

HUMAN RELATIONS NEWS

Quarterly Newsletter of the **LOUISIANA COUNCIL ON HUMAN RELATIONS**
 incorporating **THE BATON ROUGE COUNCIL ON HUMAN RELATIONS NEWSLETTER**

JAN/FEB/MAR 2006 **SPEAKING OUT FOR A BETTER LOUISIANA SINCE 1964**

VOL. NO.

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Winter Board Meeting Held in Lafayette

The winter meeting of the L.C.H.R. Board was held at the riverside residence of Dr. Pat Rickels in Lafayette on Sat., Jan. 21st. About 15 board members were present. Guests present were Mrs. Musa and Mr. Wesley Kennedy. The latter assisted his Aunt Pat in hosting the event. King cake was served, as Carnival season was in progress.

At the spring meeting, the Board had approved allowing Eileen and Ben Shieber to use L.C.H.R. as an organizational sponsor in order that they could set up a community meeting at LSU on the war in Iraq. The Shiebers were commended for their initiative in raising concern about the war in Iraq. The Board also approved setting up a formal category of Life-member, to honor those who have contributed significantly to the goals of L.C.H.R. through financial or volunteer support.

After some discussion the Board also approved a motion by Paul Burns to emphatically condemn to use of torture by any representatives of our country. Although torture violates the most basic standards and covenants of human rights, some military and intelligence operatives have engaged in its use, and political leaders have looked for ways to circumvent these standards or justify in some way the use of torture now that, as they say, "9-11 changed everything" (?!!)

Another motion was passed to commend Board member Barbara Conner. As a member of the local planning commission, she voted to oppose an underhanded deal by the President of U.L.-L., to sell the former Horse Farm. This green oasis amid urban sprawl, would have been devoured by the greed of developers. Her exercise of civic responsibility did not sit well with some university administrators. Dr. Pat Rickels had made the motion, knowing first hand the courage it takes for faculty to "buck the system."

The Spring Board Meeting will be held on Sat. April 22nd at the home of Doris White in Plaisance, LA. For info call 337-826-7578



The Board agreed to accept the offer of the Baton Rouge Council on Human Relations to have a joint annual meeting of LCHR and the BRCHR in Baton Rouge. The date was tentatively set for June 3, 2006.

Paul Burns led a discussion of the agreements between LCHR and Casey Family Programs and LCHR and Equity!Now Baton Rouge. Equity!'s work this fall has been handicapped by Hurricane Katrina. The Board adopted a recommendation that Dick Haymaker ask Equity!Now to live up to the obligations it assumed in signing the January 2005 agreement with LCHR.

What Has Happened to My Country? by Assistant Editor Paul Y. Burns

I belong to what has been called “the greatest generation.” I’m 85 years old, a patriot, a combat veteran of World War II. I never imagined that there would be a debate about TORTURE in my country. To end this debate we need a statement from the President that torture is forbidden everywhere, all the time, under all circumstances, and by every government agency. The LCHR Board of Directors made a statement: WE OPPOSE TORTURE.

The use of torture for any reason—even in the name of fighting terrorism—is immoral and ineffective, a crime against humanity that cannot be justified. The use of torture is a violation of international law and of the U.S. Constitution, and goes against everything America stands for as a nation.

My father was a combat Marine in Europe during World War I. When World War II broke out, my brothers and I enlisted in the Armed Services. I went to Europe with the Air Corps, and helped to defeat Hitler’s gang. The U.S. was fighting evil regimes in Germany, Italy, and Japan—countries whose evil tactics we vowed we would never employ.

In the U.S., German P.O.W.’s were treated well. Americans tried to make friends out of our former enemies. In contrast, in Germany and Japan, American P.O.W.’s were ill-treated.

In 2002 the Bush administration was considering how to legally rationalize torture. The *Washington Post* in an Oct. 26, 2005 editorial titled, “Vice President for Torture” wrote that “He (Cheyney) is proposing that Congress legally

authorize human rights abuses by Americans.” Americans have tortured prisoners in several locations around the world. Ordered by the U.S. government, servicemen, contractors, and CIA employees have sodomized, killed, beaten, and maimed prisoners held in custody. At Guantanamo Bay, in Iraq, in Afghanistan, and in other places, prisoners have been punched, kicked, and had bones broken. Hoods have been placed over their heads, and they have been wrapped in duct tape. Their flesh has been seared with chemicals. They have been suffocated, hung upside down until dead, starved, frozen to death, electrically shocked, and water-boarded. In few of these cases have the victims been charged with a crime. Little or no evidence has been formally presented against the prisoners subjected to excruciating pain.

