

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

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Maxine Crump: A Lifetime of Service to Eliminate Racism

This issue of the newsletter will highlight the work of Maxine Crump who has dedicated her life to eliminating racism. Maxine is president and CEO of the organization “Dialogue on Race Louisiana”.

What Has Motivated Maxine?

When Maxine Crump was growing up in rural Louisiana, she first asked her father the question that perhaps all children in the segregated south asked their parents. Why are we over here and they are over there? If you remember what answer you got you will also remember that you grew up too questioning that answer. It was likely a “lie” but we can’t say that in the south; we have to say it was probably told to you in an age appropriate way. When were they planning to come back and tell you the truth?

No one told you it was because we live in a legally segregated society where it has been scientifically determined that white people were the ones eligible for full citizenship and people of color are a different species and therefore would not be able to handle the responsibility of full citizenship.

Maxine Crump says her father, Emanuel Crump, came as close to the truth as he could. He said “we live in a society that has set it up for white people to believe they have more rights than we do”, but he said, “the Constitution says we have the same rights as they do”.

This was in the 1950’s during the time of the Freedom Rights Movement led by Martin Luther King...later dub the Civil Rights Movement by the media. Maxine began to believe, Negroes would finally get to live out their constitutional rights.

It was bit surprising to her when her father became involved. He thought the vote and education were two keys to gaining American rights. He joined the work of fighting for the right to vote and later joined the Voters League in Iberville Parish to help get Negroes registered. It turned out to be a daunting task because of the fear left in place from earlier voter suppression.

Voters had to pass a test to vote and this was during the time when many people of color could not read or write. Many were turned down from registering. When they were told that would no longer be the case, they were afraid to take the chance. There had been so many broken promises in their wake.

After getting voters registered, there was the task of getting them to the polls. Crump joined that movement. He used his own vehicle to carry people to the polls since many of them did not have transportation. Finally he learned that he was working to elect white candidates that often only showed interest in neighborhoods where Negroes lived when it was election time. Next he set out to help young Blacks run for office. That was successful.

Maxine began to see that the Southern Negro was drowning in racism. She didn’t have that language at the time, she said, but as soon as one institution of

power was unlocked at some level, another one was in front of you.

The schools, although public were barred to blacks. Maxine's father often spoke about the fact that the taxes collected from the Black people helped pay for all public schools and people should be able to choose any public school to which they wanted their children to attend.

When school desegregation laws passed, he immediately enrolled his children in the public school. It turned out that he was the only one to send his children to the "white" school served by the three communities.

They experienced untold miseries from the daily effects of being treated like they were causing problems. The system was more concerned about the welfare of the white children. Many white parents took their children out of the school and put them in parochial schools and some got together and opened a new private school outside of the three communities.

Maxine was entering college that year and when her father offered her the chance to attend LSU, she immediately said yes because she said she remembered all the times she heard her father say his tax dollars paid for schools that his children could not attend. Now his children were in the schools he chose. He chose those schools, because the best resources were there. He didn't think his children should be in substandard schools. He wanted to empower them to be able to take full advantage of all their constitutional rights. It was the first year you could register to vote at the age of 18. Maxine was excited about that and did indeed register to vote in the summer of 1964. In the fall of 1964, after a law suit filed by Dr. Dupuy Anderson in his daughter Freya Anderson's name had forced the desegregation of LSU, Maxine entered LSU and became the first African American female to reside in women's housing on the LSU campus.

It was the beginning of Maxine becoming an activist. She joined the Newman Club, a Catholic Student organization on campus, and she joined the

choir at Christ the King Church on campus. Maxine was the first black member of these campus organizations. She got a job on campus as a student worker in the dormitory cafeteria. She had understood her constitutional rights and began exercising them as if the sky was the limit.

Maxine also remembers being thrown out of, and refused service, in a few places. She said it was never about her in her mind. It was about a system that had been set up that way, but she believed in what her father her taught her, that what is right will prevail in the end.

She worked in her home parish of Iberville during election as a "poll watcher". It was during the time where blacks wanted to be sure there was no voter intimidation, or voter fraud. She said many of these efforts made her uncomfortable because, "it's not always easy to have unfriendly faces looking at you and not take it personally." She said she imagined that people like her father had worked to opened doors for people like her and now it was her turn to join in and do what she could to make a difference.

It became a mixture of compromises when she became friends with many really nice white people. It was also a challenge for them. They made a lot of mistakes through their well intentioned efforts.

When she became the first black female reporter in the WAFB-TV newsroom, the levels of complication and compromises escalated. She says she had to learn the business since she was not a trained journalist. That meant she had to befriend the news people and persuade them to help her. She did, and they helped. She was very appreciative to many of the reporters for the time they gave in helping her to learn.

The other area was in dealing with ways the newsroom wanted to cover some of the stories. She noticed their racial sensitivity was very low. They didn't see many of their errors. She fought for stories to air and for fair treatment of other employees of color who did not work in the newsroom. She was glad when the station hired other people of color, but she found out later that they were encouraging the

other reporters of color to not associate with her. Then when she fought for the coverage of stories and for a different way of handling some of the stories around race, (quoting an African American reporter), they would then say “so and so doesn’t see a problem with how we are reporting this story”.

Maxine stayed at WAFB 15 years. She says many citizens were so proud of her that they encouraged her to stay. She said she made many valuable contacts in the community that has served her today.

While at WAFB, she was asked to serve on the YWCA Board of Directors. She accepted the position because she learned that their mission was “the elimination of racism”. She had not imagined that such an organization existed in Baton Rouge or anywhere in the deep south. She soon began to challenge them to become more active in the elimination of racism. They feared the loss of funders. Maxine also became the board president and at the end of her term, she began working on the idea she had introduced to the board; more racial activism.

