

**VOTE'S MISSION:**

**VOICE OF THE EX-OFFENDER (VOTE)** is an organization dedicated to building the political power of people most impacted by the criminal justice system, especially formerly incarcerated persons (FIPs,) their families and loved ones. Through leadership development, community education and voter mobilization, VOTE will ensure that our constituents are at the center of transforming the criminal justice system.

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**Freedom Riders*****50 Years Later, Youth and Elders come together to keep Freedom Riders spirit Alive***

In the dim light of a projector, rapt faces took in the solemn image of a bus in flames. On screen, a multiracial group of youth crawled in the grass, coughing and choking from the smoke of the blaze behind them. This was just the first in a series of attacks that the Freedom Riders of 1961 faced as they made their way through the South. Fifty years later, at the RAE house in New Orleans, the lessons and struggles of these youth came alive to a multi-generational, multi-racial audience carrying on the current-day fight for justice.

“Back then they would sick dogs on you and you couldn’t ride on those buses but today we have the school-to-prison pipeline,” says Briana O’Neal after the viewing of *Freedom Rides*, a new Firelight Media documentary directed by Stanley Nelson. The viewing was co-hosted by Voice of the Ex-Offender (VOTE) and Fyre Youth Squad. VOTE AND FYS invited a multigenerational audience to share their reflections after the viewing the powerful documentary. This dialogue was critical for us because we wanted to go beyond remembering history, and explore how lessons from the Freedom Rides inform our work today.

The film describes the Freedom Rides as “six months in 1961 that changed America forever. From May until November 1961, more than 400 black and white Americans risked their lives—and many endured savage beatings and imprisonment—for simply traveling together on buses and trains as they journeyed through the Deep South. Deliberately violating Jim Crow laws, the Freedom Riders met with bitter racism and mob violence along the way, sorely testing their belief in nonviolent activism.”

The documentary details the planning and execution of the trips (which were initially designed to last two weeks) and the ensuing campaign of terror that white supremacists like the KuKluxKlan and others, including government officials, waged against the swelling movement of riders. The original group was comprised of a few dozen youth from around the country. The more violence the Freedom Riders faced, thwarting the buses progress, the more young people put themselves in the line of fire. These youth took on a strong leadership role and, by continuing on with the dangerous rides, challenged the Kennedy brothers and even Rev. Dr. King himself, who urged a more moderate strategy. It is a story filled with inspiring moments as well as brilliant strategy.

*Excerpted from a longer article first published at <http://www.bridgethegulfproject.org/blog>. Read the complete article there or on our website.*

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# Member Profile & VOTE Update

## Donald Chopin

Donald Chopin was born in New Orleans, but after a few years, moved to the West Bank where he was raised. He attended Southern University and Loyola University. Now, he is semi-retired after a career in life insurance and work as a bail bond consultant. Mr. Chopin is also a volunteer chaplain at Orleans Parish Prison and a member of Safe Streets/Strong Communities. In his spare time, he enjoys dancing, riding his bicycle, and speed reading.

Donald Chopin actually met Norris before VOTE had even existed. They had a mutual friend who introduced the two. Norris was interested in meeting him after reading about the role Mr. Chopin played in helping inmates access the right to vote. Donald Chopin had successfully lobbied for this while working for Calvin Johnson, who ended up becoming a judge thanks to in part votes from prisoners. After VOTE was created, Mr. Chopin became a VOTE consultant. Donald Chopin has stuck with VOTE because it is an organic organization designed to respond to the needs of the people, particularly inmates and their families and friends. He appreciates that VOTE encourages them to fight for their rights and to get things done.

## VOTE Update

Last March VOTE members took a trip to the **Inaugural Meeting of Formerly Incarcerated People** in Alabama in which they were able to meet FIP's from all over the country, march over the Edmund Pettus Bridge, visit the Civil Rights Museum, and bond with other VOTE members and new friends. The follow-up conference will be in Los Angeles in November and will coincide with the Drug Policy Alliance national conference. So far 12 VOTE members hope to travel to these important conferences.

To commemorate the 40th Anniversary of Nixon's Declaration of a "War on Drugs," our friends, **Women With A Vision**, held a second line beginning at the Three-Star Barber Shop on Friday, June 17. VOTE would also like to congratulate them as a bill passed both the House and Senate that hopes to remove Solicitation of a Crime Against Nature from the sex offender registry and equalize the penalties to those of prostitution.



