

Rumors feed lynching theories in Fla. deaths

BELLE GLADE, Fla. (AP) - Three years ago in a small Mississippi town, a man found his black son's body hanging from a pecan tree. Three months ago in Belle Glade, another man found his stepson dangling from a tree in their yard.

Authorities labeled both deaths suicides - but in both cases, rumors of lynching have persisted.

One scholar believes the rumors are part of vigorous "urban legends" in the black community that are fueled by years of mistrust over past police misdeeds.

Patricia A. Turner, author of "I Heard It Through the Grapevine: Rumor in African-American Culture," says that for generations black communities have turned to rumor as an outlet for frustra-

tions, particularly in response to racial injustice.

Turner, a vice provost at the University of California at Davis, said she used to debunk myths among her black students, such as one that said U.S. scientists created AIDS and tested it on Africans before it spiraled out of control worldwide.

Other commonly circulated rumors linked drugs in black neighborhoods to a national conspiracy against blacks, and alleged that the Ku Klux Klan owned a fast food chain and doctored the food so black men would become sterile.

The crime of lynching reached a peak more than a century ago, numbering more than 100 a year, according to the Southern Poverty Law Center.

From 1935 to the 1960s, the average fell to a few a year, and none has been documented for more than two decades.

In Kokomo, Miss., authorities ruled the hanging death of 17-year-old Raynard Johnson a suicide. National civil rights leaders rallied behind relatives, who labeled it a lynching, charging that Johnson was killed as a warning to other black men who date white women.

After three years, relatives and others in Kokomo still believed Johnson was murdered by racists.

The same convictions surround a case that divides the rural farming community of Belle Glade, where Henry Drummer found stepson Feraris "Ray" Golden dead and dangling from a

tree in their yard May 28.

Some said Golden's hands were tied behind his back, that he was killed because he was dating the daughter of a white police officer and that authorities covered up the murder.

The stories persist despite a special public inquest last month at which a judge concluded that the evidence pointed only to suicide. Autopsy photos showed a single bruise around his neck, and video from a police car arriving at the scene showed Golden's stiffened arms at his sides.

Evidence at the inquest showed Golden was a troubled, divorced, unemployed father of four who was behind in child-support payments and frequently joked that he would take his own life. He also died with traces

of cocaine in his system and a blood-alcohol level more than four times the legal limit for driving.

History shows lower numbers of suicides among black men than among white men, although the numbers are rising, Turner said.

"It makes more cultural sense to many members of his community that he would

have been lynched, rather than he would have taken his own life," she said. "It's unrealistic to expect that you will eventually get all members in the community to believe otherwise."

The Southern Christian Leadership Conference and the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights are reviewing the Belle Glade case.

Services

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papers without fear."

"The amount of traffic we get and the number of issues we deal with, it's definitely going to be a void in the community," Williams said. "A large number of the clients we serve would rather come here than go to City Hall. It doesn't affect us as much as it will affect the community. Groups met here. They didn't have notice."

When the city opened outreach offices, council members didn't have community liaisons, Sanchez said.

"The outreach offices are council offices," Weekly said. "I didn't utilize that office. I have neighborhood meetings. I represent them (constituents), not staff. If they (constituents) have any problems, they can just call me. My concern is that we

would not lose any jobs.

"What Michael Chambliss is doing now should not stop. He has an office in City Hall. That's where his office was to begin with. Services will not be interrupted. They can just call me."

The Preservation Office, which contains a conference room, offices and a reception area, worked on special projects and helped with citizen referrals.

"If someone is stranded, in need of emergency housing, we called social services to get them a voucher," Chambliss said. "It's a number of things we deal with, depending on what people walked in the door. Services ranged from employment, healthcare, childcare and straitening this out with the police department."

"It's not dollars," Sanchez

said. "We are trying to increase efficiency. We are trying not to duplicate our efforts. This is a city manager (Douglas Selby) move. There was a lot of duplication of services and we are trying not to do that."

What is to become of the Nucleus Center, which the city remodeled less than a year ago to accommodate moving the Preservation Office from another office there?

"I don't know if there are any plans," Sanchez said.

Jackson

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town to celebrate Labor Day and call attention to the challenges faced by American workers in a struggling economy.

The parade ended at the recently unveiled Michigan Labor Legacy monument in Hart Plaza, which symbolizes the continuing spirit of organized labor and the importance of unions to the region's history.