Maxine said she drew on experiences of her childhood where she believes she learned at her father’s side that “telling the truth” was very important. She says she learned from friends at LSU that there were many well intentioned white people who needed an education on how to talk about race issues. They needed an education on the history of race issues, the status of such issues, and what could be done to improve race relations.

It came to her that she had been involved in many onversations that were more frustrating than productive. She recalled that “Free Speech Alley” had become a very prominent fixture on the LSU Campus; that it had given students a place to have a voice. She said it gave her a place to get “a stomach ache.” The debates were places to blow off steam but not to get anywhere. She felt she had watched people work for change, “real change” and this was not it.

This led her to design a “structured” dialogue. She had the constitution as her “strong man”. She said

the YWCA had formed a Dialogue group that served them during the period when the YWCA had been given a national mandate to desegregate. They formed living room dialogues to get to know each other across racial lines.

Maxine decided that the dialogue needed to be held in board rooms using factual materials. The dialogue needed to be facilitated and participants needed to know the difference between dialogue and debate. The facilitators would work in biracial teams and the dialogues would be time structured.

While a lot of people warned her that racism is too big, too old, too deep, and too complicated to solve, Maxine believes that for every complicated problem, the solution is simple, though “not easy; simple”. She says this quote is not original with her; she found it somewhere in the national YWCA racial justice materials. She says it is a problem that is worth her effort. Racism was built into our system and anything that was built can be dismantled.” When she looks back, she definitely says this work has not been easy, but she didn’t do it all at once. She definitely spent a lot of her time having fun. It has been an exciting challenge.

Responding to the Challenge: The Dialogue on Race Series

Maxine responded to the challenge by creating “The Dialogue on Race Series.

History/Qualifications

Maxine Crump, a former YWCA Board President, created the model for this program more than 20 years. It is a structured program of six consecutive 2 hour weekly sessions with scholarly reading materials, and led by a bi-racial team of trained facilities. Maxine Crump has remained involved in a leadership role in the dialogue at all levels, including training facilitators from its inception.

The educational process was used by The Baton Rouge Town Meeting “What Color is Community in

1994 and in the year 2000 the YWCA picked up the series and continued it. The Dialogue on Race won a national award for Racial Justice at the YWCA of the USA in 2008.

Dialogue on Race Gaining Momentum in Baton Rouge

Dialogue on Race Louisiana is *dedicated to the eliminating of racism through education, action and, transformation.* It is a Membership Association that brings together organizations, businesses, and individuals that have similar goals for working to end the racial divide. Through this association these groups can be a source of support and inspiration to each other as well as maximize their collective efforts.

The core program is the Dialogue on Race Series. The series itself is an educational process to eliminate racism. This community-led process has educated several thousand area residents to understand, identify, and to eliminate institutional racism. Its importance is rooted in the continued challenges of our State, our city, and much of the Southern region, to reduce crime, eliminate poverty, improve public education, clean up the environment, advance employment opportunity, reduce the “brain-drain” of talented young professionals, and improve the economy and quality of life for all.

Racism, in today’s age is often subtle, unspoken, and unaddressed in communities. In Baton Rouge, for example, the issue of race often stands in the way of mobilizing all people toward a shared vision for the Capital City. One way it has showed up is in a lack of voter approval for any comprehensive capital improvement plan in the last 47 years. Many would also claim as well that our city’s identity has not received its proper national acclaim despite our multiple assets. Other communities around the state can site similar issues.

The Dialogue on Race Series is the only local community-led educational entity providing enlightened understanding and discussion of racism

in a non-threatening, respectful environment. The Dialogue has been managed by volunteers who are now devoting themselves to the creation of a statewide membership association incorporated as Dialogue on Race Louisiana.

Dialouge on Race Louisiana: Origiannl Series

Maxine recently incorporated the organizaion with the name “Dialouge on Race Louisiana”. She is president and CEO of this organization. The Dialogue series is a structured two hour weekly series limited to 15 participants. The sessions are led by trained facilitators and participants are prepared for the discussions by reading short articles before each session. The facilitators set a safe environment for open honest discussion around three topic questions with one 10 minute break during the session. All sessions begin and end on time.

Understanding what racism is and how it operates through institutions in our system helps bring about a more equitable society for all citizens. The Dialogue recognizes that racism is not an “us versus them” issue in communities. Racism is an institutional construct that was built into our system and much of it exist today unintentionally an indirectly. However as long as racism exists, our institutions will tend to operate to the advantage of one race over another instead of full access for all equally.

The Dialogue on Race is an award winning program that has been proven to be effective in helping people understand what needs to be done and what they can do. The sessions are arranged as follows:

Session I – Definitions and distinctions needed when discussing the subject of race

Session II – White privilege which talks about how the privileges experienced by whites are invisible to most white people

Session III – Understanding Institutional Racism showing how racism operates and that it is largely indirect and unintentional

Session IV – “Struggle in Transformation” is how the last movement to end racism served to make many positive changes we enjoy today around race and what is left for us to complete to ensure full rights for all citizens

Session V – Affirmative Action – the constitutional change designed to roll back racial discrimination and level the playing field; A look at its benefits and drawbacks

Session VI – “A time for Action” and “Can we talk” - two articles used to discuss how participants can activate what they have learned through the process that will serve them in being a part of eliminating racism

DIALOGUE ON RACE EVENTS COMING UP

The last Dialogue on Race Original Series and the Advanced Series began in October and is now underway. November 8 is the Dialogue on Race Membership Reception. The 2013 Dialogue on Race Original Series will be schedule soon.



Maxine Crump

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