

'Crackers' book unnerves Black parent

*By Dater Blackwell
Special to Sentinel-Voice*
GREENSBORO, N.C. (NNPA) — Charles Timber is a very concerned parent. His 11-year-old daughter brought home an order form last month to buy a book, "Jacob Summerlin: King of the Crackers," written by her school's principal and his father.

"As a Black man, my first reaction was, there has to be some kind of racism attached to this," said Timber, whose daughter Pamela is a fifth grader at St. Pius X Catholic School.

Principal J. Mark Akerman and his father, Joe Akerman, wrote "King of the Crackers." Both are historians with advanced degrees in the field.

The Florida Historical Society, published the book. The book is a biography of Jacob Summerlin who was a

Florida cattleman who supplied cattle to the Confederate Army from 1861 to 1863.

The cattlemen were called "crackers" because of the bullwhips they used to round up their cattle. The explanation doesn't sit well with Timber. He said if the word "cracker" is an acceptable term in the school, it makes him suspicious of what the faculty will teach next.

About 500 children attend St. Pius and all of them were given order forms for the book. Eight percent of the student body is Black, J. Mark Akerman said.

Timber said he was so upset he called the "Tom Joyner Morning Show" to talk about the incident, but never got through.

According to the "Dictionary of Afro-American Slang," self-published by Clarence Major in 1970, "cracker" is a colloquialism

used by Georgia slaves to refer to the slave masters and the cracking of their whips. Although the word is derogatory to some people, it has been used by White Georgians as a term of endearment, according to the dictionary.

Wyatt Kirk, chairman of the human development and services department at North Carolina A&T State University, said Timber should take his concerns to Akerman's boss, and should find out what the book is really about.

"It depends on what the book is really saying. On the surface, people don't think about who or how they say things, but to minorities we don't want to read anything about 'crackers,'" Kirk said.

Principal Mark Ackerman said he doesn't understand why the term is offensive to African-Americans. "The flyer was an advertisement

because a parent showed interest in the book. Mr. Timber had an issue with the word 'cracker,' but if you will look up the Florida Historical Society, there are about five titles that use the word 'cracker.' It has no racial connotation whatsoever," said Akerman.

He refused to comment when asked what his opinion was on parents who see the Confederate flag as a racist symbol.

Timber said more parents should speak out about what goes on in their children's lives. He added that his daughter has experienced racism in the school before she brought home the order form.

As a second grader, a classmate told her that he hated Blacks. Timber spoke to the classmate's parents. He advised them to be careful what they say around their children because it was a re-

flection on them.

The parents claimed their son learned the hatred from seeing Martin Luther King, Jr. on television during Black History Month. The boy sent the Timbers a letter of apology.

Timber also recalled picking up his daughter from school one afternoon. A group had gathered in a van for a classmate's birthday party. His daughter told him that everyone in her class was invited except her. He asked himself how he could raise his daughter to have self-esteem when she wasn't included.

Timber said his daughter attends the school because his wife is a devout Catholic from Columbia, South America. St. Pius is the school she wants her daughter to attend. Timber said his wife believes God will take care of it.

Timber contacted the Chancellor of the Diocese of Charlotte, Monsignor Mauricio West.

"Objections to the title and content of the book have been noted," said West, who is Black.

Timber's 16-year-old son, who no longer attends the school, also experienced racism. His son's classmate told him he could not attend a party because he was Black. Timber went to the school to discuss it.

He said the teacher literally cried and said, "Mr. Timber, I don't know what to say."

Timber suggested an open dialogue with the children and parents about race. He explained, "My daughter has a hard time making friends because of what she is, not who she is."

Dater Blackwell writes for the Carolina Peacemaker.

Mother of slain teenager files claim against city of LA

*By Gene Johnson Jr.
Special to Sentinel-Voice*
LOS ANGELES (NNPA) Black The mother of 13-year-old Devin Brown, who was shot and killed by an LAPD officer recently, has filed a claim against the city seeking unspecified damages and more police reforms, her attorney announced.

