

Newsletter of the LCHR

Louisiana Council on Human Relations

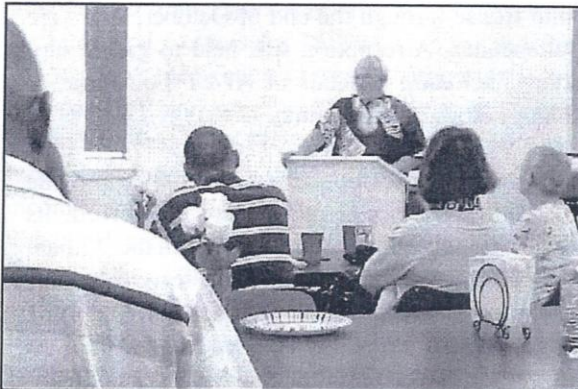
James D. Wilson, Jr., Editor
jwilson005@bellsouth.net

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LCHR Annual Meeting Held in Opelousas

The Louisiana Council on Human Relations held its annual meeting at Mount Olive Baptist Church in Opelousas, La. on Saturday, June 18. This year's meeting was held in conjunction with *Vien Ensemble Acadiana* (Coming Together Acadiana), a recently established human rights group centered in St. Landry Parish. The theme of this year's meeting was "Telling Where it Hurts: Swapping Stories and Healing Wounds." Reverend Walton Dunbar, founder of V.E.A., was the driving force behind the program and he shared several stories from his experiences in St. Landry Parish. Reverend Dunbar was joined on the program by LCHR board member Doris White, Hebrard Green, Jr., and Reverend Woodrow Thompson. The program included a lively discussion of the current state of race relations in Louisiana and was highlighted by a spirited rendition of "There Is A Balm In Gilead To Make The Wounded Whole."

At the meeting attention was called to the desperate state of the local Opelousas Boys and Girls Club, which was forced to shut its doors earlier this summer for the first time ever due to a significant reduction in funding.



Reverend Walton Dunbar of *Viens Ensemble Acadiana* addresses the audience at the 2011 LCHR annual meeting.

The 2011 Oliver-Sigur Humanitarian Awards were also presented as part of the LCHR annual meeting. This year's recipients are Dr. Sarah Brabant of Lafayette and Mrs. Frances Bussie of Baton Rouge. Dr. Brabant, a Professor Emeritus of Sociology at the University of Louisiana at Lafayette, has assisted the needy of south Louisiana for over forty years, focusing special attention on poverty and mental health issues, as well as grief counseling. Mrs. Fran Bussie, a longtime community service advocate in the Baton Rouge area, has served on countless boards and committees through the years and been particularly active in the political sphere. Bussie, the wife of longtime labor activist and Democratic Party organizer Victor Bussie, served as a delegate to several national political conventions and was one of Louisiana's greatest proponents of the Equal Rights Amendment.

The Oliver-Sigur Humanitarian Award is named for the late Dr. James Oliver and the late Msgr. Alexander Sigur, both of whom were instrumental in the establishing of the Louisiana Council on Human Relations in 1964.



LCHR Board Members Joe McCarty and Joe Dennis with 2011 Oliver-Sigur Award recipient Dr. Sarah Brabant.

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Ruby Bridges Painting Goes Up In Obama White House

New Orleans Civil Rights pioneer Ruby Bridges met with President Obama earlier this month to celebrate the hanging of the famous Norman Rockwell painting, "The Problem We All Live With."

Rockwell's painting depicts 6-year-old Bridges surrounded by federal marshals as she integrated William Frantz Elementary in New Orleans in 1960. The painting, which was on the cover of *Look* magazine in 1964 and immediately became an important image of the Civil Rights Movement, was hung in the White House to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the integration of public elementary schools in the South.

"Since President Obama came into office, I have supported having the painting hung in the White House," said Bridges. "It is the perfect symbol of how much we have accomplished in the last 50 years and a poignant reminder of how far we have left to go."

