

Newsletter of the LCHR and BRCHR

Louisiana Council on Human Relations and the
Baton Rouge Council on Human Relations

Dr. Paul Y. Burns, Editor
pburns@tigers.lsu.edu

Volme 48, 1
January, February, and March 2012

A Glimpse into the African American/Native American Indian Interface

Introduction

The month of February was Black History Month. In considering the history of Blacks in America, we will take the opportunity to briefly examine the interaction between African Americans and Native American Indians. This examination is partially motivated by several news items last year reporting on the dispute between Black Cherokees and the Cherokee Nation. This issue has involved the U.S. Bureau of Indian Affairs and other federal agencies that have funds designated exclusively for American Indians. A vast amount of information relating to this topic can be found on the Internet. There are also individuals here in Louisiana who can attest to this connection. It would be interesting to explore the origin of the “Big Chief” in Mardi Gras parades and related topics. However, we will provide only a “glimpse” into the African American/Native American Indian Interface with the hope that it will whet your appetite for more personal research. A follow-up article might be presented specifically on American Indians in Louisiana.

The Black Cherokee Dispute

The Black Cherokee dispute was discussed at a Louisiana Council on Human Relations (LCHR) meeting during the summer of 2011. The LCHR considered sending a letter to the

parties in dispute encouraging them to resolve their differences in a humanistic manner. The headline for an article in the Kansas City Star newspaper on September 21, 2011 was Cherokee Nation restores citizenship for black freedmen. The article included the statement “Black Cherokees in Kansas City were ecstatic Tuesday after learning that the tribal citizenship they’d been fighting years for has been restored.” The Cherokee Nation citizenship of some 2,800 African Americans known as freedmen was regained through an agreement made in federal court between the country's second-largest Indian tribe and its black members.

The dispute involved 2,800 African Americans known as freedmen and the Cherokee Nation, the country's second-largest Indian tribe. This group of African Americans is descendants of slaves once owned by wealthy Indians. The Indians signed a treaty after the Civil War freeing these slaves and granting them full membership in the tribe. But these descendants of former slaves were stripped of their citizenship and suffrage rights in 2007. A decision had been made that bloodline determined citizenship. The freedmen filed suit. A lower court ruled against them. But as indicated in the above news article, a federal court in Washington, DC reversed that decision, ruling in favor of the African American Indians, guarantying their tribal rights, including the right to vote and other benefits. This ruling gave 2,800 freedmen all the benefits available to the Cherokee tribe. Concerning the dispute, one Black Cherokee said “We are not begging

them for anything.” “We are not asking them to give us this. This is our heritage. This is our right.” Yet, the issue was more than about heritage and culture. Before the decision to re-instate the Black Indians, the U.S. government told the Cherokee Nation to restore citizenship to the African Americans or risk losing more than \$30 million in housing money that was being withheld. At stake for the Black Cherokee was not only the identification as a Black Cherokee but federal benefits available to American Indian tribes. These benefits include scholarships, medical care, food stipends and low-income homeowners’ assistance.

Other Black Indians

In considering the above statement that said these benefits include scholarships, during March 2012, the Louisiana Board of Regents listed ten requests for proposals involving financial assistance to Native American Indians or Alaska Natives.

The above section concerned Black Cherokee Indians. There are also Black Indians among other tribes. The Wikipedia Encyclopedia gives a discussion of Black Seminole Indians. According to historians, these are descendants of free blacks and some runaway slaves, the runaway slaves escaping from coastal South Carolina and Georgia beginning as early as the late 17th century. By the early 19th century, they had often formed communities near the Seminole Indians. The two groups formed a multi-ethnic and bi-racial alliance and today, the Black Seminole descendants still live in Florida. There are also Black Seminole communities in other states.

The Association of American Indian Affairs (AAIA) is an organization concerned with the well being of Indians in general. Its Web site

says that the organization has programs focused upon youth/education (scholarships, child welfare, summer camps), health (diabetes education and prevention), cultural preservation (sacred lands protection, Native language preservation) and the empowerment of tribal communities (federal acknowledgment, funding for tribal programs).

Other Web sites give the many treaties and agreements that the U.S. government has signed with the various Indian tribes.

