

## 42 Years Later, Housing Discrimination is Still Prevalent

By: Ailen J. Arreaza

This past April marked the 42<sup>nd</sup> anniversary of the Fair Housing Act, an important piece of legislation that the Community Relations Committee is in charge of upholding in Charlotte.

Although housing discrimination in 2010 is not as prevalent or blatant as it was in 1968, it is still a common occurrence. According to the latest report from the National Fair Housing Alliance, in 2008, fair housing organizations processed twice as many complaints as all other government agencies combined, reaching a total of 30,758. The report also determined that housing discrimination has spiked due to the foreclosure crisis and Internet advertising that violates fair housing law. Most complaints were filed on the basis of disability, race, and familial status, and an overwhelming majority of the allegations of housing discrimination stemmed from the rental market.



### Discrimination online

The country's current economic situation has displaced many homeowners and caused an

upsurge in rental transactions. Unfortunately, some of these families have faced unfair treatment when attempting to secure a new place to live. Technology has made it very easy for housing providers to advertise their properties to a wide audience for a nominal cost; however, it is very important that these providers remember to adhere to the fair housing laws when using the Internet to promote their units. Under the fair housing act, it is illegal to make, print, or publish statements or cause to be made, printed, or published any notice, statement or advertisement related to housing transactions that indicate any preference, limitation or discrimination on the basis of race, color, national origin, religion, sex, disability, or familial status. This prohibition certainly applies to statements made online.

Examples of discriminatory language found in online advertisement for one, two and three bedroom units and single family homes include:

- Female only please
- Preference renting to a couple
- A single person would be ideal
- Indoor pets ok, no kids

### Understanding disability


Complaints alleging discrimination on the basis of disability continue to rank as the highest among all protected classes nationwide. Disability is different from all other protected classes in that housing providers *must* make reasonable accommodations for tenants who are disabled. When



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CRC's vision is a Charlotte-Mecklenburg where people's differences are acknowledged, understood and appreciated

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a fair housing complaint is filed on the basis of disability, the investigator does not need to gather comparative data, as with the other protected classes – if the housing provider refused to make the accommodation, then the fair housing act was violated, there is no need to examine how others were treated.

Housing providers should be aware that reasonable accommodations can take many different shapes – from allowing a service animal into a no pet community to designing a specific parking space for someone who has mobility issues. Housing providers have the right to request documentation that establishes the individual's disability, but they can't ask specifics about the nature of the condition or request detailed medical records.

### **It's not an option, it's the law**

The most important thing when it comes to fair housing is that providers understand that the Fair Housing Act is not a suggestion, it is the law. Everyone, regardless of race, color, national origin, religion, sex, disability, or familial status deserves to live in the home of their choice with the same terms and conditions as everyone else. Let's hope that becomes the case 42 years from now.

## **Welcome New Members!**

Over the past few months, the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Community Relations Committee has acquired several new members and the editorial board of the *Link* would like to extend a warm welcome to:

Richard Carter, Mark Friedland, Beverly Grant-Truner, Azania Herron, Jibril Hough, Karen Johnson, Nicole Johnson, Kathi Knier, Kaz Muhammad, David Nichols, Ryan Rich, Patrick Rivenbark, Lisa Rudisill, Amad Shakur, Mary Jo Shepherd, and David Smith.

We are very excited that you've decided to come on board and help carryout CRC's mission to advocate for an inclusive community where trust, acceptance, fairness, and equity are the community norms.

The Community Relations Committee focuses on providing services to Charlotte and Mecklenburg County residents in four core areas: intergroup relations; fair housing assistance program; police-community relations; and conflict management. Our dedicated board members support the organization's work by participating actively in several subcommittees: Leadership, Education, Intercultural Relations, Police Community Relations, Communications, and Youth Violence/Gangs.

We can't wait to see and report back on the many ways you will contribute to this organization.

Thank you for your commitment to community harmony!



## Food For Thought

*Suggestions by Willie Ratchford*

As the Executive Director of the Charlotte Mecklenburg Community Relations Committee, I believe that one of the best ways to resolve our differences is by having meaningful, and sometimes painful and difficult, discussions around issues of diversity, race, and religion.

Recently, I happened upon two powerful articles that I believe could facilitate debate about our differences, our similarities, our perspectives and how we might view the communities we live in.