When Rockwell moved from *The Saturday Evening Post* to *Look* magazine in the 1960s, he began to explore social commentary in his work. "The Problem We All Live With" focuses on segregation, depicting a wall of racial slurs, stains from thrown tomatoes and faceless marshals.

Bridges was accompanied at the White House by her husband, Malcolm Hall, and her youngest son, Rae-shad Hall. Representatives from the Norman Rockwell Museum, which is loaning the painting to the White House through the end of October, also were in attendance. A reception was held to gather supporters, including officials of AT&T Louisiana, of the Ruby Bridges Foundation.

Bridges started the foundation in 1998 to provide children with an equal opportunity to succeed. Its primary initiative is to create a school in the William Frantz Elementary building that will serve as a model for integration and equity in education. The Ruby Bridges School would educate leaders for the 21st century who are committed to social justice, community service, equality, racial healing and nonviolence.

HIV Epidemic in the South

Until his death in March, bluesman “Big” Jack Johnson of Clarksdale, Miss., crisscrossed the troubled terrain of the Mississippi Delta, singing of broken homes and broken hearts. His songs touched on all the timeless blues themes of poverty, abuse, abandonment and longing. But Johnson also took on a newer heartache—HIV/AIDS—that is sweeping through the Delta and much of the rest of the South. And he confronted it head-on.

“Hello, little schoolgirl,” Johnson sang, “You better keep your dress tail down. I hear there’s a lot of AIDS out here, and it’s spreading all around.” When the song was released in 1991, many people still regarded HIV/AIDS as chiefly a problem of gay enclaves in big cities. But a new county-level map of U.S. HIV infection data, by researchers at Emory University’s Rollins School of Public Health, along with an analysis of the data by *USA Today*, shows how deeply in three decades HIV also has become entrenched in America’s heartland, especially the South.

HIV is tightly entwined with poverty. Southern counties that have the greatest rates of HIV infection are among the poorest in the nation. Elsewhere in the USA, counties with the highest rates of HIV-infected people had, on average, one in seven people living in poverty, earning roughly \$22,350 for a family of four. In the South’s most HIV-stricken counties, about one of every five people live below the federal poverty line.

Jonathan Mermin, director of HIV/AIDS prevention at the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, says the agency’s research supports the link between HIV and poverty. “People with household incomes of less than \$10,000 a year were 10 times more likely to have HIV than people whose household incomes are greater than \$50,000.” What’s more, the South’s HIV-infection rates were statistically higher than the rest of the nation, and the epidemic disproportionately affects minorities, especially blacks. In Mississippi, blacks account for 37 percent of the population but 76 percent of new cases of HIV.

Louisiana isn’t far behind. Statewide, 72 percent of newly diagnosed HIV/AIDS cases were blacks, although they account for just more than 30 percent

of the total population. Based on the latest available figures from the Louisiana Department of Health and Hospitals, the HIV diagnosis rate among blacks was five times higher than the rate among whites and nearly twice as high as the rate among Hispanics.

Richard Womack, director of Go Care in Monroe—a non-profit, community-based agency that provides HIV testing, counseling, outreach and other prevention activities—said northeastern Louisiana has ranked as the third-highest region in the state in per capita HIV/AIDS rates behind New Orleans and Baton Rouge for years. “We’re seeing the same thing here,” Womack said. “It is definitely a disease of poverty. It has a lot to do with the poverty that exists in northeastern Louisiana. When you look at the poor parishes in our region, you see very high incidence rates of HIV. That has to do with things like a lack of education and unemployment.” The per capita rate of persons living with HIV/AIDS is higher in smaller, poorer parishes in the region such as Tensas and East Carroll parishes, he said.

Christopher Murray, of the non-profit Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation in Seattle, a non-profit that studies factors that contribute to health, said that “findings are incredibly robust” that a lack of education may be as important an explanation as poverty for poor health in communities worldwide.

