

HUMAN RELATIONS NEWS

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Newsletter of the Louisiana Council on Human Relations

Incorporating the Baton Rouge Human Relations Council News

LCHR Annual Meeting of June 11, 2005

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Louisiana Council on
Human Relations
c/o 2137 Cedardale
Baton Rouge, LA
70808

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The BRCHR hosted the Annual Meeting at the Southern University Catholic Student Center on a sunny Saturday afternoon. Kudos to Dr. Eva Baham, who chaired the program, a panel on "Americanisms within the Lens of Cultures in Louisiana."

The panel members included Louisiana natives Ms. Michaeline Prejean, of Syrian descent; Ms. Mary Battle, representing the Creole culture from Southeast Louisiana; Herbert Wiltz of C.R.E.O.L.E., Inc., from Southwest Louisiana; and Dr. Barry Ancelet, representing Acadian culture. From overseas, but now residing in the Baton Rouge area were Dr. Joseph Meyinsse, an immigrant from Ghana; Elnur Musa, from Sudan; Dr. Pat Meyinsse, from Jamaica; and Mr. Naresh Sharma from India.

Speaking from a perspective of being a guest in other countries were two members of the Southern Univ. community, Michael Baham, and Dr. Warner Anderson. Dr. Anderson immigrated as a child from Nicaragua and currently directs overseas study in Mexico and elsewhere

for Southern Univ. students. Michael Baham has been one of these students. He is also the son of Eva Baham. He has learned Spanish and has traveled and studied in Mexico and Costa Rica. Both Michael and Dr. Warner spoke of how enriching travel and study abroad is, and how important it is to make an effort to learn the language, to make friendships, and connect with the lifestyle of the people.

The rich "gumbo" of reflections from the panelists was too varied to adequately convey all that was said, but a few highlights may convey how enriching a program it was.

Some of the panel concentrated on their personal odysseys of immigration, from more traditional or tribal cultures to the fast-paced, post-modern culture of the U.S. They were able to realize dreams and overcome daunting adversities, and their stories were touching, humorous, and awe-inspiring. We were also treated to a number of native costumes. Board member Elnur Musa, a native of the Sudan, was resplendent in his white Sudanese robe and turban, and filled a display table with crafts and artifacts from the Sudan.

Those who were from cultures long-settled in Louisiana

focused on the survival of traditions and folkways, the challenge of maintaining continuity and connection with the past while adapting to the present, and moving forward. The strong bonds of family and kinship ties served as the foundation that allowed this evolution, without loss of pride and connection to their roots.

Food and music seemed to be particularly strong vectors of such cultural connection and continuity. Such practices as the naming of children to honor ancestors and heritage was found to be less well observed, but an important way to maintain such connection and continuity. Also noted was the importance of the passing down of family lore, including the times of sorrow and suffering, which some may choose to forget. Thus it is possible for a family, people, or culture to celebrate their resiliency and determination in overcoming adversity and oppression.

The pastor of the Catholic Student Center, Fr. George Lundy, S.J., provided a welcome and said the grace before our luncheon. We are glad to welcome him as a new member of the Council.

We also were happy to learn of importance of peace and justice concerns in campus ministry at Southern. The Moratorium Campaign against the Death Penalty is now centered there.



Annual Conference 2005

Presentation of Oliver-Sigur Awards

The Annual Meeting had one of the best turn-outs in some years. Following a delicious catered box lunch, it came time for the presentation of the Oliver-Sigur Humanitarian Awards.

Dr. Pat Rickels introduced the Award itself as dedicated to the memory of Dr. James Oliver and Msgr. Alexander O. Sigur. Both ranked high in the fields of higher education and religion. They were willing to make a difference, sometimes at personal cost at a time when their contributions were crucial, on behalf of improvement of human relations and creating opportunity for those previously excluded from the benefits of society.