There is a Web site for the Black Native American Association. It is <http://www.bnaa.org/>. This site gives information on an inter-tribal group of people with African-American and Native American heritage. This was organized in late summer of 1992. The various ways they assist their members include tribal ceremonies, drum classes, making of traditional regalia, genealogy searches, social events such as picnics, pow wows, information on social and psychological impact of the crisis of living with bi-racial, tri-racial, multi-racial identities, etc. This group resides in the state of California. They state that their objective is "To Recognize, Stand, and Represent Our African and Native American Ancestors by Celebrating and Supporting the Development of the Black Native American Community and All of Our Relations." The activities include providing education to young people, and working to provide higher education for all. The Web site includes several activities they have undertaken as part of Black History Month. This Web site provides a list of books that give information about the Black/Native American culture. Included are such topics as "Africans and Seminoles: From Removal to Emancipation", "Black Indians: A Hidden Heritage", "Black Warrior Chiefs: A history of the Seminole Negro Indian Scouts", "The Buffalo Soldiers", "Red - Black Connections", "Afrikans and Indians", and other books.

For a rather comprehensive treatment of the African American/Native American Interface, you might go to the Web site

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Black_Indians_in_the_United_States

This site documents **Black Indians in the United States.**

Finally, you might be interested in Black Indians in Louisiana. If so, you can review the following:

ASSESSING THE IDENTITY OF BLACK INDIANS IN LOUISIANA: A QUANTITATIVE AND QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS

A Dissertation; Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the Louisiana State University and Agricultural and Mechanical College in partial fulfillment of the Doctor of Philosophy In The School of Social Work

By Francis J. Powell; B.S.W., Jackson State University, 1977;
M.S.W., Grambling State University, 1996;

May 2004; ©Copyright 2004;
Francis J. Powell.

A Grassroots Human Relations Organization that was Out Front

"I Was Country When Country Wasn't Cool" is the title of a song written by Kye Fleming and Dennis Morgan, and recorded by Barbara Mandrell in 1981. The members of the following human relations organization can say that they were into Human Relations when Human Relations was not cool. The name of this Human Relations group is "Four +4 Men Fellowship". The unique thing about this group is its inter-racial composition - its main goal being that of strengthening self,

strengthening one-another (Proverbs 27:17), and holding fellowship together.

It is a Baton Rouge based group that was started in 1993 and has progressed over the years. The original vision was given to Roland F. Carey, which was to form an inter-racial group of men, balanced in number between blacks and whites. The initial membership consisted of three black men and one white man. The three blacks were Roland F. Carey (Directory of Information Systems at Southern University), Floyd L. Mathews (Exxon Engineer) and Richard 'Dick' Turnley, Jr. (CEO of the Southern Teachers and Parents Federal Credit Union). The white man was Robert T. "Bob" Denbo who (when relocated to Hot Springs, Arkansas in October 1994) was replaced by Don L. Eisenberg (Executive Director of Louisiana Capital Area Red Cross). Two years later (1996) 4 associate members (Broussard, Downing, McMahan, and Francis – racially the inverse of the founding-four) joined the group, for a total of eight fellows (4-blacks, 4 whites). The Fellowship maintained racial balance throughout its 18-year history.

By February 2004, the group had increased to fifteen members consisting of 8 black men and 7 white men. Over the years, the fellowship grew to over twenty core and associate members, with an equal number of blacks and whites. The Mission was "To unite via 7 principles aimed at strengthening each man, through vital relationships, to be a more Godly influence in his world". Their seven stated principles reflect the emphasis placed on having genuine relationship with one-another, and reaching-out to others. These principles are: 1.) Help strengthen each other to routinely lead godly lives, starting with self; 2.) Keep ourselves informed and current on important issues of today, especially those that affect men; 3.) Reach

out to help other laymen in their daily walk – spiritual and secular; 4.) Encourage and support each other as individuals to help save ‘at risk’ youth – particularly Black males; 5.) Help improve genuine race relations in the local community; 6.) Get involved in other concerns related to the issues above; 7.) Support (generally) the commitments of Promise Keepers.

The following show the flavor of activities that were conducted over the years:

1. A letter dated September 12, 1996 was sent to ten influential clergy leaders in Baton Rouge on the letter head of Judge Robert D. Downing of the Nineteenth Judicial Court (he being an associate-member of the group). Part of the content of the letter reads as follows:

“Re: Improving race relations in the Community; led by black and white men

As Christian laymen we sense an urgent need to cultivate a higher level of goodwill between the races in our community. Who better to lead the way than men of the Household of Faith? Who better to encourage and facilitate the process than those called of our Lord to teach us how to (obey His command to) love one-another? – **you!** Hence, we the undersigned (Downing, and **Four Men**) also call-out to you (in behalf of the Community) to unite with us in partnership of progress in race-relations in our Parish community.”

2. Special guest at the Founders day program in February 1995, were Hon. Tom Ed McHugh, Mayor Baton Rouge/East Baton Rouge Parish. William L. “Bill” McMahan, (a fellow member) represented Promise Keepers. Mayor McHugh was also special guest at the 6th anniversary program held March 15, 2000. He also made a third visit. The theme for that program was “How Can

Four Men have greater Impact in the BR Community?”