AIDS activist Cedric Sturdevant, 46, of Jackson, Miss., who was diagnosed with HIV in 2006, said misinformation about HIV helps fuel Mississippi’s epidemic. “Mississippi, being a Bible belt state, is homophobic,” he said. “If you’re heterosexual, and you get infected, you don’t want people to put you in the category of being homosexual.” The shame attached to HIV also contributes to its spread by discouraging people—especially young black gay men, who are at especially high risk of infection—from getting tested or seeking treatment, he said.

Womack said those same stigmas exist in northeastern Louisiana. “We see that all the time,” Womack said. “People not coming in to get tested simply because of their fear of someone seeing them or finding out.” The stigma is more pronounced in southern states and more pronounced in more rural areas of the state like northeast Louisiana.”

White Supremacist Stampede

Add to the growing list of candidates considering a bid for the GOP presidential nomination in 2012 America's most famous white-power advocate: David Duke. A former grand wizard of the Ku Klux Klan, member of the Louisiana House of Representatives and Republican executive-committee chairman in his district until 2000, Duke has a significant following online. His videos go viral. This month, he's launching a tour of 25 states to explore how much support he can garner for a potential presidential bid. He hasn't considered running for serious office since the early '90s, when he won nearly 40 percent of the vote in his bid for Louisiana governor. But like many "white civil rights advocates," as he describes himself, 2012 is already shaping up to be a pivotal year.

Former (and current) Neo Nazis, Ku Klux Klan members, neo-Confederates, and other representatives of the many wings of the "white nationalist" movement are starting to file paperwork and print campaign literature for offices large and small, pointing to rising unemployment, four years with an African-American president, and rampant illegal immigration as growing evidence that white people need to take a stand.

Most aren't winning—not yet. But they're drawing levels of support that surprise and alarm groups that keep tabs on the white-power movement (members prefer the terms "racial realist" or "white nationalist"). In May, the National Socialist Movement's Jeff Hall hit national headlines in a bizarre tragedy: his murder, allegedly at the hands of his 10-year-old son. But before his death, he had campaigned for a low-level water board position in Riverside, California. The swastika-wearing plumber who patrolled the U.S. border paramilitary-style walked away with almost 30 percent of his community's vote. "That's a sizable amount of the vote for a person running openly as a Neo Nazi," says Marilyn Mayo, of the Anti-Defamation League. While Hall's political future—and life—has been cut short, Mayo points out that we should expect more white supremacist hopefuls next year.

Mayo and others date the current spike to 2008, and the election of the country's first African-American president (an historic marker accompanied by a surge in the percentage of U.S. children born to minorities in 2008—48 percent, compared to 37 percent in 1990). "The immediate reaction after Obama was elected was of rage. They feel if a black man can get elected, why can't someone who represents white interests?" Just a

few weeks after Obama's election, Duke gathered followers in Memphis to expressly strategize what to do next. The solution? If you can't beat 'em, join 'em.

What followed in 2010, say extremism watchers, was the biggest electoral push by white supremacists in years. "We've seen increasing numbers of white supremacists and others on the radical right running for electoral office for several years now and we likely had more in the last election than in any other in recent memory," says Mark Potok of the Southern Poverty Law Center. "Although extremely few of these people are elected, especially if their views become known during the campaign, the fact that there are so many openly running for public office reflects the growth of white nationalism over the last 10 years."

Potok's group tracked 23 candidates in 2010 with radical right-wing views, nine of whom they described as white supremacists or white nationalists. (The others had extreme immigration and world-conspiracy views but did not specifically have links to white organizations.) One candidate, the neo-Confederate Loy Mauch, won a seat in the Arkansas House of Representatives, and another, James C. Russell, who has denounced interracial marriage, garnered 37 percent of the vote in his quest for the New York House of Representatives. Some candidates benefited from a new umbrella organization—the A3P, or American Third Position—which was launched in 2010 by a handful of wonkish-looking professors and corporate lawyers to, as they wrote in their mission statement, "represent the political interests of White Americans." One of their political hopefuls, Atlee Yarrow, who has filed paperwork to run for Florida governor in 2014, says the Southern Poverty Law Center has listed A3P as a hate group "but it has open membership that mirrors the NAACP. They can have identity politics, but if white people do, it's considered racist."