It is the custom since its inception, to present the award to two individuals who have distinguished themselves in advancing human relations. Dr. Rickels related the distinguished company of past recipients as including the following: Judge Jules Edwards and Professor of Criminal Justice Burk Foster; Ms. Lorna Bourg of Southern Mutual Help Assn. and State Senator Don Cravins; environmental advocate Dr. Wilma Subra and author Ernest Gaines. Joining their company in 2005 are Ms. J'Nelle Chargois, Maurice, and Sr. Helen Prejean, New Orleans.

Joseph Dennis introduced Ms. Chargois. She is owner/manager of Lafayette station KJCB and has devoted considerable air-time to public affairs discussion and call-ins. She has distinguished herself as the

President of the Lafayette chapter of the N.A.A.C.P. Under her tenure, the group has taken a more activist profile and increased the membership base. Under her leadership the chapter tackled tough issues of school integration and police brutality.

Ms. Chargois is a true humanitarian, who has initiated programs directed toward the needs of low-income, at-risk children. These include multi-parish campaigns to collect school supplies for families who cannot afford them. She is particularly proud of founding the Heritage Band, which is now winning awards at marching band competitions. This is an opportunity that is enormously enriching for children who may not be able to afford the costs now required in public school band programs.

J'Nelle has proven herself a go-getter, a ball of energy, dedicated to community betterment, and one who has made a difference in standing up for the voiceless. In accepting the award, she voiced her fond recollections of Dr. Oliver.

Dr. Rickels introduced Sr. Judith Brun of the Srs. of St. Joseph, who was given the next award to present to a Louisiana treasure, Sr. Helen Prejean, for her tireless work to eliminate the death penalty, a goal which L.C.H.R. has long espoused. A native of Baton Rouge, she has become a world-renowned figure, and has been a nominee for the Nobel Peace Prize and a

recipient of many prestigious awards. Although Sr. Helen is domiciled in New Orleans, her work keeps her constantly on the move, and on the weekend of June 11th she was speaking in Kentucky. Her one-woman campaign has led to more questioning and protesting of the death penalty. Although it remains on the statutes, there has been a marked drop-off in its application.

Sr. Judith noted that this Award is just as meaningful as all the other awards Sr. Helen has received and even a bit more, coming from fellow Louisianans who have stood by her when so many others have turned a deaf ear to her pleas for of justice and equality. Sr. Judith found it an honor to be asked to present the award, and knew Sr. Helen would surely be delighted to be honored by our organization. L.C.H.R. members and friends are reminded that Sr. Helen is the best-selling author of *Dead Man Walking* (1993) and now *The Death of Innocents* (2004), which indicts our criminal justice system for disregarding fair judicial process, resulting in innocent people repeatedly being sent

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See page 8 for B.R. residents.

LCHR ANNUAL BUSINESS MEETING 2005

to death chambers.

Following the presentation of the awards, President Joe Dennis chaired a very short L.C.H.R. business meeting. Most of the regular business was dispensed with until the next board meeting. However, members of the Board whose terms were expiring were unanimously re-elected to another term. Added to the Board by acclamation was Ms. J'Nelle Chargois; so, by presenting an award we gained even more in return.

The next Board meeting will be held July 9th at the home of Ms. Doris White in Plaisance, LA, northeast of Opelousas in St. Landry Parish. Board members are expected to attend, and a reminder and directions will be

NEWSLETTER NOTE

We received positive remarks concerning the first quarter newsletter. For the first time in LCHR's 41-year history there was color on the first page. However, it was found that the cost was prohibitive, given the Council's modest monetary situation.



MORE ON THE MORATORIUM

sent out a week prior to the meeting.

The Moratorium Campaign, a national effort initiated by Sr. Helen Prejean, has been revived. Former Gov. Ryan of Illinois, alarmed to find that innocent people were being sent to their death due to glaring legal inequities, put a moratorium on executions in that state. This was seen as an opening for restraint, short of outright abolition, which could garner majority and bipartisan support in death penalty states. The Moratorium Campaign had merged about a year ago with Equal Justice USA.

