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Alumni Profile

EmilyRose Johns

American University Washington College of Law

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ALUMNI PROFILE



After earning her J.D. from the Washington College of Law, **Lauren E. Bartlett**, a California native, moved her entire life to New Orleans during the summer of 2007 to continue working with the successful non-profit she had created during her third year of law school. Having dedicated four years of service to the Gulf Coast region as founding member of Louisiana Justice Institute (LJI) and a foreclosure attorney with Southeast Louisiana Legal Services, Bartlett has returned to WCL to work with the Center on Human Rights and Humanitarian Law (Center) on coordinating a new training initiative on human rights in the U.S. for legal aid attorneys.

To understand Bartlett's passion for New Orleans, it helps to know what it was like to be a WCL student when Hurricane Katrina hit the Gulf Coast. In August 2005, Bartlett was beginning her second year at WCL, and Hurricane Katrina was battering the Gulf Coast. All of WCL was consumed by the news. Students were glued to televisions and the entire campus was discussing the hurricane and its devastating aftermath. "It started a big conversation that lasted my remaining two years," Bartlett recalled. She was significantly moved by the injustices occurring in the region, and having just spent her summer in North Carolina and other southern states working with African-American farmers losing their land to military bases, she felt deeply connected to the plight of displaced persons.

Following the hurricane and the mass relocation of Gulf Coast residents, Bartlett arranged weekly fundraisers to collect donations for non-profits helping Katrina's victims. She also organized a conference at WCL where attorneys who had been displaced by the storm discussed their advocacy work and the injustices occurring during Katrina's aftermath. In the spring of 2006, Bartlett led the first of WCL's many alternative break volunteer service trips to the Gulf Coast. Bartlett went on to coordinate service trips to New Orleans for over 4,000 students country-wide through her leadership role in the Student Hurricane Network.

During that first visit, only six months after the hurricane hit the city, Bartlett saw a muted New Orleans. There was no greenery to be seen, and there were no bugs or birds to be heard. The city was quiet and dark, she recalled, and the smell of Cajun cooking was replaced with the odor of a washed-away city. Gulfport, Mississippi, where she spent a portion of her first volunteer trip, was razed by tidal waves up to a mile and a half inland. The bustling riverside restaurants were reduced to rubble, and the casino boats were upside-down in the middle of highways.

During this first trip to the Gulf, Bartlett worked with other students to interview residents for a historical preservation

project. The effort was a means to obtain grants for residents to rebuild their homes, most of which were roofless and water-damaged from strong winds and merciless storms. Despite the devastation they faced and their great need of assistance, the residents were generous and resilient. After this first trip, Bartlett knew that she wanted to live in the Big Easy and help revitalize the city.

The summer after Hurricane Katrina, Bartlett worked for the New Orleans non-profit Advocates for Environmental Human Rights. Her work there focused on the environment's impact on housing, which included the rights to a health, environment, and return of people displaced by natural disasters. It was just the beginning of her dedication to housing law in New Orleans. Advocates for Environmental Human Rights also provided Bartlett with exposure to the international mechanisms available to remedy domestic human rights violations; Bartlett saw a case she had worked on that summer make it to the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights.

Determined to continue her work in the region, Bartlett moved to New Orleans the summer after graduating law school and founded LJI with several friends from the Student Hurricane Network. In collaboration with her founding partners, Bartlett wrote LJI's initial bylaws and articles of incorporation. She also developed the mission statement, obtained its 501(c)(3) status, and helped secure the initial funding. Bartlett learned a lot from founding LJI, which is now run by Tracie Washington, a veteran attorney. The non-profit continues to provide legal support and community programming, and also has an impact litigation component.

Legal aid in New Orleans is triage. "You just respond to whatever's going on," Bartlett said. "There is not enough time to stop and think about the big picture." When Bartlett and her partners founded LJI, there was a large need for advocates of displaced persons living in Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) trailers. Those living in trailers had few if any housing alternatives, and at the time Bartlett was beginning her work, reports were coming out indicating high levels of formaldehyde making trailer residents ill. LJI advocated for the rights of the displaced when the health issues were uncovered, and also when Gulf Coast cities attempted to force the trailers off private property, leaving the displaced with nowhere else to live.

In the summer of 2008, Bartlett sought more litigation experience and took a position at Southeast Louisiana Legal Services defending residents in foreclosure cases. The work was fulfilling. "You help people in a real, tangible way," Bartlett said. It also provided her the opportunity to hone her litigation skills. "I had a lot of cases . . . and I spent a lot of time in court," Bartlett said.

During her time in Louisiana, Bartlett also teamed up with Morgan Williams of Greater New Orleans Fair Housing Action Center to teach a housing law and policy class at Loyola University New Orleans College of Law. Now that she has returned to WCL, Bartlett hopes to continue teaching.

Bartlett's tremendous achievements did not begin in New Orleans. While at WCL, she was awarded the 2007 Peter M. Cicchino Public Service Award for her dedication to helping

victims of hurricanes Katrina and Rita. Additionally, Bartlett worked for the Center as a Dean's Fellow, served on the Center's Student Advisory Board, and held a leadership position with Action for Human Rights, a student organization that continues to facilitate alternative break service trips. She covered the *Human Rights Brief's* NGO column for two years and contributed to the *Sustainable Development Law & Policy Brief*. Bartlett participated in the DC Students in Court clinic, the United Nations Committee against Torture program, and an experiential learning project about gentrification's impact on the Anacostia watershed.