Disappointed with Ron and Rand Paul and other leaders who they feel are close, but not close enough, to their views—the A3P has fielded candidates like Harry Bertram, who ran for the West Virginia board of education last fall, pulling down 14 percent of the vote. He's now angling for governor. "My platform is conservative like the Tea Party but more racist inclined," Bertram says. Another A3P candidate won 11 percent of the vote in a recent run for a seat in the New Hampshire House of Representatives. Those numbers are small, but hardly laughable, especially for a new group explicitly running on a white-interest ticket. "We're just beginning," says board member Jamie Kelso, who says the group's

platform includes a complete moratorium on immigration. "But we're filling a void."

Some candidates for 2012 are already filling paperwork. "White people need to wake up to the fact that we're becoming a minority in our country," says John Abarr, a 41-year-old former organizer for the Knights of the Ku Klux Klan, has filed to begin raising money for Montana's lone U.S. House seat. He's not worried that the Republican Party isn't backing him: "I don't think public opinion is all that much against us. Montanans are independent thinkers." His key platform? Abolish the Fed, raise the military age to 21 to stop what he calls the "barbaric" practice of sending teenagers to war, end the death penalty, legalize marijuana (he doesn't smoke or drink himself), establish a 5 percent flat tax, and help whites by fighting entitlements (like affirmative action and immigration) that he says favor minorities. He describes the Klan as a Christian, white civil-rights organization, and glosses over the brutality that has earned the group its bad name. "I can't agree with lynching anybody for any reason, but that was a different time in our history." He adds: "We already have a black president, and I'm not sure when we'll have a white president elected again."

Another self-described blue-collar, pro-white candidate is The Nationalist Party of America's Billy Roper. After a long career in neo-Nazi organizations and failing spectacularly in his bid for Arkansas governor in 2010, Roper and a fellow "White Aryan" veep candidate are promising on their 2012 website to continue the fight "for the civil rights of Americans of European ancestry." Now supported by the A3P, he ran as a write-in candidate for governor, he says, to learn the ropes for 2012. He's faced censorship, and has come to see it as a political plus. "Let's just say Facebook wasn't founded by the Irish. Hundreds of white nationalists like myself have had our pages and profiles deleted, disabled, or frozen. It teaches newcomers that censorship really does exist, and just hardens our resolve."

One key precinct for politically minded white-rights activists: Stormfront, the nation's largest white-supremacist website, where thousands of "racial realists" talk about everything from homeschooling and the news to uniting into a single party. Stormfront founder and radio host Don Black suggest the strategy is to start from the ground up, "where we have a chance of winning. It's impossible to get into the Senate or Congress but state legislatures or smaller offices can work." Black says the Tea Party's influence spurred hopes among his ideological soulmates—but that the initial excitement

has given way to a realpolitik sense that the Stormfront crowd will have to go it alone. "Many of our people are involved in the Tea Party," says Black. "But much of their leadership is skittish when it comes to talking about racial realities. The Tea Party is a healthy movement but many are too conditioned to run like scared rabbits when called racists."

No office is too small. The Neo-Nazi National Socialist Movement's "Sergeant" Harriet Paletti in Wisconsin, a bubbly working mom with three kids, only takes off her swastika when she's at work. She'll be running for her district's alderman position in 2012 and has just sent in her résumé to the mayor of New Berlin, hoping to fill a seat on either the Crime Prevention Committee, Police and Fire Commission, or the Parks and Recreation Board. "These are volunteer positions which of course will boost my political résumé when I begin my campaign in late 2012." If elected, she says she'll represent everyone in her mostly white district, regardless of color. She just doesn't believe in intermingling in private life, part of what she calls a "natural law of self segregation."