Now the new Campaign Director is Fr. George Lundy, S.J. As noted on p.1, Fr. Lundy is a campus minister at Southern University and hosted the 2005 annual meeting at the Catholic Student Center. He comes from a career of distinction in ministry and administration at Loyola University. We are happy to welcome him as a new member of LCHR.

The Campaign's focus for the coming year is to "develop, in partnership with state and local organizations, state-specific cases for moratoria, and to build a larger membership base to strengthen our capacity to bring about change." LCHR several years ago joined the Moratorium as an institutional member.

The Campaign's website is www.moratoriumcampaign.org. Sr. Helen's books (see p. 2) are available on-line for purchase. The phone number of the Cam-

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paign is (225)775-8814.

INDIGENT DEFENSE

Louisiana has one of the worst indigent defense systems in the United States. It's not unusual for accused persons to spend more time in jail waiting for trial than they could possibly serve if found guilty and sentenced in a timely manner. Often the only time the defendant and the attorney meet is in the courtroom, moments before the trial. In one parish, clients, including in death penalty cases, get only about two hours of an attorney's time. There are national standards for provision of indigent defense. It's about time that Louisiana measures up to them.

THE FRENCH QUARTER

in New Orleans is a playground for booze and sleaze. The Greater New Orleans Fair Housing Action Center has been studying the racial practices of these establishments, and finds a continuing practice of racial discrimination. Black patrons have for years been discriminated against by steering, carding, intimidation, harassment, and price-gouging. This pattern is not confined to just a few establishments.

This came to climax recently when four white bar bouncers at one such place killed a black patron. Initially three were charged with the lesser charge of negligent homicide. After some months of picket lines outside the Razzoo Bar & Patio on Bourbon St., by people determined to

LOUISIANA NEWS NOTES, cont.

see that justice was not denied, manslaughter charges were filed. The deceased, Levon Jones, was put into a choke hold when he allegedly intervened for a friend, who was refused entrance because he did not meet the dress code. The nightclub has maintained that its bouncers acted appropriately because they were assaulted by Jones. (*The Advertiser* 6-5-05)

HISPANIC GROWTH

throughout the South and in Louisiana has been observed by recently released Census Bureau report. The Hispanic category may be inclusive of people from a wide variety of cultures and languages. One out of seven Americans now fit in this category. Their presence in Louisiana has been small but has grown considerably in just a few years' time. This pattern of growth will continue, given that the Hispanic-Americans are mostly younger, and bearing children at a higher rate than other sectors of the population. Yearly growth is estimated at 3.6% nationally. This compares with Euro-Americans, whose growth rate is lowest, at 0.8%. The country is becoming more multicultural; by 2050 the white portion of the population is expected to be in the minority.

The Census counts 3,320 Hispanics in Lafayette. However, Hispanics are believed to be notoriously undercounted in population data studies. Following Hurricane Lili, workers who

came in for the clean-up liked the community and decided to stay. They are looking for a better quality of life than is available in the larger cities such as Houston. They have already contributed much to Lafayette and will increasingly do so in the future. (*The Advertiser* 6-9-05)

ABBEVILLE, LA

The power of one person to make a difference was evident in this small town, the parish seat of Vermilion Parish.

Kim Broussard, the owner of Silhouettes Hair Salon, sat in her chair on the street corner to protest that the city of Abbeville was about to turn off the water to her business without giving her a 24-hour notice. Construction work was being done on the road and the water lines needed to be cut off, but Broussard was informed of this by a note stuck on her door the same morning, that the water would be shut off at noon for an undetermined time period.

Being a salon owner, Ms. Broussard had clients scheduled. Without more notice she would be unlikely to get appointments rescheduled and would lose business for the better part of the day.