What has happened to the U.S.A. since my generation lost control? How can we possibly be debating the “merits” of torture? How can we promote human rights by eroding human rights? I have signed Amnesty International’s *Petition Against Torture*. Readers with access to the internet should also sign. Go to <http://denoucetorture.amnestyusa.org/> **SPEAK UP!**



Left Behind After Katrina-Then and Now

Attorney Bill Quigley, a New Orleans human rights attorney and professor at Loyola University, has posted on the website www.truthout.org a compelling story of evacuation from N.O. after Hurricane Katrina. He and his wife huddled with 2,000 people in a hospital without any electricity or water. Even cell phones could not work, so there was no communication with the outside. After five days, they were rescued by fishing boat. He noted that those with resources were able to leave, but left behind were the poor, the sick, the elderly, the disabled, children, and prisoners—all largely African-American. While Quigley had a home to return to that could be repaired, those people who rented, and were poor or unemployed, had no place to return to. Healthcare in New Orleans is now difficult even for those with insurance, but nearly impossible for the poor without it. There is no functioning public hospital in New Orleans. Before the storm there were 60,000 public school students; now there are only 13,000 including charter school students. New Orleans is at risk of losing 80% of its black population. The people left behind in the evacuation of New Orleans after Katrina are the same people being left behind in the rebuilding of New Orleans.

Sheehan Speaks in N.O. and B.R.

Peace Mom Cindy Sheehan, with her back to the boarded-up St. Bernard housing Development, which before Hurricane Katrina housed up to 1,300 families, stood on the step in February and said that the slow recovery in New Orleans is related to the siphoning of federal dollars for the Iraq War. Sheehan, mother of the U.S. soldier Casey Sheehan, killed in action in Iraq on 4-4-04, had spent the weekend in Baton Rouge, and was on her way back to Washington to file a lawsuit related to her arrest at President Bush's State-of-the-Union address. Her "crime" was that she wore on her t-shirt "2245 DEAD. HOW MANY MORE?". By March 9, the total had reached 2306.

Ms. Sheehan visited Baton Rouge on Feb. 12th. She was a pulpit guest at the Unitarian Church, and later that day addressed a public meeting, accompanied by her

friend Ann Wright, a retired Army Colonel. Both speakers favored immediate withdrawal of our troops from Iraq. After the talks by Sheehan and Wright, a candlelight vigil for peace, honoring those killed in Iraq, was held on the church lawn. The next day Mrs. Sheehan and Lt. Col. David Couvillon spoke about the Iraq War at L.S.U. Sheehan said that the Sept. 11, 2001 terrorist attack could not be used to justify invasion of Iraq. Couvillon spoke in support of the war.

Sheehan was arrested again on March 6th in front of the building which houses the American Permanent Mission to the United Nations in New York. She and three other activists were charged with criminal trespassing and resisting arrest after trying to deliver a petition with more than 60,000 signatures urging the withdrawal of all troops and foreign fighters from Iraq.

EQUALITY RIDE HITS CAMPUSES

Inspired by the Freedom Rides of the 1960's, a busload of 35 GLBT (gay, lesbian, bisexual, & transgender) young people, age 18 through 27, are traveling across the country to religious and military colleges where GLBT youth are discriminated against and subject to being expelled if they are open about their identity. The Equality Ride is sponsored by Soulforce. This organization applies the "soulforce" principles of Dr. Martin Luther King and Mahatma Gandhi to counter religious oppression and spiritual violence against persons who are in the sexual minority. The organization was founded in 1999 by Rev. Mel White and his partner Gary Nixon. Rev. White had at one time been a speech-writer and media consultant for members of the Religious Right, including Jerry Falwell and Pat Robertson. Liberty University and Regent University, schools associated with the ministries of the above, were among the schools which have been visited. The purpose of the ride is to reach out to closeted gay and lesbian students on the campuses and open dialogue with campuses and nonviolently invite them to reconsider their oppressive and exclusionary policies.