Another NSM leader, Brian Culpepper, says his chapter in Tennessee may openly field a candidate for the state and U.S. House of Representatives. Culpepper describes himself as a "realist," saying he prefers sneaking candidates into office under the radar rather than openly flouting the white-rights agenda. The same is true of the United Klans of Tennessee, which says it has several mayors and county commissioners serving who do not openly identify as Klan members. "We insert ourselves into the infrastructure of other established parties due to the bias against us and the difficulty of third parties to get ballot access," says Culpepper. Unlike other Neo-Nazis in his group, these are not on NSM rosters and "have hair, no ink, no piercings, and increasingly are college-degreed" says Culpepper, who says he is also a "suit and tie" guy and does not favor bomber jackets. Some Neo-Nazis have quietly been joining national campaigns and offices to start sharpening their political teeth. "We have people working with the most recent incoming class of freshmen in the House," says Culpepper. "And they don't even know it."

A Duke candidacy could have a galvanizing effect. He has been living in Europe in recent years, but maintains a high profile—and stokes his fan base—online. Duke says there is nothing wrong with a white political bloc. "I have no hatred of anyone," Duke says. "Just a love of my heritage and values."

Louisiana Violated Disabled Voter Rights, U.S. Says in Suit

The state of Louisiana and some of its agencies and officials violated the National Voter Registration Act through their treatment of disabled residents and people on public assistance, the U.S. said in a lawsuit.

The U.S. Justice Department said in the suit filed in federal court in Baton Rouge, Louisiana that the state broke the law by failing to provide voter registration services at offices administering to residents on public assistance or state-funded programs serving people with disabilities. The law requires states to "identify and designate" these offices as voter registration agencies, the U.S. said.

"The voting process begins with registration," Thomas E. Perez, assistant attorney general in the civil rights division, said in an e-mailed statement. "Therefore, it is essential that all citizens have unfettered access to voter registration."

The Justice Department is seeking a court order requiring the state and its agencies to comply with the voter registration law. The U.S. names as defendants the state, Louisiana Secretary of State J. Thomas Schedler, the Louisiana Department of Health and Hospitals and others.

Sharon Kleinpeter, spokeswoman for the Louisiana attorney general's office, said she couldn't immediately comment.

The lawsuit is U.S. v. State of Louisiana, 3:11-cv-00470, U.S. District Court, Middle District of Louisiana (Baton Rouge)

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**James Wilson
417 Elizabeth Ave.
Lafayette, LA 70501**

jwilson005@bellsouth.net

EDITORIAL

Fairer Treatment for Katrina's Victims

The federal Department of Housing and Urban Development recently announced that it had reached a legal settlement in a civil rights lawsuit over Louisiana's Road Home program, which distributed aid to those trying to rebuild homes destroyed by Hurricane Katrina.

The suit filed in 2008 by fair housing groups charged that the program discriminated against minority homeowners because the grants were based not on replacement costs, but on the prehurricane value of their houses, which were on average less expensive than identical homes in wealthier neighborhoods.

The failure to treat low-income homeowners equitably has been longstanding. Shortly after Katrina hit, President George W. Bush pledged that the federal government would "stay as long as it takes to help citizens rebuild their communities and their lives." When Mr. Bush left office three years later, it was clear that the federal government had done little to ensure that low- and moderate-income communities got the 50 percent share of federal disaster aid that they were entitled to under federal law. As a result, many poor families have suffered far more and far longer than they should have while redevelopment in some areas has lagged.

The Obama administration has worked to reverse this trend all along the storm-ravaged Gulf Coast. The HUD secretary, Shaun Donovan, has pressed both Mississippi and Texas to direct more money to low- and moderate-income communities. Under last week's settlement, about \$62 million in aid will be distributed to 1,400 mainly minority homeowners whose homes are not habitable.