While I do not endorse the positions articulated in the articles, I'd like to share them with you and encourage you to read and talk about the interesting issues they raise with your family, your friends and your co-workers

### Love Thy Neighbor? Not If He's Different

*New research reveals that people connected to organized religion are more likely to harbor racial prejudice.*

*By David Villano*

Universal brotherhood and tolerance toward others remains common fare at Sunday church sermons everywhere, but does the message have any impact? Apparently not. In a new study drawing on nearly a half century of data, a team of researchers report that religious adherents in the United States — especially fundamentalist Christians — are more inclined than agnostics to harbor racist attitudes toward blacks and other minorities.

This “religion-racism paradox,” as University of Southern California social psychologist Wendy Wood explains it, is deeply embedded in organized religion which, by its very nature, encourages people to accept one fundamental belief

system as superior to all others. The required value judgment creates a kind of us-versus-them conflict, in which members of a religious group develop ethnocentric attitudes toward anyone

perceived as different. The study, “Why Don't We Practice What We Preach? A Meta-Analytic Review of Religious Racism,” appeared in the journal *Personality and Social Psychology Review*.



“Religion creates a very strong sense of a moral right and wrong within the group,” says Wood. “When you do that, members of the group will be more likely to derogate anyone who is not part of it.” And because religion in America is practiced largely along segregated lines (just 12 percent of U.S. congregations report even a moderate level of diversity, one study shows) that derogation, and the sense of superiority that drives such diminishment of others, can extend beyond religious differences to race, class and ethnicity.

Compounding the effect, the study's authors explain, are similarities in the moral makeup of people drawn to religion and of people who exhibit racist attitudes and behavior. Previous studies have shown that religious adherents are more likely than agnostics and atheists to rate conservative “life values” as the most important principles underlying their belief systems.

Those specific values — social conformity and respect for tradition — also most closely correlate with racism. In short, people are attracted to orga-

nized religion for the same reason some people are inclined toward racist thinking: a belief in the sanctity of established divisions in society.

“There are so many, many positive aspects and benefits to religiosity,” says study co-author Deborah Hall of Arizona State University. “But there are gaps in the literature when it comes to religion’s dark side. We were hoping to fill some of those gaps.”

Hall, Wood and co-author David Matz of Augsburg College analyzed data from 55 studies on religion and racism in America dating to the early civil rights era. Combined, the studies include more than 22,000 participants, mostly white and Protestant. The researchers looked not only at things like religious affiliation, church attendance and other participation but also at the motives behind their involvement to avoid clumping all religious adherents into a single category. Racial prejudice was measured principally as self-reported attitudes and behaviors, such as preferred levels of social distance toward blacks and other minority groups.

As expected, the authors found a positive correlation between religious affiliation and racism. The link was strongest among people who viewed religion mostly as a mechanism for fulfilling material and social needs such as community status, family security or group acceptance. Religious fundamentalism — the unwavering certainty in basic religious truths — correlated even more strongly with racist attitudes.

The link among people who expressed purely spiritual pursuits as the motivating influence of religion was less clear.

While researchers found no correlation between this so-called “intrinsic religiosity” and racist attitudes, there was no evidence that their behaviors reflected a commitment to racial tolerance. Acts of humanitarianism, such as tolerance, appeared to be directed only toward members of their own group. Only agnosticism, defined as an active, questioning orientation, correlated positively with all measures of racial tolerance.

(Not surprisingly, the authors note in support of their argument, social conformity and respect for tradition — the life values closely linked to religious adherence and racism — don’t statistically link with agnosticism but do with fundamentalism).

It’s worth noting, Woods adds, that one of the studies that revealed the strongest religion-racism link looked at attitudes of seminary students, a population of highly educated and devout people. “It’s not just the poor and the uneducated,” she says.

While the study focused on Christians in the United States, the authors believe the conclusions can be generalized to other cultures and religious faiths, perhaps helping untangle the complex web of faith, fear and distrust that provokes hatred within religious extremist groups around the globe.

Indeed, previous studies, including one which sampled from 71 countries, have shown that Muslims, Jews, Catholics and other Christian groups are religiously motivated by the same underlying conservative life values — and engage in the same in-group derogation of outsiders — as do the predominately white Protestants observed in the study review. Religious racism, Hall says, transcends cultural boundaries. In some cases the urge is suppressed by social norms; in others it flares into violence.

Both Hall and Wood acknowledge some unease at promoting their study. Religion bashing is a contact sport these days and they fear the findings will be used to score easy points for the opposition, painting churchgoers as unabashed bigots. Not all religious people are racially intolerant, yet detractors undoubtedly will insist it’s so. And it should be noted that the relationship between religiosity and racism has declined steadily in the past half century, perhaps reflecting new anti-discrimination laws in the United States and changing societal standards.

