

# Newsletter of the LCHR

## Louisiana Council on Human Relations

James D. Wilson, Jr., Editor

Volume 45, Issue 3  
April, May, June 2009

### President Obama's Election Discussed at Annual Meeting

The annual meeting of the Louisiana Council on Human Relations was held at Judice-Rickels Hall on the campus of the University Louisiana at Lafayette on June 13. The theme of the meeting was "Barack Obama's Election and the Past, Present, and Future of Human Relations." Roundtable speakers for the event were: Lafayette Parish Councilman Kenneth Boudreaux; former Lafayette-chapter NAACP president J'Nelle Chargois; and Southern University Professor Doris White. The discussion was moderated by Professor Bradley Pollock of the University of Louisiana at Lafayette.

Three new LCHR board members were elected at the LCHR business meeting: Mr. Cecil Wiltz of Lafayette; Dr. Richard Webb of Baton Rouge, and Minister Phil Woodland of Baton Rouge (decline).

It was announced at the annual business meeting that illness has forced Dr. Patricia Rickels to resign from her longtime post as LCHR Corresponding Secretary. James D. Wilson, Jr. agreed to fill the post until the election of new officers at the July LCHR board meeting. Dr. Rickels will continue to serve on the LCHR Board of Directors.

**REMINDER:**  
**LCHR Board of Directors**  
**Quarterly Meeting**  
**JULY 18, 10am**  
**University Presbyterian Church,**  
**3240 Dalrymple Drive**  
**Baton Rouge, La.**



LCHR Board Member Joseph McCarty (left) and LCHR President Joseph Dennis (right) present the 2009 Oliver-Sigur Humanitarian Awards to Austin Sonnier, Jr. and Cheryl Castille, accepting on behalf of Dr. Maureen Brennan. (See page two for more information on this year's recipients.)

## **LCHR Board of Directors**

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## **2009 Oliver-Sigur Humanitarian Awards Presented**

**by Joseph McCarty**

The LCHR presented its annual Oliver-Sigur Humanitarian Awards at its meeting on June 13. This year's recipients are Dr. Maureen Brennan and Mr. Austin Sonnier, Jr. The award is named in recognition of two seminal figures from the early days of the LCHR, Dr. James Oliver and Msgr. Alexander O. Sigur.

### ***Dr. Maureen Brennan***

Dr. Maureen Brennan has been selected for this Louisiana Council on Human Relations Award for her community service and arts activism, especially as manifested through her vision and leadership of the Cite' des Arts, a community-based Arts facility and program.

Dr. Brennan has distinguished herself in many ways. She holds an MS. in Applied Psychology from U.S.L. and a Ph.D. in Clinical Psychology from North Texas State. For some 30 years she has been engaged in as a mental health professional. She has conducted a private practice as a Clinical Psychologist in Lafayette since 1984. Along the way she has engaged in research, teaching, community education, and management consulting.

Dr. Brennan's experience in the arts developed in Lafayette, starting with minor acting roles before moving into directing and more technical aspects of theater. For ten years, she was President of the Lafayette Community Theater. She has her own production company, Brenrose Productions, specializing in new and multi-cultural pieces. She continues to act, produce, and direct, and has tried her hand at playwriting.

She has served as Executive Director of Cite' des Arts since its inception. She is now overseeing the creation of the Cite' des Arts Artists' Village in Lafayette. This will provide housing, studio, performance, and classroom space for local artists and musicians of all disciplines. As well as over twenty years of dedicated service through the Lafayette Community Theater and the Cite' des Arts, Dr. Brennan has also

served at various times as Board Member of the Acadiana Arts Council, The Artists Alliance, and the Festival Internationale de Louisiane. She served one year as President of Festival Internationale and is currently chairperson of the Arts and Culture Subcommittee of the North Lafayette Planning and Coordinating Committee.

Dr. Brennan serves on several local boards, including: World Studies Institute of Louisiana; Rotary Club of North Lafayette; The Sexual Assault Recovery Center; and the Louisiana Council on Child Abuse. She served as president of the local chapter of France-Etats Unis and helped establish the local chapter of Alliance Francais. She was also a founding board member and the first Executive Director of the Lafayette Teen Court Program.