The settlement is just the latest chapter in a six-year struggle to win a fair share of the redevelopment pie for struggling neighborhoods. To prevent a replay the next time disaster strikes, Congress needs to strengthen the law so that poor communities get what they are entitled to from the beginning, not five or six years later. That means reinforcing aid eligibility rules and watching closely to make sure that the states follow them.

~From the editors of the *New York Times*.

Newsletter of the BRCHR

Baton Rouge Council on Human Relations

Paul Y. Burns, Assistant Editor

Volume 46, Issue 2

BRCHR News

The Baton Rouge Council on Human Relations had a very busy Spring. In addition to hosting its annual Spring Forum, the BRCHR presented the 2011 Powell-Reznikoff Humanitarian Awards to Gloria J. Graham and Julia B. Moore for both of their Cancer awareness work, and provided considerable assistance to the Community Association for the Welfare of School Children (CAWSC). Several BRCHR members agreed to volunteer individually to help CAWSC: Mija Thompson volunteered to serve as a Reading Friend; while Thompson, Gloria Hall, and Lillian Jones agreed help restock the clothing closet; Hall also volunteered to assist students with mathematics; Richard Haymaker agreed to assist with staff Cardiopulmonary Resuscitation Training (CPR), as well as assist with sponsoring an event for the children. The BRCHR also provided a \$500.00 donation to CAWSC this year, which was increased to \$700 thanks to a \$200 personal donation by Haymaker.

Gay Professors Battle Prejudice

In February, LSU Student Government amended the equal opportunity nondiscrimination clause to include gender identity and expression. Although the bill did not pass unanimously, the clause's success shows LSU is becoming a friendlier environment for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and questioning students. A recent study, however, suggests gay and lesbian professors still fight an uphill battle, facing discrimination on college campuses, a finding echoed by many on the LSU campus.

Elaine Maccio, assistant professor of Social Work at LSU, said she has never been openly discriminated against. "Discrimination isn't always obvious," she said. "There are students that are not taking my class because I am gay, but I will never know. Discrimination normally occurs as a way to oppress, but students aren't in the position to do that with faculty and staff members." Maccio noted the difference between discrimination and prejudice. "There are absolutely prejudices on campus," she said. "Discrimination is an act, while prejudice is a belief."

LSU student Ferrari Howell agreed there are prejudices toward professors. "Anybody, whether they are gay, transgender or lesbian, faces discrimination." "It's not verbalized as much because your grade depends on [discretion] when it is your professor. But secretly students do talk about it."

Fellow LSU student Sam Wheelock, expressed a similar sentiment. "Most students would discriminate against gay, lesbian or transgender professors just because of stereotype, but in the end they are your professor. They would be teaching you in the same way any other professor would," he said.

Matthew Patterson, a member of the LSU LGBTQ club Spectrum, said there have been many incidents on campus sparked by people's sexual orientations or gender identities. "Female staff members have been told to wear skirts instead of pants to look more feminine." "Professors have referred to transgender students as 'it.'" He said LSU fosters a negative, discriminatory environment. "LSU is a large, Southern university. It is not as tight knit of a community as where I attended undergraduate school," he said. "LGBTQ groups just don't get as much support."

Spectrum and Patterson have advocated for Louisiana House Bill 112 for this reason. According to Patterson, Louisiana already has a state law to stop bullying. But the current law does not address harassment on the basis of sexual orientation, gender identity or gender expression in primary and high schools. East Baton Rouge Parish, along with five other parishes, does not have a law protecting against any form of bullying.

HB 112 was initially written with a section that outlawed bullying of LGBTQ students. It was amended to outlaw bullying of any kind. The bill did not pass.

"Conservative political groups do not want to recognize gay, lesbian, transgender or bisexual groups even exist," Patterson said. "They will take away rights of others to make sure that happens. That's just how it works here."

By Laura Furr, *The Daily Reveille*

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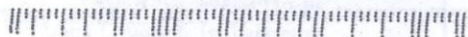
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