

Scribbled notes have judge dodging racist accusations

By Christy Lemire

Private notes, scribbled on pieces of paper and tossed in a trash can nearly 15 years ago, have become an issue in one race for the state's highest criminal appeals court.

Mike Keasler, the Republican nominee for Place 1 on the Texas Court of Criminal Appeals, has drawn heavy criticism for handwritten racial comments he made to a bailiff during a trial in early 1984.

Keasler, a 56-year-old Dallas state district judge, said he had "no excuse" and apologized when the notes surfaced in May. But he believes those comments won't hurt him on Nov. 3.

"I've got a good opinion of voters' thought processes and I think they know quality when they see it," said Keasler, a district judge since 1981. "I believe they'll do the right thing."

Incumbent Democratic Judge Charles F. "Charlie" Baird, on the court since 1990, said

he was "very sad" when he learned of the notes.

"Some people think it was a political windfall, but I think it's a sad day when it becomes evident that members of our judiciary have those attitudes and those biases," said Baird, 43.

Several groups have expressed angrier sentiments.

Two dozen members of the J.L. Turner Legal Association, a black Dallas lawyers' group, recently protested Keasler on the county courthouse steps.

The Texas chapter of the League of United Latin American Citizens and the Hispanic Bar Association have asked Keasler to resign as state district judge.

The board of directors of the 2,000-member Texas Criminal Defense Lawyers' Association passed a resolution in September urging the state Commission of Judicial Conduct to investigate, calling Keasler's

comments "abhorrent, disgraceful and in violation of the spirit of the Supreme Court."

Both groups tried to get him to pull out of the race, but the deadline for candidates to withdraw already had passed.

The state chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People also passed a resolution, questioning Keasler's ability to be fair and asking state authorities to look into his judicial record.

LULAC state director Angie Garcia said she hopes this issue and others inspire more minorities to vote.

"It seems like we're having a backlash of racism and it's coming out of the woodwork," Garcia said. "We don't need to have anybody interpreting the law that has those kinds of feelings."

Keasler said no one from those groups ever talked to him about his comments.

"They never attempted to sit down with me or ask me any questions," he said. "Either

they don't know of my record for working in the area of gender, racial and ethnic fairness or they know about it and disregard it."

As dean of continuing education at the Texas Judicial College from 1990-97, Keasler said, he introduced a curriculum of racial fairness training to judges.

During a 1984 trial, Keasler wrote in one note that a lawyer "better get rid of those blacks" as potential jurors. He complained that a black prosecutor said "axed" instead of "asked." In another note, he referred to someone as "the national tearduct of Mexico."

A critic of the judge pulled the notes from a wastebasket and has kept them ever since. *The Dallas Morning News* received the notes from a self-described "lifelong conservative Republican" who said he dislikes the judge.

Keasler said the comments, in context, were not racist. "In 17 years, I've never gotten accused of racism until I got into a race with Charlie Baird," Keasler said.

Series, 'Africans in America,' examines slavery's roots

By Lynn Elber

LOS ANGELES (AP) — Consider these words:

"When you make men slaves you deprive them of half their virtue. ... You set them, in your own conduct, an example of fraud and cruelty, and compel them to live with you in that state of war."

It is hard to imagine a more eloquent condemnation of a soulless enterprise, or any better source: Olaudah Equiano, who was kidnapped as a child in Africa, enslaved in America in the 1700s and, finally, emerged a man who seized freedom.

His is one of many voices heard in "Africans in America: America's Journey Through Slavery," an incisive and stirring four-part PBS U.S. TV network documentary. It aired in the United States this week.

Using personal stories to give life to history is a favored technique of today's nonfiction filmmakers, and "Africans in America" makes the most of it. With 18th- and 19th-century diaries and other sources, many recently discovered, the series allows people to illuminate — or indict — themselves and their time.