She is the mother of three children and has eight grandchildren.

### **Mr. Austin Sonnier, Jr.**

The Louisiana Council on Human Relations, since its inception in 1964, has been committed to equality and fairness for all citizens. This has meant an on-going concern that African Americans receive the recognition they deserve, in light of their historical discrimination and the undervaluing of their creative contributions to our state. Mr. Austin Sonnier, Jr. is a most fitting honoree, given his heroic efforts to preserve the history of the African-American musical heritage in South Louisiana. He is a living exponent of the African-American cultural tradition into the 21st century through his multiple talent and creativity as a musician, composer, actor, author, playwright, producer, and visual artist.

Mr. Sonnier got his start in working life serving in the U.S. Air Force for four years. He had a career of thirty-three years with the U.S. Postal Service. This provided the financial security needed so he could pursue his artistic endeavors without fear of starving.

He received a degree in Music Theory and Composition from U.S.L. He has been a composer of music in various forms and genres. He has been researcher and historian of African-American music. His writings on music, particularly early jazz and blues, have led to numerous articles published in major journals

and magazines in Europe and the United States. He has also presented papers and lectures at symposia.

Austin Sonnier is the author of five important books of jazz history. His biography of “Bunk” Johnson is the definitive study of this pioneer of the jazz trumpet. Also invaluable is his *Second Linin’: Jazzmen of Southwest Louisiana*, published by the Center for Louisiana Studies. Eagerly awaited is his latest book *Tell the Butcher Cut ‘em Down: A Pictorial History of Jazz in Rural Louisiana*.

His musical research has been book-ended with his plays and musicals. His plays portray the humor and pathos of black life as in “The Greasy Spoon Restaurant/Funeral Parlor” and “Satchmo & Miss Lillian.” Perhaps his most successful has been “Salty Dogs,” which has garnered performances in Lafayette, Dallas, New York, and the Edinburgh Festival.

Sonnier has at various times performed and presented in schools, through grants from the Acadiana Arts Council; he has served as adjunct faculty at U.S.L.; a consultant to the S.W. LA Zydeco Festival Assn. for an N.E.H. grant, and was recipient of an N.E.A. grant to transcribe recorded trumpet solos of Willie G. “Bunk” Johnson. He has been commissioned to compose music for dance and theater productions. Not long ago he was a featured musical artist in the Louisiana Crossroads series.

The list of his accomplishments could continue on, but Austin Sonnier is a man very modest about his past honors and endeavors. In a recent statement, he writes about how gratifying it was for him as a young man to interview elderly jazz musicians. “These musicians gave me the truth in their lives. They were very kind and I will always be grateful for what they taught me about music and life through the stories they told me.” Today Sonnier is the one who is energized by young people as he finds young people have “an innocent excitement about the arts that people sometimes forget about as they get older.”

Sonnier advises “my personal philosophy on art is that if it comes through you, you are obligated to do whatever it is, and give it to the world. It all come down from a higher power. You have to work at it. That is your gift. That is your obligation.”

## **Black History Scholar Dies**

John Hope Franklin, Ph.D., died in North Carolina in March of this year at the age of 94. Born and raised in a small black community in northeastern Oklahoma, Franklin attended high school at Booker T. Washington, a segregated school in Tulsa. He received his bachelor's degree from Fisk University and his Ph.D. at Harvard in 1941.

Franklin was subjected to racial discrimination for most of his life, but he became a top-notch scholar. He stated that his challenge “. . . was to weave into the fabric of American history enough of the presence of blacks so that the story of the United States could be told adequately and fairly.”

Franklin served on the NAACP Legal Defense Fund team that helped provide the basis for the 1954 U.S. Supreme Court decision ending legal segregation of black and white children in public schools. He taught history at Fisk, Brooklyn College, University of Chicago, and Duke University.

Many honors were awarded to Franklin, including president of the American Historical Association, American Studies Association, Organization of American Historians, and Phi Beta Kappa United Chapters. He served on two national commissions. In 1995 Franklin was awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom, the nation's highest civilian honor.