"We're very concerned about this economy," said Patrick Devlin, secretary-treasurer of the Greater Detroit Building and Construction Trades Council. "People talk about the economy picking up, but we don't see it."

The biggest celebration in New York City was the annual West Indian Day parade, which this year honored slain Councilman James Davis as marchers wound through his district in Brooklyn.

Davis was shot to death in City Hall on July 23 by a one-time political rival.

The parade is famous for outrageous and colorful costumes, and bodies painted in colors representing the flags of the various countries of the West Indies. One woman, wearing a short dress, had her face and arms painted in the colors of Jamaica - yellow, green and Black.

At Yale, the service and clerical workers from two Hotel Employees and Restaurant Employees International locals walked off the job Wednesday in a dispute over wages, job security and pension benefits.

The unions represent about 4,000 clerical, technical and service and maintenance workers, but an undetermined number had crossed picket lines.

University negotiators and leaders of striking unions agreed to return to the negotiations on Wednesday.

Yale officials say their latest eight-year contract offer is generous, with pay raises of 3 percent to 5 percent, pension benefit increases and signing bonuses worth 50 percent of pay raises they would have received dating back to January 2002, when the last contract expired.

The unions want more substantial raises and larger pension benefits, as well as retroactive pay for the 20 months workers stayed on the job without contracts.

BOM

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be a one-on-one dialog with professional artists and music industry executives. Geffen Records and Elektra will have representatives there. A buffet-style lunch will be served.

Bailey Tureaud feels that too many people in the music business focus on performance and music and don't take the time to "understand the power of the dollar" in the music business.

Past celebrity guests for the conference have included Earth, Wind and Fire, George Duke, film director John Singleton and 702.

For further information, call the Economic Opportunity Board at (702) 647-7735.

Museum

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Vegas' past and stored in an outdoor neon "boneyard" maintained by the Neon Museum.

The Nevada State Museum and Historical Society is open every day from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. except Thanksgiving, Christmas, and New Year's Day. General admission is \$2 for adults and children under 18 are admitted free. Call 486-5205 for more information.

Internet

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able to fill."

Like Watts and Lewis, David Brauer, list manager of the Minneapolis Issues List, believes that the Internet increases access for those who wouldn't normally be privy to certain kinds of information and/or discussions. "My theory is that this is a way for people with busy lives to participate," he said. "I mean, on some level, we have so little activism that any activism qualifies as progress. But I really think the best thing about it is [that] it's a chance for people around the city to connect."

The Minneapolis Issue List consists of about 900 members from a variety of neighborhoods who post messages about residential, city hall, business and other concerns. Because discussions take place in cyberspace, Brauer said that it is impossible to know the race of list participants, unless they identify themselves.

"When we started the list [in 1998] with those first 100 people, I suspect we didn't have many African-Americans. I think that in the past couple of years, since the 2001 election, our African-American membership has gone up," said Brauer. "We do ask people when we post to list their neighborhoods, and the neighborhoods I've seen recently have a higher percentage of African-Americans."

"Certainly race as a topic comes up over and over again on the forum," he added. People discuss the Minneapolis public schools and the challenges that they've faced. There have been plenty of discussions about police brutality—the woman who'd been [allegedly discriminated against] in Market BBQ—there was a lot of chat about that."

Brauer concedes that, without knowledge of participants' racial backgrounds, the tenor and type of discussions that take place in cyberspace are different than the ones that would take place face-to-face.

"I would assume that, from my standpoint as a White person, if all our conversations went on and we didn't know what race people were, our conversations would be different."

"But a lot of times, [when posting messages to the list] people are just talking based on their personality and perspective. And I find myself asking, 'Hey, we don't know the race of this person.' I don't know if people listen to each other more, without making assumptions or stereotypes."

Lewis also believes that people engage information and issues very differently on the Internet than in other media. "The response to the recipient is different than if they read it in the paper or see it on TV. There is something about receiving a message at home on your computer that has a different effect," he said.

"People respond differently because they receive it through their computer and they have an opportunity to respond to it. And they respond even stronger if they have the opportunity to respond to others. And it gets even stronger if it's between two people and elected officials see it, too," said Lewis.

Easier access to information also creates some tension, however. "Some of that stuff [postings and responses to postings] is supposed to be in-house stuff in the African-American community. But my feeling is that if it's already in the media, if it's in the Spokesman or Insight, it's fair game—let elected officials see."

Shannon Gibney writes for the Minnesota Spokesman-Recorder.