, and the personality of the subject; as well as an encyclopedic knowledge of the events in that subject's life. This will have to be, however, as much performance as education, in so much as the students must never feel like they are, *ulp, learning.*

### Logistics

The Alternative American Heroes Program will depend upon enthusiastic principals. We will need people who are not intimidated by taking students off the traditional learning tack for a day. This should not be that much of a problem, as most educators love a break in the routine. I propose frequent visits to area middle schools and give each principal an individualized presentation of our program. I feel that middle school is the perfect arena for this type of program, as kids that age are just beginning to draw the connection between famous names they've heard before and the real lives of these people.

## Frequency

How often we conduct a performance will depend solely on the actor's preparedness to take on the character. Planet Playground has a knowledgeable senior staff who will research a subject simultaneously with the actor – often helping with the research – and will be the actor's first audience. Since our inquiries are likely to be more detailed than most students', it should prove sufficient. We will also prepare transcripts for concerned parents and principals.

## Background

The inspiration for this project came from the growing realization that, as we get older, more and more of our heroes tend to be people we never learned about in school. With the perspective of age also comes the realization of why many of these men and women are kept out of textbooks, often for political reasons or lifestyle choices. Similarly, wider exposure to varied sources gives fuller pictures of the lives of some of the people we *are* exposed to – and the glare of perspective is not always so flattering. We thought it was time to give the past the interpretation of historians rather than politicians.

## What?

Some of the notable historical figures from U.S. history will include:

**Paul Robeson**—Shakespearean actor, Broadway singer, political activist, All American football player

**Eugene Debs**—labor-rights leader; presidential candidate

**Elizabeth Cady Stanton**—women's-rights activist

**Henry David Thoreau**—philosopher, human-rights activist

**Victoria Woodhull**—activist, presidential candidate

**Sarah and Angelina Grimke**—human-rights activists, writers

**Charles and Mary Beard**—historians

**Ralph Waldo Emerson**—philosopher