## **Congressional Apology for Slavery Contains Loophole**

In June the U.S. House of Representatives apologized for slavery and the racial segregation which was its aftermath. The U.S. Senate quickly followed suite with a similar action. The Senate version has what is an obvious escape clause, however: the symbolic apology is not to serve as a basis for a lawsuit against the United States government. What was the Senate afraid of? Financial reparations, of course! Both apologies were in the form of resolutions, which do not require presidential approval.

**The LCHR / BRCHR is Online at:  
[www.brchr.org](http://www.brchr.org)**

## **Justice Thomas Lone Dissent in Voting Rights Case**

The Voting Rights Act, the government's chief weapon against racial discrimination at polling places since the 1960s, survived a Supreme Court challenge in a ruling that nevertheless warned of serious constitutional questions posed by part of the law.

After argument in late April, it appeared the court's conservatives could have a majority to strike down part of the law as unnecessary in an era marked by the election of the first African-American president. But with only one justice in dissent, the court avoided the major questions raised over the section of the voting law that requires all or parts of 16 states — mainly in the South and with a history of discrimination in voting — to get Justice Department approval before making changes in the way elections are conducted.

Five months after Barack Obama became president, Chief Justice John Roberts said the justices decided not to determine whether dramatic civil rights gains means the advance approval requirement is no longer necessary. That larger issue, Roberts said, “is a difficult constitutional question we do not answer today.”

Justice Clarence Thomas, alone among his colleagues, said he would have resolved the case and held that the provision, known as Section 5, is unconstitutional. “The violence, intimidation and subterfuge that led Congress to pass Section 5 and this court to uphold it no longer remains,” Thomas said.

Roberts himself noted that blacks and whites now register and turn out to vote in similar numbers and that “blatantly discriminatory evasions of federal decrees are rare.” He attributed a significant share of the progress to the law itself. “Past success alone, however, is not adequate justification to retain the preclearance requirement,” Roberts said.

The Voting Rights Act, first enacted in 1965, opened the polls to millions of black Americans. In 2006 Congress overwhelmingly renewed the part of the law which provided for the advance approval requirement for 25 years.

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## **Filmmaker Remembers Bogalusa Civil Rights Events**

The May 2009 issue of *Country Roads Magazine* carried an interesting interview with Mr. Sailor Jackson, a black photographer from Bogalusa, La., who is Director of Audio, Film and Video for the Louisiana Secretary of State. Jackson grew up during the 1950s and 1960s in Bogalusa, Louisiana, a hotbed of local civil rights activity. Much of the local agitation centered on the Crown Zellerbach paper mill, where blacks protested for jobs, the right to vote, and the right to eat at restaurant lunch counters. Activists eventually formed the Bogalusa Voters League, led by A.Z. Young and Robert Hicks. In August 1967, Young's group marched from Bogalusa to Baton Rouge. The trek was 106 miles and took ten days, twice as long as the famous Selma-to-Montgomery march by Martin Luther King, Jr.

Jackson reported that black churches provided food and shelter along the route. At the Tangipahoa-Livingston Parish boundary, Louisiana State Police officers advised Mr. Young to return to Bogalusa, because a KKK group was advancing toward them. Young did not retreat, and the marchers arrived safely in Baton Rouge, where they petitioned for justice on the steps of the State Capitol. Jackson was fifteen years old at the time and attending Bayou Boys State at Southern University, and he welcomed the marchers at the State Capitol.

In 1993, A.Z. Young received the Powell-Reznikoff Humanitarian Award from the Baton Rouge Council on Human Relations. Mr. Young died later that year, and his body lay in state in the state capitol rotunda, perhaps the first black to receive that honor. Jackson commented that Eddie Robinson was the second.

## **Louisiana Tops Gun Death Rate**

The latest report from the Violence Policy Center, a national nonprofit group, states that Louisiana's gun death rate of 19.58 deaths per 100,000 people for 2006 was the highest in the nation. The national average was 10.32. Alabama was next in line after Louisiana, followed by Alaska and Mississippi. The Center stated that each of the states with a high death rate has higher gun ownership rates and lax gun laws.

## **Equal Pay for Men & Women**

A state mandate that would require businesses to give equal pay to men and women performing the same jobs was overwhelmingly defeated by the Louisiana House amid strong opposition from business groups. The 59-33 vote against the bill wasn't surprising.