Wood hopes her study will stimulate public discussion on group dynamics and the politics of exclusion, especially the harmful effects social institutions can have on people who are not members. “I see this as more of an opportunity than a condemnation,” she says. “And organized religion itself may be perfectly situated to address these kinds of issues.”

## “Imagine”

*Tim Wise is among the most prominent anti-racist writers and activists in the U.S. Wise has spoken in 48 states, on over 400 college campuses, and to community groups around the nation. Wise has provided anti-racism training to teachers nationwide, and has trained physicians and medical industry professionals on how to combat racial inequities in health care. His latest book is called *Between Barack and a Hard Place*.*



Let's play a game, shall we? The name of the game is called "Imagine." The way it's played is simple: we'll envision recent happenings in the news, but then change them up a bit. Instead of envisioning white people as the main actors in the scenes we'll conjure - the ones who are driving the action - we'll envision black folks or other people of color instead. The object of the game is to imagine the public reaction to the events or incidents, if the main actors were of color, rather than white. Whoever gains the most insight into the workings of race in America, at the end of the game, wins.

So let's begin.

Imagine that hundreds of black protesters were to descend upon Washington DC and Northern Virginia, just a few miles from the Capitol and White House, armed with AK-47s, assorted handguns, and ammunition. And imagine that some of

these protesters —the black protesters — spoke of the need for political revolution, and possibly even armed conflict in the event that laws they didn't like were enforced by the government? Would these protester — these black protesters with guns — be seen as brave defenders of the Second Amendment, or would they be viewed by most whites as a danger to the republic? What if they were Arab-Americans? Because, after all, that's what happened recently when white gun enthusiasts descended upon the nation's capital, arms in hand, and verbally announced their readiness to make war on the country's political leaders if the need arose.

Imagine that white members of Congress, while walking to work, were surrounded by thousands of angry black people, one of whom proceeded to spit on one of those congressmen for not voting the way the black demonstrators desired. Would the protesters be seen as merely patriotic Americans voicing their opinions, or as an angry, potentially violent, and even insurrectionary mob? After all, this is what white Tea Party protesters did recently in Washington.

Imagine that a rap artist were to say, in reference to a white president: "He's a piece of shit and I told him to suck on my machine gun." Because that's what rocker Ted Nugent said recently about President Obama.

Imagine that a prominent mainstream black political commentator had long employed an overt bigot as Executive Director of his organization, and that this bigot regularly participated in black separatist conferences, and once assaulted a white person while calling them by a racial slur. When that prominent black commentator and his sister — who also works for the organization — defended the bigot as a good guy who was misunderstood and "going through a tough time in his life" would anyone accept their excuse-making? Would that commentator still have a place on a mainstream network? Because that's what happened in the real world, when Pat Buchanan employed as Executive Director of his group, America's Cause, a blatant racist who did all these things, or at least their white equiva-

lents: attending white separatist conferences and attacking a black woman while calling her the n-word.

Imagine that a black radio host were to suggest that the only way to get promoted in the administration of a white president is by “hating black people,” or that a prominent white person had only endorsed a white presidential candidate as an act of racial bonding, or blamed a white president for a fight on a school bus in which a black kid was jumped by two white kids, or said that he wouldn’t want to kill all conservatives, but rather, would like to leave just enough—“living fossils” as he called them—“so we will never forget what these people stood for.” After all, these are things that Rush Limbaugh has said, about Barack Obama’s administration, Colin Powell’s endorsement of Barack Obama, a fight on a school bus in Belleville, Illinois in which two black kids beat up a white kid, and about liberals, generally.

Imagine that a black pastor, formerly a member of the U.S. military, were to declare, as part of his opposition to a white president’s policies, that he was ready to “suit up, get my gun, go to Washington, and do what they trained me to do.” This is, after all, what Pastor Stan Craig said recently at a Tea Party rally in Greenville, South Carolina.

Imagine a black radio talk show host gleefully predicting a revolution by people of color if the government continues to be dominated by the rich white men who have been “destroying” the country, or if said radio personality were to call Christians or Jews non-humans, or say that when it came to conservatives, the best solution would be to “hang ‘em high.” And what would happen to any congressional representative who praised that commentator for “speaking common sense” and likened his hate talk to “American values?” After all, those are among the things said by radio host and best-selling author Michael Savage, predicting white revolution in the face of multiculturalism, or said by Savage about Muslims and liberals, respectively. And it was Congressman Culbertson, from Texas, who praised Savage in that way, despite his hateful

rhetoric.