The City Works Supervisor was unrelenting on delaying the turn-off time, so she took to her chair in the sun, next to where the work was to be done. She was advised to move for safety reasons, and the police were called to the scene. The City Engineer arrived on the scene also, and he conceded that the work was not an emergency and could be delayed a day. Other businesses as well were not given timely notice, he admitted, although he still in-

sisted that the City was acting properly in giving only three to four hours notice. Although she would also lose business on Saturday, her busiest day, Kim decided she could live with this.

Though this may not seem a weighty matter, it does illustrate something very important: the power of one person to make a difference. The tendency of the powers-that-be is at times to run roughshod over others who may seem "in the way." It takes a brave and bold woman such as Kim Broussard, to take a stand in a firm, nonviolent manner. In doing so, she invited others to listen to her, and thus, all parties in the conflict could bend enough to reach a solution they all could live with. We need more citizens such as Kim Broussard, who can't be intimidated, and who are willing to take a stand at the cost of some personal comfort.

(from *The Abbeville Meridional* 5-29-05)

SEN. MARY LANDRIEU

was at the forefront of the adoption in the U.S. Senate of a Resolution apologizing for over 60 years of resistance by the U.S. Senate to the passage of legislation outlawing lynching. More than 4,700 persons, mostly African-American, were victims of lynching between 1882 and 1968. About 200 anti-lynching bills were introduced over a 62-year period, and none passed. Though this record of shame has finally been repudiated, it is too late for those denied their basic rights under the law, and who were subjected to mob brutality and terror.

RELIGIOUS RIGHT CRUSADE AGAINST GAYS HEATS UP

The spring 2005 issue of *Intelligence Report*, a publication of the Southern Poverty Law Center of Montgomery, AL, in a cover article, documents a concerted campaign against civil standing or rights being extended to gay and lesbian Americans.

In 2003 the U.S. Supreme Court overturned the convictions of two Texas men arrested for violation of the sodomy statute. The court's opinion was that the men were "entitled to respect for their private lives" and that private consensual sexual conduct should not be criminalized. Opinion polls showed the majority of Americans understood and were comfortable with the court's ruling, and this stretched far across the political divide. 75% of Republicans and 88% of Democrats polled voiced approval.

What has been come to be known as the Religious Right, however, was livid with indignation. In recent years they have engaged in a well-organized campaign to discredit the courts and undermine the independence of the judicial branch of government.

After the court decision, a "call to arms" was raised and the some of the religious right ministries were mobilized to do political battle. A major outcome of their efforts was the introduction of ballot referenda initiatives to undercut any possibility of court intervention, through ironclad constitutional bans on legalization of same-sex marriage. They were then able to get these on the ballot during the 2004 Presidential election. Their core constituency in fundamental and non-denominational churches were mobilized to the polls. Efforts to counter were under-funded and the referenda sailed to easy victories. This effort provided a boost not noted in advance polling data, and it assured the reelection of the President by a majority, despite Democratic success in mobilizing an improved number coming out for their standard-bearer,

than had voted in 2000.

The demonization and political mobilization around homosexuality has had a 30-year successful run for conservative religious groups. Starting in 1977, singer Anita Bryant founded the first national anti-gay group, Save Our Children, and successfully overturned an anti-discrimination law in Dade County, FL. Some of the powerhouses of the anti-gay efforts over the years have been James Dobson of Focus on the Family, the Rev. Jerry Falwell, and the Rev. Jimmy Swaggart. They thunder apocalyptic denunciations and support pseudo-scientific notions of "curing." Falwell, for one, on national TV placed the blame for the 9/11 terrorist attacks on pagans, abortionists, feminists, and gays and lesbians "who are actively trying to make that an alternative lifestyle."

The *Intelligence Report* article lists 12 major groups which are behind the anti-gay crusade. Among these is the Family Research Council of Washington, D.C. This was a small right-wing think tank that was reorganized in 1988, funded by Focus on the Family, and headed by Gary Bauer. It engages in lobbying and action campaigns and has been headed since 2003 by former Baton Rouge area state legislator Tony Perkins.