3. From the beginning, the meetings were held weekly on Wednesdays from 5:30 to 6:30 at the Mount Pilgrim Baptist Church, 9700 Scenic Highway (in Scotlandville). The fellowship has always been primarily a discussion group. Each of the 7 discussion teams includes one black and one white fellow. The topical areas are: Health/Social issues, Religion, Education, Government/Political/Legal, Employment, Family, and Race-relations.

Unfortunately, at-this-time (2012), some of their here-to-fore most-active members have health-issues; some have job and other constraints that make it difficult to continue their normal, active-pace on a weekly basis. As a result, the group is morphing into new forms that will continue (voluntarily) on an informal, ad-hoc basis, some of the activities of the past (like the annual outing with wives), a barbeque, etc. Plus, new, more accommodating groups may be formed (Example: Six-Guys Fellowship.”)

The “Six-Guys Fellowship” was formed on April 11, 2011 by Roland F. Carey. The six-guys meet monthly, rotating from home-to-home. The host-guy determines discussion-topic(s), meeting format, and facilitates the 1 ½ hours meeting. There are other interesting features of this captive men’s group, made-up of 3 black and 3 white guys.

Leading-up to their April 2012 meeting, Roland F. Carey has beseeched the other 5 members of the group as follows: “Please, let’s not waste time engaging in sanctimonious posturing, denials, or tired

sound-bites, or any other gimmick that would delay serious dialog and genuine search for answers leading to improvement in these two areas: race-relations, and strengthened-families.”

Louisiana Council on Human Relations Meeting

The Louisiana Council on Human Relations will hold its spring Board of Directors quarterly meeting at the home of Elnur Musa in Baton Rouge on April 14, 2012. Musa has emailed information out with directions to his home. If you are on email and did not receive it, give him a call.

The Baton Rouge Council Annual Awards Program

The Baton Rouge Council on Human Relations will hold its Third-third Annual Power-Reznikoff Awards Program on April 19, 2012 at the University Presbyterian Church, 3240 Dalrymple Dr., Baton Rouge, LA. Dinner will be served at 6:30 p.m. with the program starting at 7:00 p.m. In 1978, the Baton Rouge Council on Human Relations began recognizing citizens who have helped to achieve the goals of the organization: to eliminate prejudice and discrimination and to foster better human relations. Usually, two persons are chosen each year to receive humanitarian awards. The recipients for 2012 are Mary Mikell and Ulysses Joseph.

In 1993, the Council decided to name its awards after the late Fr. Elmer S. Powell, former Pastor of St. Paul the Apostle Catholic Church, and the late Rabbi Marvin M. Reznikoff, former spiritual leader of Beth

Shalom Synagogue. Both served on the Board of Directors, made significant contributions toward improving human relations in the Baton Rouge community, and were made life members of the Council.

LCHR Board of Directors

Joseph Dennis, Lafayette, President
Thelma Deamer, Baton Rouge, Vice President
Doris White, Plaisance, Corresponding Secretary
Richard Haymaker, Baton Rouge, Membership Secretary
John Mikell, Lafayette, Treasurer

Eva Baham, Slidell
Peter Bonhomme, Breaux Bridge
Paul Y. Burns, Baton Rouge
James E. Cross, Baton Rouge
Julia Frederick, Lafayette
Marjorie Green, Baton Rouge
Melanie Harrington, Lafayette
Ted Hayes, Lafayette
Elnur Musa, Baton Rouge
Joe McCarty, Lafayette
Anthony Navarre, Lafayette
Rogers J. Newman, Baton Rouge
Eileen Shieber, Baton Rouge
Cecil Wiltz, Lafayette
James D. Wilson, Jr., Lafayette
Phil Woodland, Baton Rouge

BRCHR Board of Directors

Thelma Deamer, President
Gloria Jordon Hall, Secretary
Bridget Udoh, Treasurer
Richard Haymaker, Membership Secretary

Donna Collins-Lewis
James Cross
Eileen Hendricks
Elisha Hendricks
Eileen Shieber
Horace White

(For fiscal year beginning July 1, 2011)

Single Membership \$15.00

Family Membership \$20.00

Student / Low Income Membership \$1.00

Name _____

Street Address _____

City _____ **State** _____ **Zip** _____

Email _____ **Telephone** _____

**(Baton Rouge area residents make checks payable to BRCHR.
Other residents make checks payable to LCHR.)**

**Send all payment to:
Richard Haymaker
254 Nelson Drive Baton Rouge, LA 70808**

Louisiana Council on Human Relations
254 Nelson Drive
Baton Rouge, LA 70808

ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED

**Non-Profit Org.
U.S. POSTAGE
PAID
Permit 413
Baton Rouge, LA**