Brown was shot at around 4:00 a.m., Feb. 6, near the corner of 83rd Street and Western Avenue. Police said the boy was behind the wheel

of a stolen 1992 Toyota Camry and was backing the car into a police cruiser when Officer Steven Garcia fired 10 shots at the vehicle.

At a press conference held at Bethel A.M.E. Church, where Brown's funeral was held a week earlier, an attorney representing the family said that Brown posed no threat to officers and, therefore, should not have been killed.

However, because of the negligence on behalf of the

officers involved, and the inadequate training they received by the LAPD, Brown's life was cut short, causing Evelyn Davis, Brown's mother, and the rest of her family to suffer lifelong injuries "to their minds and bodies" from "being deprived of the love, comfort and society of a son... and close family member, in addition to severe emotional distress and civil rights violations," the claim states.

Davis is being represented by the firm of famed civil rights attorney Johnnie L. Cochran. Attorney Brian Dunn will serve as lead counsel.

When contacted, a spokesman with the city attorney's office said the city had not yet received the claim. They have 45 days to respond. If the city chooses not to issue an answer before the deadline, the matter will be rejected and Brown's family can then move forward with a lawsuit, a spokesman with the city attorney said.

"This is the aftermath of one of the worst cases of police abuse that our city has ever seen," Dunn said. "We are dealing with a culture of violence within law enforcement which has struck at an unprecedented level. This particular case has struck at the very heart of this community by taking the life of a child, all because of the outdated policies of the LAPD and the negligent tactics of

the officers in question.

"We are here today with the simple reason that the life of Devin Brown is going to stand for the proposition that this must never happen again. I stand here with the family of Devin Brown to state that this young man did not die in vain."

Brown's mother, who fought to hold back tears, refused to comment during the press conference, where she was supported by family, clergy and community activists who all claimed a small victory several weeks ago when the Police Commission approved a change in LAPD policy regarding shooting into moving vehicles.

That policy change was being considered for nearly a year before Brown's death and was approved recently because of the pressure applied by the Black community. Dunn said if LAPD Chief William Bratton would have acted sooner, Brown's death may have been avoided.

Attorneys for the Brown family expect to file a lawsuit by April because they do not feel the city will be willing to offer the family the kind of justice they are seeking.

"This is not about money," Dunn said. What the family wants are reforms that have a dramatic affect, Dunn said, much like those enacted in the Riverside Police Department after the officer-involved shooting death of Taisha Miller. Dunn repre-

sented Miller's family in that case.

Melanie Lomax, a former police commissioner and seasoned civil rights attorney, said the Brown family definitely has a case that could cost the city millions even if it never goes to trial. "This is a perfect wrongful death case because of the number of shots fired into the car, the lack of visibility on part of the officers, the fact that the child was not armed, and the ability of the officers to move away from harm," she said.

"You can't really claim that you needed to use deadly force if you didn't make an attempt to move out of the way of the vehicle. When it comes to these execution-type killings and the hostile atmosphere in the community, we are talking about a multimillion dollar case with the city winding up having to pay."

Lomax said Brown's age and lack of a criminal record will definitely affect prospective jurors, that is, if a lawsuit is filed and goes to trial, something that is rare in these cases.

"Chief Bratton will want to defend his officers," she said. "But what the city usually does is right before trial they'll try to settle because they know a jury can go beyond a simple settlement and award \$20 million, so this makes much more sense to settle it early in litigation."

The fact that there is no videotape of the shooting, as in the case of other high-profile incidents involving alleged use of excessive force, may work in the favor of the Brown family, Lomax said. This way, jurors will not be tainted by visuals and will instead have to meticulously go over the facts of the case to reconstruct the scene.

(See Lawsuit, Page 12)



Sentinel-Voice photo by Isaac Sawyer

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

Morning radio personality Galaxy Glenn of KCEP-FM 88 is joined by Michelle Beasley as they enjoy the food provided by the Las Vegas Alliance of Black Culinary during the annual Grazer. The fundraising event for scholarships highlights local Black chefs from various hotel properties demonstrating their culinary skills.

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