The *Intelligence Report* issue also contains an interview with the Rev. Mel White. White was a ghost-writer and media consultant to leaders of the religious right, including Falwell and Pat Robertson. After two decades of being in the closet and trying to deny his homosexuality, he came to terms with it and wrote a best-selling memoir in 1993, *Stranger at the Gate: To be Gay and Christian in America*. In 1998, he and partner Gary Nixon founded Soulforce, an organization for education and direct action founded on the principles of nonviolence of Gandhi and the Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr. Soulforce mobilizes people to nonviolently protest at both mainline and fundamentalist gatherings. In May there was a weekend of prayer vigils with civil disobedience at the headquarters of Focus on the Family in Colorado Springs, CO.

Soulforce is a spiritually-based movement of gay and lesbian Christians, who believe the Gospel stands for justice and equality for all and challenges Christians to speak truth to those who use their religious authority to continue to perpetuate untruths about homosexuality and gay people. The efforts of the religious right constitute spiritual violence and emotional abuse, according to White.

Now that "godless Communism" can no longer be raised as a means of mobilizing political fundraising and power, gays and lesbians have become a convenient scapegoat. Rev. White contends that personally many of these religious leaders are not obsessed about the so-called "gay agenda". A few have gay children who have come out. However, it works as a wedge issue for creating fear and loathing, and mobilizing people around these negative emotions.

White also expressed sadness and disappointment that Pope John Paul II had taken the Catholic Church in the direction of anti-gay polemics and coalition with the religious right. He feels that if the Pope had spoken to affirm that "God made gays, and they should be who they are" the wall of exclusion and denial would have collapsed. White says that if this would ever happen "It would end terrible confusion and allow gay people to be what God created them to be....if we're always on the defense and always on the outside...we are not allowed to exercise our gifts on behalf of humankind."



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5978 Linden Ave.
Baton Rouge
LA 70805

Tel. (225) 356-3059
Fax: (225) 769-3810

www.brchr.org
tbrcohr@yahoo.com

PRESENTATION FOR 2005 OF- POWELL-REZNIKOFF AWARDS

The Baton Rouge Human Relations Council's presentation of the Powell-Reznikoff Humanitarian Awards was done at a dinner held at the offices of Blue Cross/Blue Shield. This year's honorees were two who were associated with the historic Baton Rouge Bus Boycott of 1953: Johnnie A. Jones, Sr., and Martha White. Jones at the time of the boycott was recently graduated from Southern University Law School. He took on the challenge of being counsel for the boycott committee. He continued to challenge segregation in the courts and the community and served as a board member of the B.R.C.H.R. Martha White was the 'Rosa Parks' of the Baton Rouge bus boycott, whose simple act of refusing to give up her seat to a white person led to her arrest and set the boycott movement in motion. A third recipient of the award was Gertrude "Trudy" K. Meyers. She has a long record of tireless advocacy on behalf of peace and justice on numerous fronts. She is a 40-year member of B.R.C.H.R. She served on its Board of Directors and personally knew the two persons in whose memory the award is named.

The late Fr. Elmer Powell was the pastor of St. Paul the Apostle Catholic Church in Eden Park. In 1967 he became the first African-American and the first Catholic clergyman to head the E.B.R. Ministerial Association. Rabbi Marvin Reznikoff was Rabbi of Liberal Synagogue (now known as Beth Shalom). He also distinguished himself in inter-faith and human relations work and was an important voice in promoting the desegregation of the public school system.



