



2211 Arca Drive • Anchorage, Alaska 99508

(907) 277-6677
Fax (907) 272-2161
TTY (907) 258-2232
E-mail: info@arc-anchorage.org
www.arc-anchorage.org

PRESS RELEASE

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Contact: Ann WingQuest
Director of Public Affairs
(907) 277-0340

THE ARC OF ANCHORAGE CONDEMNS NEGATIVE DEPICTION OF PEOPLE WITH INTELLECTUAL DISABILITIES IN FILM “TROPIC THUNDER”

[Anchorage, AK] – The Arc of Anchorage announced a campaign to address the portrayal of an individual with an intellectual disability in the movie “Tropic Thunder” which opened nationwide this week. The Arc of Anchorage joins the efforts of The Arc of the United States and other national advocacy groups mobilizing around the use of hate-speech in referring to persons with intellectual disabilities. “Tropic Thunder” features Ben Stiller portraying “Simple Jack,” a person with an intellectual disability; this character is repeatedly referred to as a “retard,” “moron,” and “imbecile.”

The Arc of Anchorage is marshalling people with intellectual disabilities, their families, self-advocates, members and other stakeholders to establish a presence around the movie theaters where the film is being shown. “We are urging the general public not to spend their hard-earned money on this film because of its deplorable and demeaning view of a person with intellectual disabilities,” said Gwen Lee, Executive Director of The Arc. “This is an opportunity to educate our neighbors about the rights of people with disabilities – most importantly to live with the same dignity afforded every ordinary American,” added Gwen Lee.

Fay Peace, a self-advocate, said, “As a person with an intellectual disability, I have been called the R-word in my life. I live and work in the community and treat everyone I meet with respect. I deserve that same respect. Movies that disrespect me and my rights should not be supported. ‘Tropic Thunder’ is supposed to be a comedy, but there is nothing funny about putting down people with disabilities.”

A Rally for Respect will happen on Saturday, August 16 at 1 pm at the Anchorage theaters currently screening the movie (Century 16 and Totem Theater). Organizers and advocates will be distributing flyers on the R-word and hate speech, along with other educational materials.

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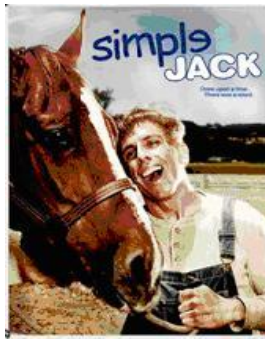


"Tropic Thunder" Background Information

[Tropic Thunder](#) is a comedy/action adventure film scheduled for release on August 13. DreamWorks is the film's producer and Paramount is its distributor.

The film features popular actors Ben Stiller, Robert Downey Jr. and Jack Black as self-absorbed actors filming a big-budget war movie on location. Through a series of freak occurrences, they are forced to become the soldiers they are portraying.

Stiller plays Tugg Speedman, a fading action star who earlier failed in his bid for an Oscar as "Simple Jack," a man with an intellectual disability. "Simple Jack" is featured as a film-within-a-film, with Stiller sporting a classic institutional bowl haircut and bad teeth. The film within-a-film's promotional poster (below) bears the subtitle "Once upon a time there was a retard." A promotional website for the Simple Jack movie, which has since been withdrawn, bears the slogan "What he doesn't have in his head, he makes up for in his heart." A satirical plot synopsis quotes a critic as saying that Speedman's Jack was "one of the most retarded performances in cinema history."



Several staff members of The Arc of the United States, along with self-advocates and other representatives of the disability community, were able to preview the movie. It is clear that the film's depiction of people with intellectual disabilities is derogatory and demeaning. The Arc of the United States, in coalition with other disability groups across the nation, is calling for a national dialogue on the language and treatment of people with intellectual disabilities.



THE R-WORD ISN'T JUST HURTFUL; IT'S HATE SPEECH.

WHAT IS HATE SPEECH?

Hate speech occurs when a majority group freely makes jokes about a minority group including negative stereotypes and negative images, not just language. It is commonly seen as harmless by the majority, but it sets the stage for more severe outlets for prejudice, harm and abuse.

