

Defense: Rosenbaum slaying about alcohol, not race

Special to Sentinel-Voice

Lemrick Nelson essentially admitted stabbing Yankel Rosenbaum during the 1991 Crown Heights riot but did so under the influence of alcohol and not because the victim was a Jew, a defense attorney said to jurors Monday in Brooklyn federal court.

The dramatic admission came in the opening state-

ment by attorney Richard Jasper who is defending Nelson in his federal retrial on charges he violated the civil rights of Rosenbaum by fatally stabbing the Hasidic scholar the night of Aug. 19, 1991.

"What you will see is a very terrible combination of alcohol, youth and tragedy which came together that night," said Jasper. Evidence



Lemrick Nelson Jr., 21, told his former girlfriend around 1992 that "I stabbed somebody, but not because he was a Jew, 'cause I was drunk, I had been drinking,"

will show that Nelson told his former girlfriend around 1992 that "I stabbed somebody, but not because he was a Jew, 'cause I was drunk, I had been drinking," Jasper said in his opening.

Jasper's remarks, although not directly stating that Nelson admitted stabbing

Rosenbaum, appear to represent a sharp shift in tactics from the defense employed in Nelson's first federal trial in 1997. At that time, different defense attorneys argued that Nelson did not stab Rosenbaum. (Nelson was acquitted on state murder charges in 1992).

Nelson was convicted at the first federal trial on the civil rights charge but an appeals court overturned the conviction after it determined that the first trial judge improperly meddled with the composition of the jury.

In her opening statement, assistant U. S. Attorney Lauren Resnick said that Rosenbaum happened to innocently wander into the path of mob incited by a fatal car accident in Crown Heights that night which took the life of 3-year-old Gavin Cato and injured his cousin Angela. They were struck by a car drive by a Hasidic man.

"A man named Yankel Roenbaum was killed, not because of anything he had done, but because of who he

was, because he chose to make known through his dress and his physical appearance his religious identity, because he was an Orthodox Jew," Resnick told jurors.

"This gang went looking for a scapegoat that night, it wanted to find a Jew to even the score," she said.

Resnick argued that Nelson took a knife from his pocket and stabbed Rosenbaum, "inflicting the wound" that caused his death.

She repeated much of what the federal prosecutors had argued in the 1997 trial: that Nelson ran from the scene, was found hiding in some bushes by police and had a bloody knife that had Rosenbaum's DNA on it.

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Activist

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Something is wrong with this picture."

Analysts estimate that the rebuilding of Iraq could cost \$25 billion to \$100 billion, depending on how long it takes and the extent of international cooperation. And some question whether rebuilding efforts in Iraq will last.

"It doesn't take a rocket scientist to understand that they are not there to rebuild that country, but to steal its natural resources," says Julia Hare, executive director of the Black Think Tank in San Francisco. "Not only do they not plan to rebuild here. They do not plan to rebuild there. They plan to strengthen the oil wells and the money that they have."

Iraq is the second largest oil supplier in the world, behind Saudi Arabia. That has led some opponents of the war to charge that the fighting is not about freeing Iraqis from Saddam Hussein's oppression, but about seizing the prosperous oil wells.

With the war in Iraq and proposed tax breaks tilted toward the wealthy, most cities and states are experiencing budget problems. According to the National Conference of State Legislators, 41 states will face deficits the next fiscal year totaling \$78.4 billion.

William Spriggs, executive director of the National Urban League's Institute for Opportunity and Equality, says Americans are suffering in other ways.

"We'd gotten so used to thinking that we couldn't afford [needed services] that people have stopped thinking about it," Spriggs says. "It dropped from the conversation. So, part of the problem is just that — a lack of political will — and a lot of passing the buck."

For that to change, community groups must step up the pressure, says Damu Smith, founder and Chairman of Black Voices for Peace, a Washington, D.C.-based anti-war group.

Smith says advocacy groups must ask themselves, "Where's the other share of the pie when it comes to public education, affordable housing and health care?" There's got to be a reorientation. And that's a public policy issue."

Patricia A. Coulter, president of the Urban League of Philadelphia, knows all about the impact of public policy.

"It's not so much getting the computers hooked up," she says. "Our real challenge is the safety of the computers because in order to have the computers in the building, we need to have a gate to guard the computers. So, you have to go through the system of getting a gate for the school. When you think of how these things impact our children on a day-to-day basis, that's another thing. When you look at our schools in Philadelphia, they look more like prisons."

And most of the people going to prison are poor.

"Poor people have not been able to gain access to even a decent income," says Maude Hurd, president of the Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now (ACORN), a community-based group that represents low-income people. "We need decent wages for basic necessities like food, rent and just to be able to put clothing on their family's backs. But poor people have not even been able to gain access to even a decent income to be able to survive, so it's tough."

And it will get tougher unless people take action, says Cummings. Bush refused to meet with Cummings and the CBC to discuss the war with Iraq and other issues.

"In some sort of way, we've got to refocus him on the attention of this country," Cummings says. "Every forum that we can, we're going to be talking about it. We're going to be asking him publicly, why is it that he can't find time to meet with us on issues that go to the center of the lives of Americans, period."

Cummings answers his own question:

He says, "The fact is that we've got a president who claims to be compassionate and conservative. He is extremely long on conservative and extremely short on compassionate."

Sharpton names Watkins as campaign manager

*By J. Zamgba Browne
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NEW YORK*

(NNPA)—It seems that there is no stopping now for the Rev. Al Sharpton, who has his eyes set on the U.S. presidency. Last week he announced the appointment of Frank E. Watkins as his campaign manager.

A press secretary and director of communications for Rep. Jesse Jackson Jr. (D-Ill.), Watkins is on loan to Sharpton and will manage the Sharpton's exploratory campaign.

Sharpton said Watkins brings an array of exper-

tise, having worked on the two presidential campaigns of the Jesse Jackson Sr.

"I am proud that Frank Watkins has chosen to come aboard," said Sharpton. "I have known him ever since we worked together on Operation Breadbasket," a Jackson Sr. project.

Sharpton said it is important that as his campaign raises questions about the fundamental expansion of the U.S. Constitution to have someone with such expertise will help his campaign frame this platform.

"Mr. Watkins has an invaluable network of progres-

sive activities around the country that speak to the issues our campaign represents," said Sharpton.

In accepting the appointment, Watkins said he was highly honored to be asked to serve in the campaign.

"I anticipate a winning campaign that will help to move the Democratic Party and the American people from the legitimate and necessary tasks of defending civil liberties to advancing the cause of putting new human rights in our Constitution," said Watkins.

He also said that he looks forward to a fight for human

and constitutional rights for all Americans through the Sharpton presidential campaign.

According to Watkins, Sharpton has chosen a broad-based platform that is nonpartisan. Watkins, who worked with Jackson Sr. for 27 years as a key adviser, is author of several books.

He recently co-authored with Rep. Jackson Jr., "A More Perfect Union: Advancing New American Rights."

J. Zamgba Browne writes for the New York Amsterdam News

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Timothy Williams is a member of the Nevada & Illinois State Bar, practicing primarily in personal injury cases.

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