*Donald Chopin at the NAACP Banquet*

VOTE's charter **Paralegal Class** will be meeting for the last time on June 29. Look out for a new paralegal class beginning in late Fall.

We've launched a **voter registration and membership recruitment drive**. We are going to be using Twitter, Facebook, and other social networking sites as well as street outreach and door-knocking to recruit new members and increase voter registration in our community.

# Intern Profiles

## Sara Kugler

Sara is a rising senior at Tulane University who is majoring in Latin American Studies and Psychology. She is originally from Silver Spring, Maryland, but she plans to stay in New Orleans after graduating. Sara is involved with a lot of organizing work at Tulane, focusing on making the university more accountable to the city and improving the way that students engage with the community. More specifically, she is involved with the organization SOAR, Students Organizing Against Racism, which is a partner of the People's Institute for Survival and Beyond.

Sara was first introduced to VOTE at a community pot-luck two years ago and has been coming in to volunteer ever since.



This past spring she increased her involvement and as soon as the school year ended, she began interning. Sara values her experiences with VOTE because VOTE ties in with the anti-racist organizing she has done with SOAR. In Sara's words, "Working with VOTE really exposed how the criminal justice system is perhaps the most important existing institution to focus on as a violator of civil rights and perpetuator of racism." She also believes that VOTE has shown her how a relationship-based organization works, one that is accountable to its members and its mission as opposed to funders or outside sources.



## Bernadette Rabuy

Bernadette is an incoming sophomore at UC Berkeley in California. She plans to study Political Economy with a minor in Global Poverty. Bernadette is a director of a club called Project Rishi, a non-profit that strives to provide solutions to infrastructural, health care, and educational needs of a rural Indian village. She was born and raised in San Francisco but has family in Zachary, so she has been to Louisiana a few times. Bernadette has come to VOTE through the Magnolia Project, a UC Berkeley post-Katrina program that strives to build solidarity with the Gulf Coast through a service trip, a summer internship program, and a semester-long exchange with the University of New Orleans.

She is shocked by the frightening statistics she has already learned about the criminal justice system from reading, *The New Jim Crow*, by Michelle Alexander as well as from VOTE's members whose drive she finds inspirational. Bernadette is looking forward to building relationships with the members and hopes that when she leaves New Orleans at the end of July, she will be able to bring the knowledge she has gained regarding mass incarceration and the struggle of FIP's to California so that other people will also be able to see the value of FIP's in society.



GREATER NEW ORLEANS ORGANIZERS' ROUNDTABLE presents

2<sup>nd</sup> ANNUAL  
*Masquerade*  
PARTY & FUNDRAISER

*With Silent Auction*

To benefit local organizing efforts addressing leadership development, accountability and humanistic anti-racist organizing.

SATURDAY  
**JUNE 25**  
7PM - 11PM

**LIVE ENTERTAINMENT \* CASH BAR**

NEW ORLEANS AFRICAN AMERICAN MUSEUM  
1418 Governor Nicholls St.

\$25.00 Advance Ticket | \$30.00 at Door

GET YOUR TICKETS AT THE PEOPLE'S INSTITUTE FOR SURVIVAL AND BEYOND  
601 N. CARROLLTON | MONDAY - FRIDAY - 1PM - 3PM  
Full cost of ticket is a tax-deductible donation to Advocates for Environmental Human Rights, the  
fiscal sponsor of the GNO Organizers' Roundtable

For More Information contact Monique Harden 504-799-3064  
or Kimberley Richards 504-301-9292



**Change in Location!!  
The Location of the  
MASQUERADE has been  
changed to**

**Fine Arts Center of New Orleans**

**1733 Constantinople Street  
New Orleans, LA**

Funds raised will go to the work of The Greater New Orleans Organizers Roundtable collectively. Such as the support we gave to the Family of Billey Joe Johnson Jr. - <http://www.blackchristiannews.com/news/2008/12/naacp-says-death-of-billey-joe-johnson-jr-wasnt-suicide.html> or other activities of the Organizers Round Table. Your Support is truly needed. If you are in need of Tickets (\$25.00) or your organization can Sponsor (\$125.00) contact Derek Rankins Jr. (504) 638 - 3488 / [D.Rankins@gmail.com](mailto:D.Rankins@gmail.com)

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**JOIN US FOR THE NEXT MEMBERSHIP MEETING  
WEDNESDAY JULY 6<sup>th</sup> AT 7PM AT THE RAE HOUSE  
1212 St. Bernard Avenue, NO, LA 70117**