The Equality Ride has generally met with a frosty reception when it has parked at the conservative Christian college campuses. At Lee University in Cleveland, TN the bus was defaced with paint reading "Fag Mobile." However, some students on campus came to clean off the graffiti as best they could. At Liberty University they passed out fliers pointing out that the Rev. Falwell, who founded the campus, had years ago not allowed black people into his Church, and called the civil rights movement the "civil wrongs movement." He has reversed these earlier stands, but remains adamant that gay and lesbian students are barred from his university, and has said the campus should be "burned to the ground" if it ever reverses this exclusionary policy.

A total of 19 schools are on the Equality Ride itinerary and the tour will conclude with a visit to the U.S. Military Academy at West Point on April 29th. For further information and updates on the progress of the Equality Ride go to the Soulforce website:

www.soulforce.org

CIVIL RIGHTS MEMORIAL in BIRMINGHAM

On Oct. 23rd, last year, thousands gathered in Montgomery, AL to celebrate a new Civil Rights Memorial Center which now houses the Wall of Tolerance. In 1989 the Southern Poverty Law Center dedicated the Civil Rights Memorial, honoring

those who died in the Civil Rights Movement and chronicling its history. Visitors may pledge to work for social justice in their daily lives by adding their names to the Wall of Tolerance. Host for the ceremony was NAACP Chairman Julian Bond.

BLACK COWBOYS

The Houston Livestock Show and Rodeo in February held a Black Heritage Day to honor the African-American contributions to cowboy and rodeo history and lore. This obscure chapter in the saga of the West is being championed by Mollie Taylor Stevenson, Jr. at her American Cowboy Museum on her family's ranch. She is concerned that this chapter is not only obscure but is fading away as fewer African-American youth grow up in the country and participate in such country life programs as 4-H and F.F.A. Although black children's parents may not be able to afford to have their children raise show cattle, Ms. Stevenson is hopeful that they will at least be able to show chickens and rabbits in competitions. She hopes that the dream of owning and working land and livestock, which animated African-Americans through many generations, will remain alive in the hearts of African-Americans of today.

Ms. Stevenson's museum also includes displays on the contributions of Hispanics, Indians, and women. The story of historic figures such as Bill Pickett and Bose Ikard are displayed. Pickett invented the sport of steer-wrestling, and Ikard was the prototype for the fictional character played by Danny Glover in the mini-series *Lonesome Dove*. Racism contributed to the obscurity of the Black cowboys. They were confined to the hardest and dirtiest jobs on the ranches and drives. Although Blacks began breaking into rodeo back in the 1950's, their acceptance and recognition has been very gradual.

Stevenson's mother, Mollie Taylor Stevenson, Sr. was the first Black woman inducted into the National Cowgirl Hall of Fame in Ft. Worth, TX. (from *The Advertiser*, 4-19-06)

GAY COWBOYS

Although the movie *Brokeback Mountain* failed to sweep the Oscars, as some had predicted, it was awarded three, including Best Director for Ang Lee. The sad tale of love between two western ranch hands is based on a short story by Annie Proulx. It has become somewhat of a cultural phenomenon destined to join *Casablanca* and *Titanic* as a classic movie portrayal of star-crossed lovers. It has struck a strong emotional chord with a wide range of movie-goers.

Journalist Dave Cullen says that "the straight community is finally ready to embrace this film. They've become more accepting, more understanding. When they see this film, they realize gay love is no different from straight love." Cullen has created a website for fans of the film—

www.davecullen.com/brokebackmountain. In January alone the site received almost 2 million hits.

Brokeback Mountain is not an agenda film, but it delivers a powerful message, says Robin Parker, exec. dir. of the Beyond Diversity Resource Center in Mount Laurel, N.J. "This film makes two gay men fully human...they don't fit the image of the gay stereotype of most Americans. The two cowboys are men's men. They fight with their fist, swig whiskey and ride the range, but they also fall in love with each other. *Brokeback Mountain* raises the issue of what it means to be a man," explains Parker. "That issue is important to all Americans, black and white, straight and gay." (from the article of Robert Baxter printed in *The Advertiser* 3-4-06.)

