

Pundit: Thurmond might have raped Essie Washington

By Hazel Trice Edney
Special to Sentinel-Voice
WASHINGTON (NNPA)

A 22-year-old Strom Thurmond having sex with his family's 16-year-old Black maid should not be seen as an "affair," as it has been widely portrayed in the media, but rape, a well-respected Black sociologist says.

"You could call this a statutory rape because this person was about 16 or so when this happened," says Julia Hare, executive director of the Black Think Tank in San Francisco. "These are the types of things that we need to look at very seriously when we look at these double standards."

Essie Mae Washington-Williams, 78, a retired school teacher who now lives in Los Angeles, decided to tell her secret in order to bring closure to the subject and finally answer persistent questions from reporters.

For years, Thurmond and his family had remained silent and, in some cases, expressed doubt about the veracity of stories accusing him of fathering a Black daughter. Just days before the daughter had called a news conference to offer evidence that Thurmond was her biological father and to say she was willing to submit to a DNA test, the family finally confirmed the validity of her



Thurmond in his 20s
Photo credit: Clemson University

claim. Washington-Williams says she had not come forward earlier because she didn't want to ruin the political career of Thurmond, who died in June at the age of 100.

Thurmond was a virulent racist who ran for president in 1948 on a pro-segregationist platform. He said at the time: "And I want to tell you, ladies and gentlemen, that there's not enough troops in the Army to force the Southern people to break down segregation and admit the nigger race into our theatres, into our swimming pools, into our homes and into our churches."

In 1957—three years after the U.S. Supreme Court outlawed segregated public schools in its famous "Brown v. the Board of Education of Topeka, Kan."—Thurmond

filibustered a civil rights bill for a record 24 hours and 18 minutes. The bill, which eventually passed, was the first civil rights legislation passed since 1875. It provided the authority for establishing a civil rights office at the Department of Justice to enforce federal anti-bias laws and to investigate complaints of civil rights violations. It also provided for voting rights enforcement and established criminal civil rights violations.

NAACP Board Chairman Julian Bond notes the contradiction between a White Southerner who considered Blacks inferior while sexually exploiting an African-American teenager in private.

"It is a story, most of all, of great personal hypocrisy," says Bond. "How a man can preach racial separatism and practice interracial sex, in defiance of the then-current laws of his state and defiance of his entire public life. You wonder if Strom Thurmond and others like him ever had any convictions about anything at all."

The variety of complexions and hair textures among Black people are everyday reminders of the slave owners who took advantage of Black women.

"We are like a rainbow," says Hare. "And we're still suffering from that because



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—Julia Hare

we bought into those light-skinned, dark-skinned issues... It took us into good hair, bad hair and can you pass the paper bag test, these types of things."

Rep. James E. Clyburn (D-S.C.) says the CBC is an example of that rainbow.

"You look at the Congressional Black Caucus," he says. "Do you think Harold Ford [D-Tenn.] is a hundred percent African-American?"

Psychiatrist Frances Cress Welsing of Washington, D.C. agrees that Thurmond was involved in more than an interracial affair.

"I think that the first thing that Black people should think about is the context in which this occurred," she says. "And that this woman,

this teenager, did not have a choice. If she wanted to protest and say, 'He was forcing me,' who would have listened to her?"

Roger Wilkins, professor of history and American culture at George Mason University in Fairfax, Va., agrees.

"People have said to me, 'Can you believe this? I say, 'How can anybody my color not believe this?'" chuckles a light-complexioned Wilkins. "This should open up a much more honest conversation about who we are. There are really two things to be said about this, that we're all a part of the same species and there are no innate differences."

Hypocrisy - the failure to match private behavior with

public utterances — also dogged Thomas Jefferson, the nation's third president.

As author of the Declaration of Independence, Jefferson extolled the virtues of liberty. Yet he owned almost 200 slaves, none of whom he freed on his deathbed. DNA tests confirm that Jefferson fathered at least one of the six children of one of his slaves, Sally Hemings.

"Jefferson was a very complicated human being. He was inconsistent on a lot of things," says Wilkins, author of "Jefferson's Pillow: The Founding Fathers and the Dilemma of Black Patriotism." He explains, "I believe he was the father of Sally Hemings' children and I think that it was sexual hypocrisy of the highest order because he at times in his life talked about the dangers of race-mixing. And yet, it's fairly clear that he was continuously involved with this woman."

Thurmond's dalliances were also well known in his home state. "Everybody knew," recalls Congressman Clyburn. "I knew it... very explicitly. It's just about as widespread as (See Thurmond, Page 15)

Newspaper: Thurmond had other black relatives living in Baltimore

By Sean Yoes
Special to Sentinel-Voice
BALTIMORE (NNPA)

After decades of silence, 78-year-old Essie Mae Washington-Williams has proclaimed to the world that she is the daughter of the late segregationist politician, Strom Thurmond.

"I am Essie Mae Washington-Williams, and at last, I feel completely free," she said during a recent press conference in Columbia, S.C.