PEOPLE WITH DEVELOPMENTAL AND INTELLECTUAL DISABILITIES ARE AT GREATER RISK OF VIOLENCE.

- 1 in 3 children with disabilities are victims of some form of abuse, sexual abuse, or neglect. (Sullivan & Knutson, 2000).
- Individuals with developmental disabilities are 4 to 10 more times more likely to be victims of a crime than people without disabilities (Sobsey, et al., 1995).
- Children with developmental disabilities are at twice the risk of physical and sexual abuse compared to children without disabilities (Crosse et. al., 1993).

PEOPLE WITH DEVELOPMENTAL AND INTELLECTUAL DISABILITIES ARE DISENFRANCHISED FROM JUSTICE.

- Many people with intellectual disabilities are not able to articulate the abuse they've sustained.
- Many victims with intellectual disabilities are not perceived as credible witnesses.
- Abuse often occurs as part of name calling, bullying, hazing, or other targeted attacks based on disability status. **THIS IS A HATE CRIME.**

ENDING THE USE OF THE R-WORD IS MORE THAN A "POLITICALLY CORRECT" NOTION.

- "Retard," "retarded," "idiot," "imbecile," and "moron" are derogatory and dehumanizing terms – on par with the N-word when used to describe African Americans, and various hateful terms used to describe members of the Jewish, gay and lesbian and other minority communities.
- Self-advocates with intellectual disability have clearly stated that negative language leads to harmful action, discrimination, abuse, negative stereotypes, disenfranchisement, and violence.

SHOULDN'T PEOPLE WITH INTELLECTUAL DISABILITIES JUST LIGHTEN UP? IT'S A JOKE!

- **NO!** People with intellectual disabilities have a history of institutionalization, genocide, forced sterilization, segregation, and being regarded as "less than human."
- More than any other group, they experience record unemployment, significant physical, mental and sexual abuse, and limited rights.
- This discrimination and victimization continues, in large part, due to antiquated, discriminatory portrayals in the media and pervasive prejudice.

WHAT'S FUNNY ABOUT THAT?



What Do You Call People with Disabilities?

Men, women, boys, girls, students, mom, Sue's brother, Mr. Smith, Rosita, a neighbor, employer, coworker, customer, chef, teacher, scientist, athlete, adults, children tourists, retirees, actors, comedians, musicians, blondes, brunettes, SCUBA divers, computer operators, individuals, members, leaders, people, voters, friends or any other word you would use for a person.

People First Language recognizes that individuals with disabilities are - first and foremost - people. It emphasizes each person's value, individuality, dignity and capabilities. The following examples provide guidance on what terms to use and which ones are inappropriate when talking or writing about people with disabilities.

People First Language	Instead of Labels that Stereotype and Devalue
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• people/individuals with disabilities an adult who has a disability a child with a disability a person	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• the handicapped the disabled
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• people/individuals without disabilities typical kids	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• normal people/healthy individuals atypical kids
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• people with intellectual and developmental disabilities he/she has a cognitive impairment a person who has Down syndrome	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• the mentally retarded; retarded people he/she is retarded; the retarded• moron, idiot, imbecile he/she's a Downs kid; a Mongoloid; a Mongol
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• a person who has autism	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• autistic
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• people with a mental illness a person who has an emotional disability with a psychiatric illness/disability	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• the mentally ill; the emotionally disturbed is insane; crazy; demented; psycho a maniac; lunatic
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• a person who has a learning disability	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• he/she is learning disabled
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• a person who is deaf he/she has a hearing impairment/loss a man/woman who is hard of hearing	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• the deaf
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• person who is deaf and cannot speak who has a speech disorder	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• is deaf and dumb mute

- a person who is **blind**
a person who has a visual impairment
man/woman who has low vision
- a person who has **epilepsy**
people with a seizure disorder
- a person who **uses a wheelchair**
people who have a mobility impairment
a person who walks with crutches
- a person who has **quadriplegia**
people with paraplegia
- he/she is of small or **short stature**
- he/she has a **congenital disability**
- accessible **buses, bathrooms, etc.**
reserved **parking** for people with disabilities
- the blind
- an epileptic
a victim of epilepsy
- a person who is wheelchair bound
a person who is confined to a wheelchair
a cripple
- a quadriplegic
the paraplegic
- a dwarf or midget
- he/she has a birth defect
- handicapped buses, bathrooms, hotel rooms, etc.
handicapped parking