BOOK REVIEW: MIRROR TO AMERICA—The Autobiography of John Hope Franklin

At age 90, the renowned African-American historian, John Hope Franklin, has had his own story published, and it has been receiving favorable notices. Franklin, more than any other scholar, has made African American history an essential part of American history. In an academic career that has spanned seven decades, Franklin has published many path-breaking books. His name is well known to generations of college students and history buffs for his sterling textbook of African-American history *From Slavery to Freedom*, first published in 1947 and now in its eighth edition.

Franklin's lively, well-written book surveys a life of accomplishment marred by sad turning points and by the infuriating sting of racism. Franklin was born in a remote area of Oklahoma and grew up in Tulsa. He went to Fisk University in Nashville and earned a Ph.D. in history from Harvard. He then went on to an illustrious career holding prestigious chairs at Brooklyn College and the University of Chicago. Despite his renown the stinging barbs of racism would remind him of the elusiveness of freedom and equality for African-Americans citizens of this country.

The weaving of the personal events of Franklin's life, with the historical panorama of his times, make for an engaging and compelling story. *Mirror to America* makes clear where America fails while offering a testament to what America can be.

(from the review of Graham Russell Hodges in *America* 3-20-06)

LCHR WOMEN RECOGNIZED

During the month of March, *The Advertiser* has, in each issue, honored a Lafayette area woman of distinction. Several women associated with LCHR have been so recognized. Our Secretary, and the “Sweetheart” of LCHR, Dr. Pat Rickels was featured. It was noted that she continues to serve on the Council, and has made the sharing of knowledge and teaching of tolerance, her life’s work, in and out of the classroom. The article states that she is known for “her sharp wit, unflinching opinions, and zeal for inspiring knowledge.” All of us in LCHR can attest to that.

One of our newest board members, Ms. J’Nelle Chargois was also featured in this column of “31 Women You Need to Know.” Her energy has enhanced the fortunes of KJCB radio, of which she is Manager, and of the NAACP, of which is vice-president of the state organization, and former local president. She is quoted as saying, “I have a deep concern about people, poverty, and the quality of life that people have, and I always work to try to ensure that people have greater opportunities to

CORETTA SCOTT KING

Only a few months after the death of Rosa Parks, the widow of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Coretta Scott King, has died. No two people were as closely associated with the legacy of Dr. King. With Parks it was with the defining event, the Montgomery Bus Boycott, that catapulted him into leadership of the Civil Rights Movement. On the other hand Coretta Scott shared intimately in the triumphs and trials of her husband and the movement he was so dedicated to. Following his death, it was she who held aloft the flame of his memory. The King Center for Non-violent Change in Atlanta and the national holiday honoring his birthday were largely due to her tireless dedication to honor the memory of his beloved husband. Now, she too is gone. Her death leaves a void for all those who hunger and thirst for justice and peace in our world.

grow.”

Another long-time supporter of LCHR featured was Ms. Lorna Bourg of New Iberia. Long the guiding force of Southern Mutual Help Association, she received LCHR’s Oliver-Sigur Humanitarian Award. In 2002, S.M.H.A. has for years made an impact on the lives of rural poor people, particularly in the area of housing. Through their efforts 350 volunteers came to help rebuild 286 homes damaged in the hurricanes. She is quoted as saying, “I’m a Cajun woman, and we always work hard in my family, talk straight, and try to be kind to other people.”

Another supporter of L.C.H.R. included was Dr. Sarah Brabant, retired ULL prof. of sociology. Her work in helping peo-

ple heal from death and trauma has had an important impact in the community. She also was instrumental in the formation of the Mayor’s Commission on the Needs of Women in 1977. In the article, she honored other women with whom she worked cooperatively on this project and others, noting in particular Jessie Taylor, as the first Black woman in City Hall.



LAFAYETTE RACE RELATIONS

There has been a rather frustrating impasse in Lafayette over the issue of renaming a major thoroughfare for the Rev. Martin L. King, Jr. There is a street south of I-10 with this name, but it is a non-connecting road passing through a neighborhood. Willow St. has been proposed as a more fitting street. It passes through the entire north side of Lafayette all the way to Scott. It is likely to become more prominent a connector as development proceeds. The diversion of funds earmarked for road development in the north-side area, which is predominantly Black, to a road project elsewhere, set the stage for what has seemed to be an unfriendly and uncooperative climate among the Council members. What would seem to be a rather uncontroversial measure has become a very sore point among all parties. Black citizens have expressed concern that if they can’t be heard on this issue, they will have a battle on their hands for just about everything. *The Advertiser* has editorialized that this issue could unravel race relations in Lafayette. They state on 3-6-06, that “first there must be positive dialogue. We urge an end to angry rhetoric and recalcitrant attitudes and the beginning of sincere efforts to reach a consensus—through which the rift in race relations can be mended and King honored in a fitting manner.”

