

# Still no arrests year after bombing of black newspaper

By Barbara Harris  
Tri-State Defender

Just over a year ago, the *Jackson Advocate* in Mississippi was destroyed by an early morning firebombing.

Yet, the controversial investigation has produced no arrests despite the local Southern Christian Leadership Conference's probe naming a 29-year-old male from Meridian, Miss. as a possible suspect.

Tony Lewis Hodges was indicted early last month on five counts of manufacturing homemade bombs in March 1997 and placing them in the Jackson nail salon of Theta Hudson, a former girlfriend.

It is unclear what motive, if any, Hodges may have had for being involved in the paper's firebombing, but during the investigation, SCLC Executive Secretary Stephanie Parker-Weaver said she was told by one source that "some Black person threw the firebombs into the *Advocate*, but did not have a real reason. The person had committed another crime and did not want to go to jail and was being forced to firebomb the *Advocate* because the Feds were holding that crime over their head as blackmail."

Hodges was indicted 19 months before the

incident at the *Advocate* for bombing Hudson's nail salon. His participation in that crime led to speculation that he may have been coerced to participate in the firebombing with a promise of leniency.

If Hodges was involved, Parker-Weaver contends, he did not act alone. SCLC's investigation points to a conspiracy involving law enforcement officials and downtown business persons.

The three bombs ATF confiscated at the nail salon were described in the indictment by U.S. Attorney Brad Pigott as "gasoline-fueled incendiary devices with fuse and detonator."

Pigott has come under considerable criticism recently for his failure to aggressively pursue the Hodges case and lack of action in the *Advocate* firebombing case.

"Now that Pigott has officially charged Hodges with attempting to bomb Hudson's nail salon, maybe he will indict whoever is involved with or guilty of the unsolved Jan. 26, 1998, *Jackson Advocate* bombing," Parker-Weaver said.

"It is just as important to bring closure to this other ungodly domestic terrorist assault, an un-American First Amendment constitutional attack, so that our community

can begin healing old racial, political and economic wounds recently laid bare before the nation by the bombing of a black-owned newspaper in Mississippi in 1998, not 1968," she said.

Meanwhile, Vernon Hughes was removed in November from the nail salon bombing case by deputy fire chief Raymond McNulty. Hughes was also removed in December 1998 as chief investigator for the *Advocate* firebombing and the July 22, 1998 firebombing of the house at 333 Eastview St. adjacent to *Advocate* Publisher Charles Tisdale's home. Hughes told Jackson's daily newspaper, *The Clarion-Ledger*, last summer that the Eastview fire was a "typical house fire," totally unrelated to the unsolved *Advocate* firebombing.

"Hughes' deliberately indifferent statements of misinformation to *The Clarion-Ledger* further endangered the lives of Tisdale, his family and staff," said state Rep. Jim Evans, who also serves as *Advocate* board chairman and is a SCLC national board member. Outraged at Hughes' apparent attempt "to obstruct justice and conspire with the perpetrators," SCLC officials demanded an immediate apology from him.

"After more than 19 years on the fire department, Vernon Hughes still couldn't tell the difference between a typical house fire and a bombing," Evans pointed out.

On Aug. 21, Hughes publicly apologized and admitted he was incompetent. The cases have been reassigned to newly-appointed acting chief arson investigator Van Presson.

"Both [fires] are a top priority with the Jackson Fire Department, and will remain that way," McNulty says, vowing that Presson and his men would work diligently to try and solve both firebombings.

Meanwhile, civil rights leaders and *Advocate* staff, management and supporters continue to inquire about the whereabouts of a videotape from a surveillance camera mounted atop the A.H. McCoy Federal Building, one block from the newspaper.

The *Advocate* is currently in negotiations with the city of Jackson to lease a building on Farish Street, associate publisher Alice Thomas-Tisdale said.

The Hill-Holly Building, the *Advocate's* former home and site of last year's firebombing, is in the final stages of renovation. The building is listed on the National Register of Historical Places.

## Supreme Court staunchly defends hiring record of law clerks

WASHINGTON (AP) — Supreme Court Justice Antonin Scalia defended the court's record on hiring minority law clerks Monday, saying the justices seek "the best and the brightest law clerks we can get."

Speaking to the Jewish Council for Public Affairs, Scalia disputed a suggestion from the audience that the justices have hired a disproportionately small number of female clerks.

But, he added, "It is a problem with the numbers as far as minorities are concerned if you think the

Supreme Court should have a complement of law clerks that looks like America."

"I don't think so," he added. "I think we should have the best and the brightest law clerks we can get."

