

Report: Being black aggravating factor in most death penalty cases

By Gillian Foster
Special to Sentinel-Voice

A training video revealed a Philadelphia assistant district attorney advising novice prosecutors against selecting Black jurors for high level criminal cases, stating that "Blacks from low-income areas are less likely to convict."

In Chambers County, Ala., the prosecutor divided potential jurors into four categories: "strong," "medium," "weak," and "Black."

In a Colorado death penalty case, a prosecutor referred to a Hispanic defendant as "a chilling bastard."

In Kentucky, 100 percent of the death row inmates were convicted of killing a White person, despite the fact that 1,000 Blacks have also been murder victims.

This anecdotal evidence is outlined in "The Death Penalty in Black and White: Who Lives, Who Dies, Who Decides," a comprehensive report recently released by the Washington, DC-based Death Penalty Information Center.

The report concludes that inherent and institutionalized racism remains a potent force infecting the nation's system of justice.

Using sophisticated tools to analyze capital punishment in Philadelphia, renowned researchers David Baldus and George Woodworth discovered the startling realities of the death row phenomena: The odds of receiving a death sentence are four times higher if the defendant is Black.

Philadelphia, claiming 14 percent of the state's population, renders more than half of the death sentences. While Blacks comprise roughly 40 percent of Philadelphia's population, more than 80 percent of the inmates on death row are African-American.

"Race is more likely to affect death sentencing than smoking affects the likelihood of heart disease," DPIC executive director Richard Dieter notes. "The issue of tobacco hazards has produced enormous changes in the law and society, while racism in the application of the death penalty has been largely ignored."

The report links the persistent racial inequities to a second review which revealed that the key death penalty decision-makers are virtually all White.

In the 38 death penalty states, Whites constitute 98 percent (1,794) of the district attorneys entrusted with charging capital cases. African-Americans and Hispanics each

compose one percent of the prosecutors, a total of 44. According to the report, prosecutors not only decide who should be charged with a particular level of offense, they also have a significant impact on the way the trial is conducted.

The report cites examples of racial bias ranging from systematic striking of Blacks from juries, to favorable treatment of families of White victims, to racially tainted investigations and trials.

"Who is chosen for the jury

often determines the sentence," laments George Kendall, director of the NAACP Legal Defense Fund's Capital Punishment Project. "Not only is jury exclusion contrary to the notion of a fair trial, it discriminates against law-abiding African-American citizens who have a constitutional right to participate in jury panels."

Taking their cue from the Supreme Court, federal courts do not consider racially discriminatory patterns a basis for appeals in capital cases.

Geologists preserve ancient S. African footprints

Special to Sentinel-Voice

LANGEBAAN, South Africa — Threatened by vandals and erosion, the oldest footprints ever found of an anatomically modern human were painstakingly cut from the earth and taken to a conservation workshop Tuesday.

For 117,000 years, the tiny tracks, dubbed "Eve's Footprints," lay undiscovered on the shores of Langebaan Lagoon about 75 miles north of Cape Town.

But since they were noticed in 1995, the fossilized footprints have suffered at the hands of modern man, with visitors scratching their names nearby and placing their feet in them.

Set in crumbly sandstone, the delicate prints are also vulnerable to the rain, wind and waves.

"If human beings don't get the footprints,

nature will," said Dave Roberts, the geologist who discovered them.