BATON ROUGE HUMAN RELATIONS NEWS

Vol.

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No.

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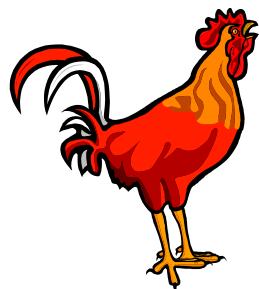
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POWELL-REZNIKOFF AWARDS DINNER COMING

The Baton Rouge Council on Human Relations Annual Humanitarian Awards Dinner is scheduled for the evening of Thursday, April 13th at the Wesley Foundation, Southern University Campus, 748 Harding Blvd.

The award honors Fr. Elmer Powell, S.V.D. and Rabbi Marvin Reznikoff, both long deceased, who made significant and pioneering efforts on behalf of inter-racial and inter-faith understanding and cooperation. It is given each year to honor members of the Baton Rouge community whose past and current efforts on behalf of human relations deserve recognition.

This year the award will be presented to Mr. Thomas Woods, civil rights activist and the first African-American Fire Chief in Baton Rouge, and to Dr. Aileen A. Henricks, community activist and Southern University professor. The theme of the evening will be "Devastation Strengthens the Human Spirit." The catered dinner will commence at 6:30 p.m., with the awards program and presentation at 7:00 p.m.

BRCHR MEMBERS IN THE NEWS

Imam Jehad Mahmoud, BRCHR Board member, was featured in an Oct. 8th article in *The Advocate* on the response of the Islam Center of Baton Rouge to Hurricane Katrina. The Evacuee Shelter set up by the Islamic Center provided homes for over 100 Muslim families from New Orleans who were displaced by Hurricane Katrina.

Roberta Madden, who was recipient of the Powell-Reznikoff Humnitarian Award back in 1985, was honored again for her humanitarian work on Feb. 19th at

Mt. Zion First Baptist Church, one of the most prestigious historically black Baptist congregations in the state of Louisiana. The Rev. Dr. Chris Andrews, Pastor of First United Methodist Church, Baton Rouge, who received the Powell-Reznikoff Award in 1994, was the guest preacher at the awards ceremony.

BRCHR Supports Grant Application

The Greater Baton Rouge YWCA has applied for a grant from the Babcock Foundation to establish a Center for Racial and Social Justice in Baton Rouge. This Center is much needed. In recent decades, the YWCA has made the promotion of improved race relations a priority in its programming. As well as the YWCA and the BRCHR, the Gr. B.R. Federation of Churches and Synagogues, the local NAACP chapter, Equity!Now Baton Rouge, and a number of other groups are actively involved in effecting positive social change. A Center would be a tremendous resource for these organization; providing assistance in coordination of programming to more effectively reach and engage the greater community.

CAMPUS STEREOTYPES DISCUSSED

In February, LSU's Black Student Union hosted a program, called "Building Bridges to Break Barriers," featuring a panel of three students each from our two Baton Rouge universities, L.S.U. and S.U. Since L.S.U. is predominantly white and S.U. predominantly black, the discussion explored the perceptions and stereotypes of students may have of each others' campuses and student bodies. Among those voiced were of LSU being unwelcoming

(cont. from previous page) and “stuck-up” toward black students, and of S.U. students being “ghetto” and more concerned with fashion than education. One of the panelists reported ongoing racial problems at L.S.U., but with a gradual trend toward improvement.

POST-KATRINA CHALLENGES

A forum was held on March 9th at the MLK Catholic Student Center at Southern University, on the challenges to the Greater Baton Rouge area in the wake of the population shift brought about by Hurricane Katrina. It was sponsored by the B.R.C.H.R. along with the Working Interfaith Network, Na-

tional Assn. of University Women, National Coalition of 100 Black Women, Community Assn. for the Welfare of School Children, and the B.R. Area Chamber of Commerce.

