

**RRA Convention 2010**  
**“Jews, Class, and Race Relations in North America”**

**HIGHLIGHTS**

**COMMUNITY READING:** In preparation for our time together, all convention participants are urged to read *Troubling the Waters: Black-Jewish Relations in the American Century*, by Cheryl Lynn Greenberg (Princeton University Press, 2006). Greenberg offers a comprehensive look at the history of this relationship and also the myths and misunderstandings that have been generated to either support or denigrate it. Those wishing to discuss the book further will have an opportunity to do so during the workshop time on Wednesday.

This year we are pleased to have **David Stein** (RRC '91) as our convention text consultant. David describes himself as “a skeptic with reportedly misanthropic tendencies.” He is a freelance editor of *Judaica*, occasional scholar-in-residence, and leader of High Holy Day services at the Taos Jewish Center. He has completed the "Prejudice Reduction Trainers Training" of the National Coalition Building Institute. His approach to issues of race is informed also by his experience leading an “Unlearning Racism” support group in Re-evaluation Counseling; and to issues of class, by a "Beyond the Taboo" workshop co-led by Christopher Mogil and Felice Yeskel.

David will be leading the *tisch* Wednesday morning, teaching a text study workshop, and supplying us with a bibliographic resource package.

---

**Steve Gutow** (RRC '03) is the executive director of the Jewish Council for Public Affairs (JCPA). Steve has extensive expertise in public policy and political issues, and will be guiding us through Monday evening’s processing of our Day of Service working in New Orleans **in the midst of the continuing disaster we call Katrina: What have we learned? What can we do? What did we experience? What did we witness? What emotions, thoughts, and values rose in our consciousness as we worked in the rawness of what had occurred nearly five years ago?**

**We will also seek to understand what both Jewish tradition and values and American tradition and values teach us about what we should do and have not yet done to remedy the ruin and poverty that persist in New Orleans. What stops us? What can we do as individuals; as a community, as a nation? This discussion should be more salient than ever in light of the immense tragedy this year in Haiti.**

**Sandy Eisenberg Sasso** (RRC '74) was the first woman ordained at RRC. Along with the first woman ordained at HUC-JIR, Sally Priesand and the first woman ordained at

JTS, Amy Eilberg, Sandy has joined hands in developing a trailblazing historical initiative that seeks to create the world's largest archival repository documenting the history of women in the rabbinate. This collection will be housed at the Jacob Rader Marcus Center of the American Jewish Archives in Cincinnati (AJA).

On Tuesday morning, Sandy will be joined by Sally Priesand and Gary P. Zola, Executive Director of the AJA and Professor of the American Jewish Experience at Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion. They will discuss why they have decided to create a historical repository that will provide future historians and researchers with the historical tools they will need to reconstruct the ways in which women rabbis have redefined the modern experience of an ancient tradition.

---

*“NOT IN OUR SHTETLS”* – **Toba Spitzer** (RRC’97) will moderate a panel presentation with Myrna Matsa, Lance Hill and Uri Topolosky Focusing on how we integrate a consciousness of class and race into our work as rabbis and spiritual leaders, this panel will present different strategies that have been used in New Orleans both pre- and post-Katrina. The speakers will discuss the unique challenges of reenergizing a socially divided city and how they used outreach, organizing and collaboration to begin building alliances.

*Rabbi Uri Topolosky* leads Congregation Beth Israel, a community synagogue in the Greater New Orleans Metropolitan area. He received his rabbinic ordination from Yeshivat Chovevei Torah Rabbinical School in 2005 and relocated from Riverdale, NY in July of 2007 to help rebuild the congregation following the devastation of Hurricane Katrina. While the building is being reconstructed, Congregation Beth Israel has been sharing space with Congregation Gates of Prayer, a local Reform synagogue.

*Rabbi Myrna Matsa* holds the position of Rabbinic Pastoral/Trauma Counselor for Hurricane Katrina Support in the New Orleans, Baton Rouge and the Biloxi/Gulfport Region. She was sent by the New York Board of Rabbis in partnership with the United Jewish Communities to work closely with leaders of the various faith communities, both Jewish and non-Jewish, and also lay people within the Gulf area providing them with direct pastoral services during reconstruction, serving as a Jewish referral resource, and interfacing with various mental health associations.

*Dr. Lance Hill* is the Executive Director of the Southern Institute for Education and Research, a tolerance education and race relations research center based at Tulane University in New Orleans. Hill holds a Ph.D. in history from Tulane University, where he has taught US History and Intercultural Communication. Hill was a community organizer for fifteen years before embarking on an academic career. From 1989-1992, he served as Executive Director of the Louisiana Coalition against Racism and Nazism (LCARN), the grass roots organization that led the opposition to former Klansman David Duke's Senate and Gubernatorial campaigns.

In 1993, Hill co-founded the Southern Institute for Education and Research at Tulane University, a race and ethnic relations center. The Institute's tolerance education program-the most comprehensive project of its kind in the South-has provided training to more than 4,000 teachers from 785 schools in the Deep South. The program uses case studies of the Holocaust and the Civil Rights Movement to teach the causes and consequences of prejudice.

---

**Ron Aigen** (RRC '76) will be honored Tuesday night as this year's recipient of the Ira Eisenstein Award for Rabbinic Service.

---

**Alan Morse** (RRC '77) will be representing the RRA members living in Israel and will update us on: "Reconstructionist issues in Israel, are they the same or different?" including discussion of Israel as a democratic society; religious pluralism (are we a society built on Jewish values, or a Torah/Halachah society?); Outreach - why the average Israeli thinks liberal Judaism is not authentic.

---

**Allan Lehmann** (RRC '79 and a New Orleans native) will teach the convention *shiur* on Wednesday afternoon.

and **Margaret Holub** (HUC '86) will lead our closing circle.

\*

***And in closing....a word from the Co-Chairs About Visiting New Orleans***

*We ARE going to be in New Orleans* (woo-hoo!), so we've left time to take advantage of the music, food, entertainment and other opportunities of this city. We've gathered information about some of the city's favorite hot spots and most unique tours, including graveyards, vampires, and rock-n-roll bowling (!) Reservations can be made individually once you're in New Orleans, and a sign up sheet will help you find other members who might be interested in touring.

One significant aspect of this year's convention location is the nature of urban life in general and life in New Orleans in particular. When we made a research visit in the summer of '09, we were alternately helped and impeded by residents' often contradictory advice about what areas were safe to wander and explore at what hour.

Issues of street safety are a *necessary* part of any conversation about visiting New Orleans. Our best suggestion to everyone is deliberately to maintain awareness about where you are and what's happening around you. It would be appropriate especially for

4

those who don't know the city well to explore the town using the buddy system and to carry your cell phone with you.

See you soon,

Nina and David