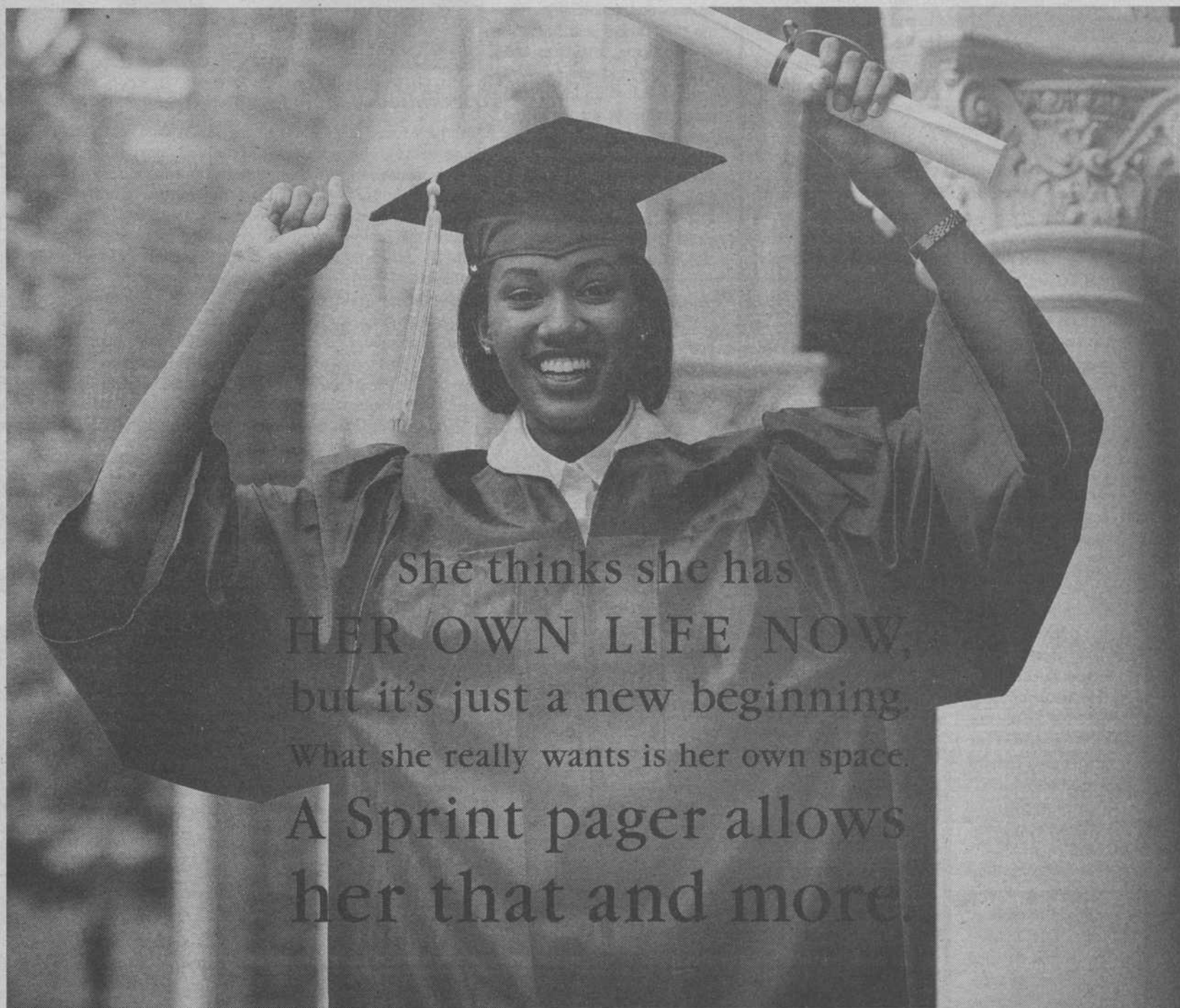
Intent on saving the tracks, geologists and engineers toiled over the weekend to cut them out in a single block of stone. Supported by a steel box and covered with resin, the mass was lifted by helicopter onto a truck for the trip to Cape Town.

After a brief stop at a workshop for more conservation work, the footprints will be moved to the city's South African Museum at the end of this week.

The footprints, eight and a half inches long, were made by a person about 5-foot-3.

The small stature led scientists to theorize they were made by a young woman.

Left on a rainswept sloping dune, they were quickly buried by wind-blown sand and gradually turned to stone.



She thinks she has
HER OWN LIFE NOW,
but it's just a new beginning.
What she really wants is her own space.
A Sprint pager allows
her that and more.



\$20 Rebate with any Sprint Paging purchase

You've always encouraged her to do her very best. And that's why you bought her the very best pager. It has a large enough coverage area so that you can reach her even when she goes off to college. And to make life even simpler, a monthly rate conveniently appears on your local phone bill. We've got all the great stuff for those who are on their way up. From pagers to long distance to local service, Sprint is the *one* company that meets all of your communication needs.

1-888-577-7579