Panel speakers included Willie Johnson, Senior V-P of Community Development; Hampton Grunewald, Exec.-Sec. to the Mayor-President; Angel Lee, Spec. Asst. to the Superintendent of the E.B.R. School System; Harry Noftsker, Lead Volunteer Agency Liaison with F.E.M.A.; Harold Rideau, Mayor of Baker, Rev. Robin Bady, Pastor of Lutheran Church of Our Savior; Jan Kasovsky, Exec. Dir. of Capital Area Human Services Dist.; and Gregory Hamilton, Renaissance Village Council of Baker. Richard Haymaker moderated the panel. The program was informative and lively with an audience of about 75 attending.

CODEPINK CHAPTER

CodePink: Women for Peace, is a new national women-initiated grassroots peace and justice movement that seeks positive social change through proactive protest and nonviolent direct action. More than 100,000 persons have signed on to their website:

www.womensaynotowar.org.

CodePink leaders recent met with Congressman Murtha of Pennsylvania, to thank him for his courageous stand in Congress against the war in Iraq. CodePink seeks an immediate withdrawal of all National Guard troops from Iraq. Just imagine, men! Suppose all the women of the world suddenly said “NO” to war. What do suppose would happen?

CHARTER MEMBER SELMA MACKIE DIES IN NORTH CAROLINA

We have received word that Ms. Thelma Mackie, a charter member of the BRCHR, died this past fall. Although it has been many decades since she lived in Baton Rouge, she had faithfully paid dues to the BRCHR through all these years. She was of advanced years, and had lived for quite some time in a Society of Friends (Quaker) retirement home in Greensboro, N.C. Ms. Selma was the widow of Wade Mackie. Wade was sent to Baton Rouge in the late 1950's by the American Friends Service Committee (the social action arm of the Quakers), to help pave the way for integration of the schools. At that time, Baton Rouge was a rigidly segregated community. She and her late husband had to be spiritually courageous to challenge a system so entrenched at all levels of society. For whites and blacks to hold

a public meeting together was forbidden by law. The only way around this was if it was a church affair, so her late husband's little office was designated an “Institute of Religion.” However, local law enforcement and the District Attorney spied on the meetings and license numbers were written down. The mindset of the time was that opposition to racial segregation was tantamount to promoting Communism.

Nevertheless the efforts of Wade and Selma Mackie did bear fruit. The coterie of black and white citizens attracted to their mission of gently tearing down the walls of segregation, formed the nucleus that eventually became the Baton Rouge Council on Human Relations. Although her stay in Baton Rouge was relatively brief, Selma Mackie maintained a life-long affection for all those she had met in Baton Rouge.

This was evident in her faithful yearly renewal of membership in the Baton Rouge Council on Human Relations. Mrs. Mackie was also an example of steadfastness in her life-long devotion to her Quaker Christian faith.

their days are like grass
they flourish like a flower of the field
for the wind passes over it, and it is
gone.
and its place knows it no more.
but the steadfast love of the Lord
is from everlasting to everlasting.
on those who fear him.
and his righteousness to his children's
children
to those who keep his covenant
and remember to do his
commandments.

Psalm 103:15-18



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INDIGENT DEFENDER FUNDING UNCONSTITUTIONAL

The head of the Tulane Law Clinic told a judge that the way Louisiana funds the Indigent Defender's office creates a conflict of interest between the defendant and the public defender, thereby depriving defendants of their right to effective counsel.

Louisiana funds the office through parking tickets and fines imposed on convicted defendants, which Pam Metzger, Director of the Law Clinic, told Judge Arthur Hunter, creates an unacceptable conflict. She stated that the public defenders should not be trying to collect fees and fines. Their job is to represent individual defendants, which may involved trying

to reduce fines that get levied against them.

Hurricane Katrina completely upset the Indigent Defenders Office in New Orleans, which lost its office and most of its staff and budget, 75% of which had been funded from traffic court fines, which fell to almost nothing following Katrina.

Although Judge Hunter did not rule on Metzger's motion, he did acknowledge it had merits, and he has halted trials involving public defenders in his section of the court.

(from The Advertiser 3-10-06)

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