However, the Baltimore Afro-American newspapers reported in 1948, the same year South Carolina's then-Gov. James Strom Thurmond was the presidential nominee of the segregationist Dixiecrat Party, that he had several Black relatives, including an uncle and two cousins.

The AFRO initially reported in the edition dated Aug. 17, 1948, that a man named Robert Thurmond, from Morristown, N.J., was Strom Thurmond's first

cousin. "I certainly do know Strom, and he knows me, and he knows of our relationship because we were the only Thurmonds in Edgefield [South Carolina]," stated Robert Thurmond.

Edgefield was the home of Strom Thurmond and his father, James E. "Snip" Thurmond, and, according to AFRO reporter Douglas Hall, Edgefield was the home to several other Thurmonds, many of whom were Black.

At the end of August in 1948, Hall traveled to Edgefield to find the rest of Strom Thurmond's colored clan.

In the Aug. 24, 1948, edition of the AFRO, he reported the existence of the Rev. James R. Thurmond, a half-cousin of Strom Thurmond, Eva Thurmond Smith, another cousin, and Thomas Thurmond, Strom Thurmond's uncle.

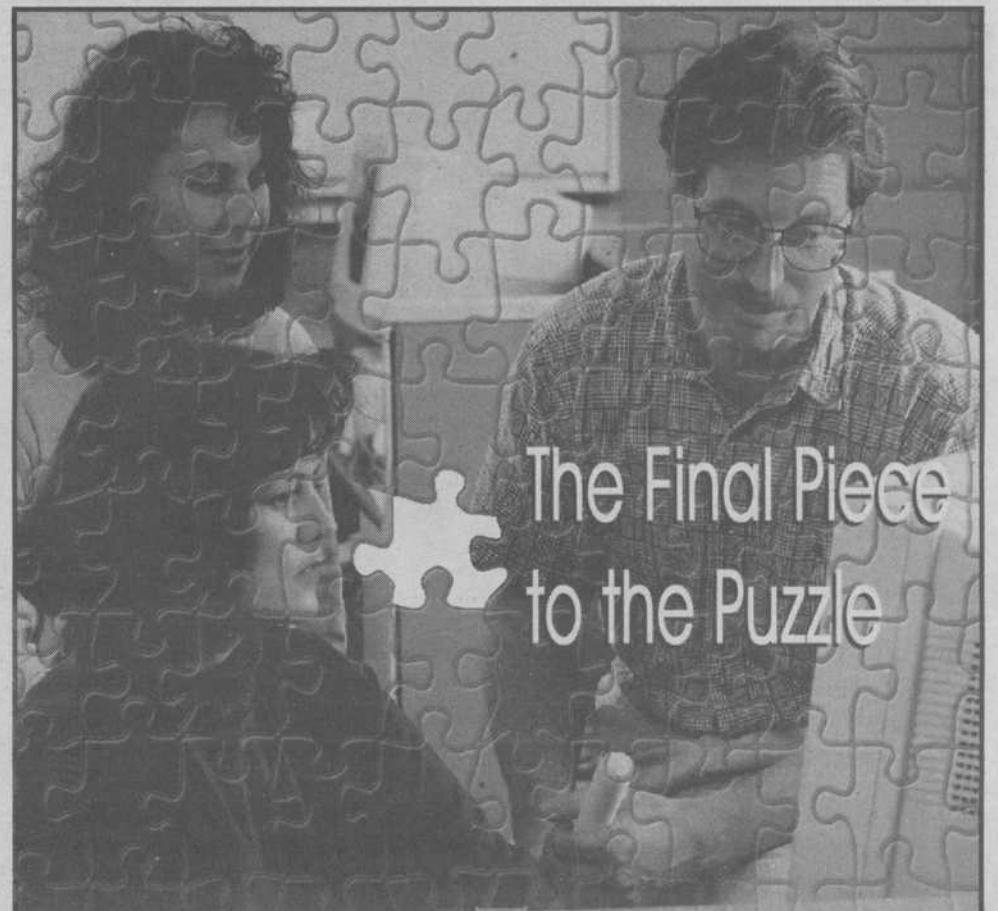
"Why, I remember well when Gov. Thurmond's fa-

ther used to visit my grandfather. I remember asking my grandfather, why did that White man always visit our home? My grandfather [Thomas Thurmond] told me that they were brothers," claimed Rev. Thurmond.

Douglas Hall reported further: "It seems like everybody up there [Edgefield, S.C.] are Thurmonds. They are of all colors. Some are so White that you cannot tell them from the original Thurmonds. The only thing that surprises Colored Thurmonds is, why is it so important that they are related to the White Thurmonds? It is an old story and 'everybody in these parts knows it.'"

In 1948, Essie Mae Washington was 23 years old and she allegedly had known about her father for seven years. The question is, did she know about her father's other Colored kin?

Sean Yoes writes for the Baltimore Afro.



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