Imagine a black political commentator suggesting that the only thing the guy who flew his plane into the Austin, Texas IRS building did wrong was not blowing up Fox News instead. This is, after all, what Anne Coulter said about Tim McVeigh, when she noted that his only mistake was not blowing up the New York Times.

Imagine that a popular black liberal website posted comments about the daughter of a white president, calling her “typical redneck trash,” or a “whore” whose mother entertains her by “making monkey sounds.” After all that’s comparable to what conservatives posted about Malia Obama on freerepublic.com last year, when they referred to her as “ghetto trash.”

Imagine that black protesters at a large political rally were walking around with signs calling for the lynching of their congressional enemies. Because that’s what white conservatives did last year, in reference to Democratic party leaders in Congress.

In other words, imagine that even one-third of the anger and vitriol currently being hurled at President Obama, by folks who are almost exclusively white, were being aimed, instead, at a white president, by people of color. How many whites viewing the anger, the hatred, the contempt for that white president would then wax eloquent about free speech, and the glories of democracy? And how many would be calling for further crackdowns on thuggish behavior, and investigations into the radical agendas of those same people of color?

To ask any of these questions is to answer them. Protest is only seen as fundamentally American when those who have long had the luxury of seeing themselves as prototypically American engage in it. When the dangerous and dark “other” does so, however, it isn’t viewed as normal or natural, let alone patriotic. Which is why Rush Limbaugh could say, this past week, that the Tea Parties are the first time since the Civil War that ordinary, common Americans stood up for their rights: a

statement that erases the normalcy and “American-ness” of blacks in the civil rights struggle, not to mention women in the fight for suffrage and equality, working people in the fight for better working conditions, and LGBT folks as they struggle to be treated as full and equal human beings.

And this, my friends, is what white privilege is all about. The ability to threaten others, to engage in violent and incendiary rhetoric without consequence, to be viewed as patriotic and normal no matter what you do, and never to be feared and despised as people of color would be, if they tried to get away with half the stuff we do, on a daily basis.

Game Over.

## Education Committee Going in Circles

By: Rhonda Gooden Taylor

The CRC Education Committee is going in circles, a Community Circle that is. Since summer 2009, the Committee has taken part in the Achieve Together project facilitated by The Lee Institute. Achieve Together is a community partnership funded by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation that connects local residents with people, training, and support to become advocates for positive change in academically struggling schools within the Charlotte-Mecklenburg School System (CMS).

Using the collective energy of naturally forming groups of community residents, The Lee Institute guided several of these groups to become a Community Circle that follows an established process to build advocacy capacity. The CRC Education Committee Community Circle met for 6 weekly sessions with Lee Institute staff who provided data and information about schools placed in CMS’ Achievement Zone.

Formed 3 years ago, the Achievement Zone is a cluster of 11 schools that need additional resources to help increase academic achievement. Schools may be placed in the Achievement Zone for several reasons. These include schools that are in corrective action under the No Child Left Behind legislation, and schools designated as low performing by the state. CMS Superintendent Peter Gorman may also place schools in the Zone as he sees fit. The goal is for these schools to improve and transition out of the Achievement Zone in order to return to one of the regular geographic clusters.





As a result of the knowledge and information gained in its 6 sessions with the Lee Institute, the CRC Education Committee Community Circle established an advocacy project with a Focus and Manifesto as follows;

### **Focus**

Creating a community-wide expectation, beginning with kindergartners, that all CMS students, especially in the Achievement Zone, will graduate high school.

### **Manifesto**

We expect no less than success from CMS administration, teachers, parents, students and the community; no exceptions, no excuses.

The advocacy project that the CRC Education Committee Community Circle plans to carry out is creation of a Public Service Announcement (PSA) that will help achieve our Focus, which is that all CMS students graduate high school. To create the PSA, the Committee is seeking talented students enrolled in Achievement Zone schools to submit an idea to the PSA Contest. Participants are encouraged to come up with a commercial that will tell everyone why they are planning to stay in school until they graduate. Each student participating in the contest will win a prize, with additional special prizes going to the winner(s). The winner(s) will also be offered the opportunity to appear in the final PSA to be aired on local radio and television stations. The contest will be held near the beginning of the 2010-2011 school year.