The House has defeated similar bills repeatedly in recent years. The measure by Rep. Barbara Norton, D-Shreveport, would ban employers in Louisiana from paying workers in a way that discriminates based on gender. Supporters of Norton's bill, called the "Equal Pay for Women Act," said the proposal would require what was only fair. They said Louisiana has one of the largest wage gaps in the nation, with a woman 25 years or older earning, on average, 65 cents for every dollar a man makes. They said 35 states have laws similar to the one Norton proposed. "How can treating all workers fairly be a problem for a company?" said Rep. Regina Barrow, D-Baton Rouge.

Opponents said the bill was vague and would open up employers to numerous lawsuits. They also said federal law already bans discrimination in the workplace. Among the powerful lobbying groups that opposed Norton's bill were the Louisiana Chemical Association and the Louisiana Association of Business and Industry. "We've already got a law out there that provides for this. If women are not being paid equally, there's already a federal remedy," said Rep. Hunter Greene, R-Baton Rouge. Rep. Patrick Connick, R-Marrero, a lawyer, said the proposal would allow people without valid claims to file lawsuits against their employers "just to cause trouble." But Rep. Karen St. Germain, whose husband co-owns a small hardware store, said she didn't understand the objections. "If you're doing the right thing, this should not hurt you or bother you," said St. Germain, D-Plaquemine.

**Stories or ideas for the newsletter  
may be sent to the editor at:**

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# **Newsletter of the BRCHR**

## **Baton Rouge Council on Human Relations**

**Tamikia Y. Jones, Assistant Editor**

**Volume 44, Issue 3**

### **BRCHR Elect New Officers**

The annual meeting of the Baton Rouge Council on Human Relations was held on June 11, 2009 at the MLK Catholic Student Center at Southern University. Glorious Wright was elected to serve as President for the up coming year and Tamikia Jones as Vice-President. Lashunda Anderson was also elected to be a new member of the board of directors. Wright replaces Cynthia DeMarcos Mason, who served as President of the BRCHR this previous year.

### **CATS President Speaks at BRCHR Annual Meeting**

The Capital Area Transit System still faces many issues. At the annual meeting of the Baton Rouge Council on Human Relations held on June 11, 2009, CATS board President Christopher J. Tyson was the guest speaker. Tyson, a native of Baton Rouge, is an attorney with Jones Walker and is a member of the firm's Real Estate Practice Group. He was elected to the CATS board in February of this year. Tyson spoke on the current state of the CATS system and its uncertain future.

The biggest issue facing the CATS system according to Tyson is that the transit system does not have a dedicated funding source to provide it with the necessary financial sources to maintain nor improve upon its current services. Another issue that CATS has to overcome is the recent loss of the contract with LSU. In situations even where there is funding available, Baton Rouge is not in the position to receive the funding. In the federal, state, local funding scenario according to Tyson the Federal government will provide resources, however the state has to match funding. Unfortunately, Baton Rouge is unable to meet the matching requirement.

One bright spot that Tyson discussed was that Baton Rouge received 6.6 million dollars through a stimu-

lus package; however, it can only be used for capital purchases. CATS intends to purchase six new buses, upgrade the radio system from digital to analog, and to also make the buses GPS enabled with advance vehicle location equipment.

Many are not aware of the importance of having an effective and efficient transit system in the city. The transit system plays a major role in the development of the city and if Baton Rouge has any hope of becoming the next greatest city, the CAT system needs to be addressed. Mass transit equals infrastructure throughout the city. Mass transit also impacts the unemployment rates. According to Tyson studies show that in cities without an effective and efficient transportation citizens tend to remain in poverty and on public assistance.

Tyson encouraged Baton Rouge residents to be engaged, stay informed, and most importantly use the bus. All in attendance agreed with Tyson that in order for Baton Rouge to become the great city it has the potential to be there must be an effective and efficient mass transportation system.

### **East Baton Rouge Bans Drug Test For Teachers**

A court settlement reached in late May barred a Louisiana school Board from requiring teachers to submit to "suspicionless" drug tests after an accident or injury. The settlement resolves a lawsuit that the American Civil Liberties Union helped bring against the East Baton Rouge Parish School Board on behalf of the local teachers union.