"That is an objective that I would think that a Jewish group in particular would applaud, rather than seeking a system in which we have some sort of racial quotas for these jobs," Scalia said.

The NAACP and others have accused the court in recent months of hiring too few minorities and women as clerks.

The clerks help the justices screen new cases, do research and draft opinions. USA Today reported last year that blacks make up less than 2 percent of the 428 law clerks hired by the court's current nine justices during their tenures and that fewer than 25 percent of those clerks have been women.

In a letter to three black members of Congress last December, Chief Justice William H. Rehnquist rejected calls for discussion of the issue with minority bar groups.

During Scalia's speech,

when a member of the audience said the brightest law school graduates might look like a more diverse group, he countered, "I'd be interested in what facts you have to establish that."

"All I have are the grades from law schools, the law school that the person graduates from and the recommendations of the law professors, and I pick my law clerks on the basis of that," he said.

Scalia, one of the court's most conservative justices, also outlined his view that the Constitution should be

interpreted according to what it was understood to mean when it was enacted.

"If you don't use the original meaning of the text as your criterion to decide a case, what do you use? ...

You will find there is nothing to use except your own prejudices," he said. "For the non-originalist, every day is a new day. You wake up and think 'I wonder what is unconstitutional today?'"

## Young man convicted for Va. cross burning

VIRGINIA BEACH, Va. (AP) — A jury found a 19-year-old white man guilty Tuesday of attempting to burn a cross on the lawn of an interracial couple and recommended he serve 90 days in jail.

The maximum punishment Richard J. Elliott faces is five years in prison. "I think the sentence ... reflects what they believed to be his role — his minimal role — in what happened," defense attorney James Broccoletti said.

He had asked jurors not to incarcerate his client for "a stupid prank without any maliciousness on his part."

Elliott was one of three white teen-agers arrested in the crime last May. At the time, he lived next door to couple in a rural neighborhood near the North Carolina border.

Jonathan S. O'Mara, 19, pleaded guilty Monday to felony charges of conspiracy and attempting to burn a cross with the intent to intimidate.

Elliott and O'Mara are to be sentenced April 26.

A 17-year-old boy agreed to plead guilty to the same charges and testified against Elliott. In exchange, prosecutors will not move his case from juvenile to adult court.

## Bomb

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"Some who have scars will refuse these operations," said Dr. A.I. Aref, a plastic surgeon. "They think their injuries are something that came from God."

Large, jagged pieces of plate glass still protrude from the downtown Nairobi mission, which draws gawkers and camera-toting tourists despite the corrugated metal sheets that encircle it to keep out the curious.

It's the last thing survivors with psychological scars want to see. "Psychologically, the impact was tremendous. There are people who still cannot bring themselves to enter downtown Nairobi," said Dr. Frank Njenga, a psychiatrist who heads Operation Recovery, which offers trauma counseling to survivors. Fidgeting under the hospital tent Monday, Charles Wasonga absentmindedly ran his fingers over the large, worm-like scars on his neck.

## Membership

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are progressive, so that members must move up the scale. For instance, you must be a silver life member before you can become a gold life member.

Corporate memberships are \$5,000.

All members, with the exception of the youngest, get a subscription to *The New Crisis*, the NAACP's official magazine.

Bond explained, "The additional revenues from the new fees will enable us to better carry out our programs in civil rights, voter registration, anti-discrimination, economic empowerment, and youth development." He also said that the ability to raise its own capital will keep the NAACP from bowing to outside interests.

According to Edward Lewis, Tri-State Conference president, the organization has been losing money by keeping the dues so low for so long.

## Rwanda genocide tribunal expands

ARUSHA, Tanzania (AP) — Hoping to speed up its work, the U.N. tribunal trying suspects in the 1994 Rwandan genocide opened a third courtroom Monday and swore in three new judges.

The new chamber will help "bring to justice those who committed heinous crimes in Rwanda," said tribunal spokesman Kingsley Mogahlu.

The addition of three judges brings to nine the number serving the tribunal, established in November 1994 to bring to justice those responsible for the slaughter in which at least 500,000 Tutsis and moderate Hutus were killed. Rwandan authorities and human rights groups have accused the court — which thus far has completed work on four cases — of incompetence.

The tribunal took a 34th suspect into custody over the weekend when Ignace Bagilishema was transferred to Arusha from South Africa, where he had surrendered.

The three judges sworn in Monday were Lloyd Williams of St. Kitts and Nevis, Dionysios Kondylis of Greece and Pavel Dolenic of Slovenia.

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