Under the guidance of its new co-chairpersons, Demario Baker and Constance Green-Johnson, Committee members are now in the midst of planning and working out all details for the PSA Contest. Thanks goes to outgoing chairperson, Elizabeth Troutman, who originally led the Committee to The Lee Institute and the Community Circle project. Other CRC Education Committee members are Rhonda Gooden Taylor, Tonya Curry, Kate Satchwill, LaWana Slackmayfield, and Ruth Stevenson.

## **Diversity is Beyond Black and White**

By: Kate Satchwill

“I’ve walked into groups where the focus and the topic is all about diversity, but everyone looks alike. Everyone is sitting around tables with people who look just like them, black or white,” Beverly Grant-Turner says. Beverly is Executive Director of the International House, and one of our newest CRC members.



“When most of us think of diversity it still means black and white,” Beverly explains. “I welcome the opportunity to be part of CRC efforts, she says, because I want to expand that thought to be inclusive of all cultures.” With her incredible background, Beverly offers a 100% guarantee that she will bring diversity to every CRC meeting!

“Charlotte takes great pride in our international, global perspectives,” she continued, “especially in business. We attract people to work here from all over the world. And of course, especially as an international banking center, Charlotteans interact every day in our global economy. But, when it comes to personal interactions, getting to know people who are different, we continue to interact

with people who are alike”

“When is the last time you invited someone who is different from you to join you for dinner?” she asked. “Just last night I had a house full of Germans,” she said. “What I didn’t know,” she laughed, “was that they were Muslims, and I had almost ordered a honey-baked ham. Do you know, everyone comes from somewhere else?”

Beverly comes to her position at International House from a professional career spanning 30 years, beginning with work in banking, ‘in some predecessor of Bank of America’ when it too was very small. It’s likely that everyone who comes here because of business already has an advantage, according to Beverly. Businesses already think internationally, and in many cases, diversity is mandated. That makes it easier for everyone. What’s also a plus for diversity in Charlotte is that we have moved more quickly to a higher level of acceptance, and have more services targeted at different cultures.

But still, according to a report Beverly recalled from 2001, Charlotte-Mecklenburg ranked among the worst among major cities when it comes to racial mistrust. It seems that when we rely only on what we see, we miss the richest kinds of diversity, the language, the experiences, the educations and lifestyles that are different among all of us, wherever we come from. We fail even to notice facial features beyond black and white, she added. Look carefully to see diversity in Middle Easterners, or Koreans, Japanese, Jamaicans, Kenyans, Germans, Italians, Welsh. Diversity goes beyond black and white, and that’s where we so often don’t practice what we preach when we talk about diversity.

When asked about what she does at International House, and what she might want to let people know about right now, Beverly highlighted three summer activities that focus on children. There also are galas, educational opportunities, an immigration law clinic, English conversation hours, book groups and partnerships with an extraordinarily diverse business and non-profit community. A visit to the International House on Hawthorne or a virtual trip to their website is a wonderful first step to learning something to enhance your understanding of diversity, or to find someone very different from yourself to meet—and perhaps invite to dinner!

## Scenes from the CRC



The Bethlehem Center dedicated its new Education Center to the memory of Stephanie S. Jennings on April 27, 2010.

Her husband and daughters participated in the ceremony.



On Friday, April 30, 2010, Willie Ratchford, Executive Director of the Charlotte Mecklenburg Community Relations Committee marched along side Major Anthony Foxx in the Stand Against Racism event organized by the YWCA.



The Community Relations Committee celebrated the 31st Annual Police Community Relations Awards on Friday, May 14, 2010.

# 2010 Committee Membership

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 Victoria Taylor  
 Elizabeth Troutman  
 Marty Viser  
 Deborah J. Walker  
 Gerald Williams

As a statutory agency of the City of Charlotte and Mecklenburg County, the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Community Relations Committee (CRC):

- Promotes the quality of opportunity for all citizens
- Promotes understanding, respect and goodwill among all citizens
- Provides channels of communication among various racial, religious, and ethnic groups in Charlotte-Mecklenburg
- Studies problems in the area of human and community relations and makes the results available to the public.

An integral part of the human relations support system for the City of Charlotte and Mecklenburg County, CRC members and staff pursue activities that:

- Ensure fair housing practices and access to public accommodations
- Assist in settling disputes and group conflicts
- Improve race, ethnic and community relations
- Prevent discrimination
- Improve communications among various community groups and individuals

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*It is the mission of the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Community Relations Committee to advocate for an inclusive community where trust, acceptance, fairness and equity are the community norms.*