(Prepared by the Texas Council on Developmental Disabilities)



"Tropic Thunder" Action Partner Organizations

The Alliance for Inclusion in the Arts	www.ntcp.org
American Association of People with Disabilities *	www.aapd.org
Autistic Self Advocacy Network *	www.autisticadvocacy.org
Best Buddies *	www.bestbuddies.org
Council of Parent Attorneys & Self Advocates *	www.copaa.net
Down Syndrome Association—Los Angeles	www.dsala.org
National Coalition on Self-Determination	www.nconsd.org
National Council on Independent Living Centers *	www.ncil.org
National Down Syndrome Congress *	www.ndsccenter.org
National Down Syndrome Society *	www.ndss.org
Parent to Parent USA	www.p2pusa.org
People First of California	www.peoplefirstca.org
Self Advocates Becoming Empowered (SABE) *	www.sabeusa.org
Special Olympics International *	www.specialolympics.org
TASH *	www.tash.org
The Arc of the United States *	www.thearc.org

For more information on finding a local chapter or point of contact for these partners, please check out the website listed. The Arc also recommends contacting other local disability groups in your community. These groups may include:

- *Other chapters of The Arc*
- *Parent groups*
- *Developmental Disabilities Councils*
- *University Centers for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities*
- *Local provider agencies*

** Note: The organizations with an asterisk have signed the "Statement of Support and Solidarity" as of August 11, 2008 (see next page for a copy).*

Statement of Support and Solidarity

We, as organizations and self-advocates representing members of the disability community, recognize the dignity of individuals with intellectual disabilities, the challenges they and their families face, and the meaningful and powerful contributions they make to their families, their communities, and their country.

We acknowledge that individuals with intellectual disabilities have been subject to discrimination, abuse, and exclusion from society throughout history;

Recognize that the more than 200 million individuals with intellectual disabilities worldwide, and more than 6 million individuals with intellectual disabilities in the United States, have suffered severe consequences including: institutionalization, physical, sexual, and emotional abuse, denial of education, employment, and healthcare, segregation, and targeted hate crimes;

Acknowledge that “attitudes and expectations of the public, in part, determine the degree to which children, adolescents and adults with intellectual disabilities are able to learn, work and live alongside their peers without disabilities.” (President’s Committee for People with Intellectual Disabilities, 2004);

Understand that for over four decades, the media has consistently mischaracterized people with intellectual disabilities; (Pardun, 2005)

Realize that over 80% of U.S. adults surveyed feel that media portrayals are an obstacle to the acceptance and inclusion of people with intellectual disabilities. (Pardun, 2005)

Recognize that many people, including those with intellectual disabilities, their families and friends, consider the “R-word” just as offensive as the “N-word;” and

Declare that under the guise of “parody,” whether intentional or not, *Tropic Thunder* demeans, insults, and harms individuals with intellectual disabilities by using the “R-word.” Furthermore, it perpetuates derogatory images and stereotypes of individuals with intellectual disabilities including mocking their physical appearance and speech, supports the continuation of inappropriate myths and misperceptions, and legitimizes painful discrimination, exclusion, and bullying;

TOGETHER, we declare our intention to make the public aware of the need to create and foster inclusion of individuals with intellectual disabilities as a matter of social justice by:

- **Boycotting** the film and explaining to our nation’s children why the film is harmful;
- **Educating** the public, especially young people, about intellectual disabilities through far-reaching awareness campaigns to ban the use of the “R-word,” and other initiatives to permanently change attitudes and promote inclusion;
- **Calling on** Hollywood studios, writers and executives to pledge to make this the final chapter in a sullied history of demeaning portrayals of individuals with intellectual disabilities and assist in public education campaigns;
- **Requesting** that Congress investigate and conduct oversight of how Hollywood portrays individuals with intellectual disabilities and the effect these portrayals have on our nation and around the world.