Bartlett obtained a Bachelor's Degree in International Relations at the University of California, Davis and traveled extensively prior to law school. Her early travels took her to Nepal with an organization called Sojourn Nepal (now Sojourn Asia), where she worked with a doctor practicing alternative medicine. Bartlett was first exposed to international development and international human rights during her time in Nepal. Bartlett later spent an academic year in Ghana through a university exchange program, after which she extended her stay for several months to serve as interim-president of an NGO in a small town bordering Burkina Faso. Following college, Bartlett received a Patrick Stewart Amnesty International grant to explore environmental- and gender-based approaches to water rights in India. While there, she helped an NGO write an extensive report on the state of human rights in India.

Bartlett came to WCL wanting to practice domestic human rights law using principles of international human rights law. "Here in the US, you can make a bigger difference, knowing the culture, the language, and having a skill; being able to think like a lawyer," she said. Becoming a lawyer also appealed to Bartlett because it would empower her to create change.

Bartlett's new project with the Center takes her back to her legal roots. Through the project, the Center will select two legal aid organizations and train their attorneys to use international human rights law in domestic courts. The project will span two years, and will help Bartlett accomplish something she witnessed fail time and time again in Louisiana; the courts are so conservative in Louisiana that they reject out of hand any legal arguments not grounded in domestic law, Bartlett said. She had even heard of a judge who was unwilling to hear any argument based on the U.S. constitution, firmly demanding that only state law was welcome in his courtroom. Building this legal aid training project with the Center will give Bartlett the tools to enable her to continue advocating for the change she would like to see. "I want to keep pushing human rights issues in state and federal courts and get judges to respond," she said of her long-term career aspirations.

Bartlett left Louisiana at a time when there was still much to be done to restore the region. Specifically, Bartlett feels the criminal justice system in Louisiana is in most need of attention. "If I had the answers, that is what I would do," Bartlett said.

EmilyRose Johns, a J.D. candidate at the American University Washington College of Law and a guest writer for the Human Rights Brief, wrote this alumni profile.

Endnotes: The Citizens of Democracy: Participation for Integration in the European Union after the Lisbon Treaty

¹⁵ See To The European Transport [sic] Commission: Petition, https://docs.google.com/viewer?url=http://www.ambientevalsusa.it/documenti/Petizione_CE_18-1-2003_ENGLISH.pdf&embedded=true&chrome=true (last visited Nov. 1, 2011).

(The full text of the petition is available online). See also European Parliament, http://www.europarl.europa.eu/parliament/expert/displayFtu.do?language=en&id=73&ftuId=FTU_2.5.html (last visited Nov. 1, 2011).; see, e.g., European Parliament: The Committee on Petitions <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/activities/committees/presCom.do?language=EN&body=PETI> (last visited Nov. 1, 2011) (discussing other examples of submitted petitions).

¹⁶ TEU, *supra* note 1, art. 11.1.

¹⁷ Regulation 211/2011, *supra* note 13, art. 10.2.

¹⁸ *Id.* art. 4.1.

¹⁹ *Id.* Annex II.

²⁰ *Id.* Annex II(6). This is a measure required in the interests of both transparency and democratic accountability; see *Green Paper on a European Citizens' initiative*, at 11, COM (2009) 622 final (Nov.11 2009). It is also considered as “a means to ensure that [citizens’] initiatives are of a citizen-driven nature;” Outcome of the public consultation, *supra* note 9, 5.

²¹ *Id.* art. 4. (containing only an implicit mention)., In case of denial of the registration by the Commission the organizers of the ECI can appeal to the European Ombudsman and if it fails, they can also resort to legal proceedings. TFEU, *supra* note 3, art. 228, 263, 265).

²² Regulation 211/2011, *supra* note 13, art. 5.2.

²³ As regards the online collection system, the European Data Protection Supervisor pointed out that “full respect for data protection rules contributes considerably to the reliability, strength and success

of this important new instrument.” Opinion of the European Data Protection Supervisor on the proposal for a regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council on the citizens’ initiative, 2010 O.J. (C 323/1) para. 5.1.

²⁴ Regulation 211/2011, *supra* note 13, art. 5.3.

²⁵ *Id.* art. 5.1.

²⁶ *Id.* art. 6.3.

²⁷ *Id.* art. 9.

²⁸ *Id.* art. 10.1

²⁹ *Id.* art. 10.1(a)(c).

³⁰ *Id.* art. 10.1(b).

³¹ *Id.* art. 11 (referring to the right to public hearing as “*the opportunity* to present the citizens’ initiative at a public hearing.” Emphasis added).

³² *Id.* art. 10.

³³ Legal and political conclusions must be addressed separately.

³⁴ *Id.* art. 10.2.

³⁵ Union of South American Nations, constitutive treaty, Brasilia, Brazil, 23 May 2008, reported in 15 *Law&Bus. Rev. Am.* (2009), at 465-76. Official website: <http://www.pptunasur.com/> (last visited Nov. 1, 2011)

³⁶ *Id.*

³⁷ *Id.*

³⁸ Cabinet Office: Big Society, <http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/big-society> (last visited Nov. 1, 2011).

³⁹ Cabinet Office: Big Society, <http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/content/big-society-frequently-asked-questions-faqs> (last visited Nov. 1, 2011).