Here, for instance, is farmer George Washington, the future president, striking a business deal: "I will take six or more Negroes...relying on your word that the whole are healthy, and none of them addicted to running away. The latter I abominate."

The irony of a man who would help win the American colonies' freedom from Britain so casually enslaving others is inescapable. But that dichotomy — of a country symbolic of freedom yet built



Photo special to Sentinel-Voice
Servants of B.W. Fosdick in Savannah, Georgia: Minda, Leah, Sarah, Tom, and Little Paul.

on slavery — is at the heart of Africans in America.

The film dissects the attitudes that allowed slavery's acceptance and how the process affected our developing national character and society.

"We tried to broaden the series and make it a much more expansive story of the impact of Africans coming to America and what that meant in terms of what this nation would become and what its people would ultimately become," said Orlando Bagwell, the project's executive director.

"It's clear that some of these ideas that are born in this period are ideas we still live with today, attitudes we still live with, things we cannot change or lose that quickly," Bagwell said.

Actress Angela Bassett provides an effective narration. The series also features readings by Andre Braugher, Avery Brooks and

William Hurt. A companion book to the series was co-written by Charles Johnson, Patricia Smith and researchers at public television station WGBH Boston. (Smith is the *Boston Globe* columnist who was fired for fabricating people and quotations; PBS has said her work on the book was thoroughly vetted.)

The documentary's first chapter, "The Terrible Transformation," relates the arrival of a handful of African slaves in 1619, just 12 years after the first colonists landed at Jamestown. It was a precursor to a lucrative human trade that ultimately would ensnare more than 20 million black Africans. Most perished along the horrific "middle passage" across the Atlantic Ocean to the Americas, in which shiploads of chained human beings were stacked like firewood, given little if any food or water and virtually no fresh

air.

By 1738, the Carolina colony's population had a black majority: They outnumbered whites by two to one. By 1750, when Georgia legalized slavery, every corner of British North America allowed slave-owning.

There was conflict from the start, with violent slave rebellions and violent reactions to fears of slave uprisings. And the turmoil was not limited to the South: Thirteen slaves were burned alive at the stake and 18 hanged in New York in 1741

after coerced witnesses alleged an insurrection plot.

In "Revolution," the second episode, the American colonies fight for freedom from England as slaves challenge their bondage. The role of blacks as soldiers on both sides of the struggle is detailed, as is the nascent split between Northern and Southern states over slavery.

"Brotherly Love" looks at the first four decades of the new nation, including the growth of Philadelphia's unique free black community, the role of black churches in demanding the end of slave

laws and the westward spread of slavery fueled by cotton farming. Inventor Eli Whitney's marvel, the cotton gin, was great for the American economy but, we learn, bad for the cause of black freedom.

The documentary concludes with "Judgment Day," focusing on the pre-Civil War years that included abolitionist activity and the Supreme Court's Dred Scott ruling in 1857 that blacks were not citizens, thus upholding the Fugitive Slave Law and leaving blacks unprotected by the Constitution.

CURRENT COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

- Clark County District Board of Health, Chairman
- BankWest of Nevada, Director
- Health Plan of Nevada, Director
- President Associates, UNLV Foundation
- UNLV Alumni Association
- Junior League of Las Vegas
- Clark County Medical Society Alliance

EDUCATIONAL BACKGROUND

- Northwestern University School of Nursing
- Graduated 1961
- University of Nevada, Las Vegas
- BS in Finance - Graduated with Distinction 1990

"A history of caring; a history of sharing"

ELECT **SHERRY COLQUITT**
UNIVERSITY REGENT "G"

(West of Rainbow the length of Las Vegas Valley plus Blue Diamond, Pahrump, Mt. Charleston, Indian Springs)

700 Shadow Lane, Ste. 370 • Las Vegas, NV 89106 • 683-7974

Paid for by Committee to Elect Sherry Colquitt • Co-Chairs: Kathleen Kelly, Jill Colquitt

