

# Merits of reverse bias suit settlement debated

By Kendall Wilson  
Special to Sentinel-Voice

Calling the settlement "anti-climactic," a white teacher who charged her civil rights were violated when she was laid off in favor of a black teacher said she was happy to bring closure to the case.

Sharon Taxman, 50, said she was glad the case was over. She said the \$443,500 settlement she received was "kind of anti-climactic."

The Piscataway, N.J. school board decided Nov. 20 not to appeal Sharon Taxman's case before the U.S. Supreme Court, voting 5-3 to settle the \$443,500 suit.

The move came after the Black Leadership Forum, an alliance of civil rights groups, agreed to pay 70 percent of the settlement.

The board believed the nation's highest

court has grown increasingly hostile to race-based policies in recent years, and thought a Supreme Court ruling would have a ripple effect on affirmative action nationwide.

Taxman lost her job in the business department in 1989, while Debra Williams, a black teacher, kept hers. Both were hired the same day and considered equally qualified by the school board.

Taxman had more teaching experience. Williams had superior academic credentials, including a master's degree. Taxman charged that she was laid off because she was white.

Williams, in tears after the confirmation of the settlement, insisted she was far more qualified than Taxman, saying that having an advanced degree apparently means nothing "but a slap in the face."

Meanwhile, advocates and opponents of

affirmative action read different messages into the settlement.

"The great debate on affirmative action will go on in Congress, the states and the lower courts because affirmative action is legal," said Kathy Rogers, executive director of the National Organization of Women's Legal Defense and Educational Fund. "It works, it's necessary and it's fair."

Clint Bolick of the conservative Institute for Justice in Washington, said, "This settlement demonstrates the panic within the civil rights establishment. This could have been a knockout blow for racial preferences."

The Rev. Jesse Jackson, who helped to raise some of the money in the settlement, described the case as one "riddled with problems."

"The black teacher has a master's degree

and the white teacher doesn't," he said. "So, they are not equals academically. This case would have been a distortion of the issue."

Taxman's attorney, Steven Klausner, said it was obvious to him that "they (civil rights groups) were afraid that affirmative action might be very damaged."

But NAACP President Kweisi Mfume agreed with Jackson about the damage that the "distortion" of the facts could have brought to the fight to maintain affirmative action.

"Distorted facts make for distorted laws," he said. "It was in the best interests of the nation that the future of affirmative action be based on a clearly articulated record and not on a case that the extreme right wing has distorted and defined as something else."

Kendall Wilson is a reporter for the Philadelphia Tribune.

# Pittsburgh NAACP demands answers in police shootings

By Treshea Wade  
Pittsburgh Courier

A long list of hearings into the deaths of Black men are taking place before the Allegheny County coroner's office this month — two of which will be to determine if there is enough evidence to prosecute some police officers.

The NAACP Pittsburgh Branch says, "enough is enough" and is encouraging the Black community to get involved.

Last month, a Pittsburgh police officer shot and killed

motorist Deron Grimmitt in downtown. Recently Coroner Dr. Cyril Wecht called for an inquest into the April 1995 shooting of Jerry Jackson by city Housing Authority police in the Armstrong Tunnels.

County District Attorney Stephen Zappala, Jr. reopened the investigation into Jackson's death after a videotape of the incident was discovered.

"It is our opinion that comments made by officials in response to this new evidence point to a clear indication of a conspiracy to

cover up the facts, obstruct justice and commit perjury," said Eugene Beard, NAACP first vice president.

Officers fired 40 rounds of ammunition at Jackson, 44, of Hazelwood. He was struck 14 times in the head, neck and shoulders. Housing Authority Officer John Charo said he fired through his windshield in self-defense because Jackson had spun around and was driving toward him.

A similar claim of self-defense was utilized by Police Officer Jeffrey

Cooperstein, who fatally shot Grimmitt.

According to Beard, the video of Jackson's shooting contradicts information originally reported by the officers. Footage shows the car Jackson was driving did not make an 180-degree turn and head back toward police; the talon bullets used in the shooting were not considered authorized ammunition for any police department; and no weapon was found in Jackson's car.

"It is our opinion that this

new evidence clearly shows that the information originally reported by the officers involved was blatantly false," Beard said.

Two months after the shooting, a coroner's jury voted 4-2 to recommend no charges be filed against Charo or other city officers involved. Jackson's family is optimistic that this will not be the case this time.

"I always knew we could get this opened back up because of the evidence we didn't have at the time of the

inquest. I always knew we would get justice for him," Robin Jackson said.

The NAACP called on Zappala to uncover any conspiracy or obstruction of justice.

"This investigation should not stop at the shooting incident itself, but should include not only the officers but any office, department or institution, no matter how remote, that had any connection with the shooting and its potential cover up," Beard said.

## Dragging

(Continued from Page 2) oppose the death penalty. King, 24, would face either life in prison or the death penalty if convicted.

Two white men and a black woman who works as a state corrections officer made the preliminary cut.

Lawyers had anticipated it would take at least two weeks to find a jury, but the speed and limited success of the interviews prompted both sides to speculate that 12 jurors and two alternates could not be found among the 122-person pool.

"Three out of 10 won't get us there," District Attorney Guy James Gray said.

If a jury cannot be seated from the available pool, the judge may have to call in additional citizens for questioning.

King has pleaded innocent. In a letter released to *The Dallas Morning News* last fall, King claimed he was dropped at his home after Berry gave Byrd a ride. He insists Berry and Brewer killed Byrd over a soured drug deal.

Prosecutors said Byrd's blood was found on the shoes of all three suspects and other personal items and DNA

samples found at the scene implicate all three.

Prosecutors Tuesday issued a subpoena for *Dallas Morning News* reporter Lee Hancock, asking her to produce the letter from King.

"We are going to speak

with our lawyers later this week and determine what action to take," said Gilbert Bailon, the paper's executive editor. "We understand they want her to authenticate letters she received from the defendant."

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