BRHRC ANNUAL MEETING 2005

Following the June 11 LCHR annual meeting, the BRHRC held its annual business meeting, chaired by out-going President Richard Haymaker. Treasurer Dan Yannitell reported fiscal year 2004-05 income was \$1,545, expenses \$1,746, and end-of-the-year balance \$766. The newly constituted board is listed in the sidebar to the left. Elected were: Pres. Marjorie Green, Vice-Pres. James Cross, Sec. Joyce Robinson, Asst. Sec. Glorious Wright, Treas. Dan Yannitell, Board members replacing Rogers Newman and Leslie Burris were Rodney Wooten, Diola Bagayoko, and Dorothy Crockett. Haymaker remains on the Board as Immediate Past President; he distributed copies of his annual President's report, which will be made available on the website, also listed on the sidebar.

MORE AWARD PRESENTATIONS IN B.R.

Maxine Crump was the recipient of the Y.W.C.A.'s Racial Justice Award for a lifetime of service to eliminate racism. She has been indispensable in the Y's annual Dialogues on Race. She was the first African-American to reside at the L.S.U. dormitories, and the first to anchor on WAFB television. Willie Johnson, a past recipient of the Powell-Reznikoff Humanitarian Award, was on hand to congratulate Maxine, and to speak on "The Power of Dialogue".

A long-time member of the Baton Rouge Council was recently honored. Mrs. Mary Frey Eaton, former prominent EBR Parish Metro Council member, received the Rev. Mary Moody Award from the Mi-City Development Alliance. The award is in named in honor of Rev. Moody, an inspirational figure in Baton Rouge, who also is a long-time member of the Baton Rouge Council.

At the May L.S.U. Commencement, Dr. Huel D. Perkins was awarded the honorary degree of Doctor of Humane Letters. Dr. Perkins is a member of the L.C.H.R. Board and also a long-time member of the Baton Rouge Council. He is a former Southern University professor, department chair, and dean. He then was recruited by L.S.U., becoming the first African-American to achieve professorial tenure, to serve in the upper echelon of the L.S.U. Administration, and to be named a Professor Emeritus. Dr. Perkins has taught and distinguished himself in a broad area of the arts and humanities.

STAND UP FOR CHILDREN

A Rally took place on the steps of the State Capital on Apr. 26th, entitled "Stand Up for Children". It was organized by the Children's Coalition. The BRCHR played a major role in establishing this event last year, and was again a partner in the effort, along with some 80 other organizations. Gov. Blanco was the keynote speaker, and Sibal Holt, the Louisiana AFL-CIO President, gave the call-to-action. The Advocate covered the event, and a link to the news story can be found on the BRCHR website.

JUNETEENTH DAY

Juneteenth is June 19th. A celebration of some 60 people attended an early commemoration at the Odell S. Williams Now and Then Museum of African-American History. This date has significance to African-Americans, especially in Texas and Louisiana, as on that date in 1865, slaves received word from advancing Union troops, that they had been freed under the Emancipation Proclamation of 1862. Sadie-Roberts-Joseph, curator at the Museum, spoke of how the youth of today should better appreciate this history.

A LOOK BACK OVER 40 YEARS

The Baton Rouge Human Relations Council was formed in 1965. One of its first projects was to determine whether or not Baton Rouge's restaurants were obeying the 1964 Civil Rights Act. Racially integrated teams went to lunch at various restaurants which traditionally did not serve Black people. Attorney Johnnie A. Jones, Sr. and L.S.U. professors Paul Y. Burns and Wayne Shannon attempted unsuccessfully to lunch at Jack Sabin's upscale steakhouse on Airline Highway. The other teams had no difficulty being served.

"REPORT BACK" MEETING WITH MAYOR HOLDEN

The Working Interfaith Network (WIN) held a meeting June 20, co-sponsored by the BRCHR, at St. Paul the Apostle Catholic Church in Baton Rouge to review the Mayor's progress in improving the inner city.

Mayor Melvin "Kip" Holden spoke on truancy, community policing, and economic development, and his speech was well received, as was that of the Chief of Police.

There were a number of questions and comments from the racially integrated audience of approximately 400.

The Human Relations Council and the YWCA several years ago were unsuccessful in getting Baton Rouge to implement a serious city-wide community policing program.

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