The school board said its policy language didn't require teachers to submit to drug and alcohol tests after being injured on the job without reasonable suspicion of intoxication. But the district allegedly imposed the tests on some teachers in spite of the written policy.

“The resolution of this case is a victory for teachers not only in Baton Rouge but around the country,” said Adam Wolf, a California-based attorney for the ACLU.

Peggy Reno, a teacher at the parish’s Mohican Education Center, had filed a separate lawsuit that claims she was forced to submit to a drug test after a student punched her last September, even though she wasn’t suspected of drug use.

Yigal Bander, a lawyer for both Reno and the East Baton Rouge Federation of Teachers, said he hopes the settlement prompts the school board to “fess up to its mistake” and also resolve Reno’s case.

## Racial Divide in Baton Rouge

On May 15 Leadership Greater Baton Rouge Alumni, an organization founded by the Baton Rouge Area Chamber, held a Dialogue on Race forum at Baton Rouge Community College. John Noland, a white man and chairman of the E.B.R. Redevelopment Authority, which deals with blighted communities, was one of four panelists. Noland said that racism is a great barrier to Baton Rouge’s development. Maxine Crump, black broadcast journalist, explained that racism is not the same as racial prejudice; racism occurs when institutions such a government or companies take the rights of people away because of their race.

J.R. Ball, a vice president of Louisiana Business, Inc., criticized the Baton Rouge Country Club for discriminating against blacks, pointing out that it is the most exclusive club in Baton Rouge, and business deals are transacted on the club’s premises.

## Baton Rouge Muslims Reach Out

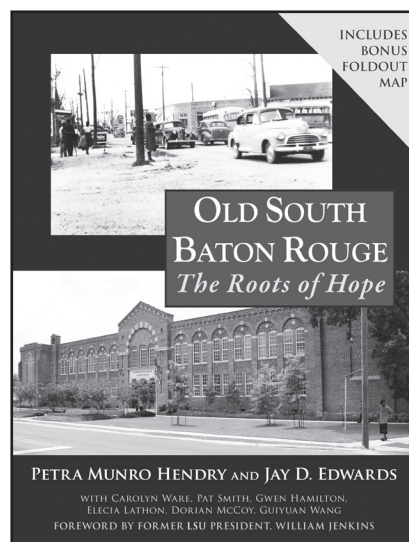
One of the purposes of the Louisiana Council on Human Relations is to improve relations among individuals and groups of different religious faiths. Thus we should be pleased that Baton Rouge Muslims in early June announced in *The Advocate* that the Islamic Center of Baton Rouge has a new and improved website (<http://www.icbrsite.org>). Shahid Khan, the Center’s executive director, said that one of the reasons for the improved website is to establish more effective interaction between the local Muslim

community and churches and synagogues. Khan said the website would help answer questions for those outside the Muslim community. He pointed out that both of the city’s mosques (one in southern Baton Rouge and one in northern Baton Rouge), operate under the same management.

A few months ago, the Islamic Center reached out to the Interfaith Federation of Greater Baton Rouge, which is composed of Jews and Christians, by inviting Federation representatives to have a meal and attend a worship program at a mosque. Paul Burns, LCHR Board member and a Presbyterian, was one of six Federation persons who accepted the invitation.

## New Book Documents Baton Rouge’s Oldest Black Neighborhood

A new book published by the University of Louisiana at Lafayette Press documents the history, culture, and architecture of Baton Rouge’s oldest black neighborhood. *Old South Baton Rouge: The Roots of Hope* is co-authored by LSU professors Petra Munro Hendry and Jay D. Edwards. The book is the culmination of a decade-old oral history project that sought to document the history of the Baton Rouge Civil Rights Movement, McKinley High School, and the businesses and churches of the Old South Baton Rouge community. Thanks to financial assistance from LSU and UL Lafayette, more than 200 copies of the book were donated to local library and community groups. The book is available for purchase at bookstores and online at [www.booksxyz.com](http://www.booksxyz.com)



## **Membership Information**

**(for fiscal year beginning July 1, 2010)**

**Single Membership ..... \$15.00**

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