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## **NEWS RELEASE**

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### **Southern Poverty Law Center Condemns Racist Comments by St. Tammany Parish Sheriff**

*Statement by SPLC President Richard Cohen*

The residents of St. Tammany Parish deserve an apology from Sheriff Jack Strain for his deplorable remarks equating Hurricane Katrina evacuees and public housing residents with “thugs” and “trash” and suggesting that his deputies will harass people who wear dreadlocks or “chee-wee” hairstyles.

Not only were his comments manifestly racist and divisive, but he appears to be either unaware or unconcerned that racial profiling is a blatant violation of the U.S. Constitution. As the parish’s top law enforcement official, he should know better.

In America today, no one should fear harassment by the local sheriff because of the color of their skin or their fashion choice. We fought and won that struggle decades ago — and no sheriff can decree a return to the law of Jim Crow.

The Southern Poverty Law Center provides anti-bias materials to thousands of educators in Louisiana and across the country. When an authority figure like Sheriff Strain publicly voices this kind of bigotry, it sets back efforts to teach tolerance to our children.

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The Southern Poverty Law Center is a nonprofit organization, based in Montgomery, Ala., that combats hate, intolerance and discrimination through education, litigation and advocacy.