

LAS VEGAS Sentinel Voice

VOLUME 24, ISSUE 15

GRIOT COMMUNICATIONS GROUP, INC.

March 10, 2005

"THE TRUTH SHALL SET YOU FREE"



Death row guard James Ludwig stands outside a death row cell in Livingston, Texas, in this Nov. 21, 2001, file photo. Texas currently has 29 juveniles on death row according to the Death Penalty Information Center.

High Court ruling encourages death row abolitionists

By Hazel Trice Edney
Special to Sentinel-Voice

WASHINGTON (NNPA) - In 1988, the U. S. Supreme Court left it up to states whether 16- and 17-year-olds could be given the death penalty. But last week, the court reversed itself in a 5-4 decision that nullifies death sentences given to offenders who committed capital crimes while under the age of 18. The fact that the justices reversed themselves heartened death penalty opponents who hope that the court will eventually examine the role race plays in capital murder cases, whether it's the suspect or the victim.

"They didn't base this decision at all on race; they didn't add up the number of minorities or anything like that, but that's who it was disproportionately affecting," says Richard C. Dieter, executive director of the Death Penalty Information Center. "So, I think the bigger issue on race is that the Supreme Court is, I think, saying that the door is still open for reconsidering things that it's decided in the past."

According to the center, there were 29 Blacks, 26 Whites, 16 Latinos and one Asian among juvenile offenders on death row when the court ruled in the Missouri first-degree murder case, *Roper v. Simmons*, that the execution of juveniles is cruel and unusual punishment. Two-thirds of the youth offenders are people of color whose lives have now been spared. The court said the ruling was also because of growing international sentiments against the execution of juveniles. In the world community, the U. S. stands alone in sanctioning the death of juvenile offenders.

Blacks making up only 12 percent of the nation's population but 42 percent of death row (1,444). By contrast, Whites constitute 71 percent of the U.S. population but only 46 percent (1,576) of death row inmates.

In the Missouri case, the defendant, Christopher Simmons, now 27, was 17 when he murdered a woman who recognized him when he and a 15-year-old compan-

(See Death Row, Page 14)

Bias alleged in school district

By Lés Pierres Streater
Sentinel-Voice

A small, but vocal, group of community activists from WAAK-UP (Westside Action Alliance Korps-Uplifting People) gathered at the Mount Sinai Missionary Baptist Church to protest the actions of the Clark County School District to restrict the showing of a play during Black History Month. The play "Black Kaleidoscope" was written to depict the life of African-Americans from Slavery to the present.

Many individuals, including former State Senator Joe Neal; Pastors T. K. Rogers, Gary Hunter, and Marion Bennett; Minister Duke Muhammad; and Marzette Lewis, founder of WAAK-UP, and others spoke about the fact that the play wasn't as controversial as others would have the public believe. Instead, the play sheds a lot of historical information about the lives of Black people surviving in Slavery and beyond, according to the speakers.

Ron Turner, the creator of



"We want to see this play go on by any means necessary. We want Mr. Ron Turner to be returned to his post at Canyon Springs as an educator."

— Marzette Lewis
President of WAAK-UP

the play and a former school employee who taught at Canyon Springs High School in North Las Vegas near Alexander and Martin Luther King Blvd, also spoke about his transfer away from the school and actions taken to prevent the play from being performed.

Sharing his perspective regarding the uproar over the play, Turner stated: "When I actually presented the play [to the administration], I had a note on it, a sticker which stated if you need to modify it, please let me know. I don't see a problem with having a play when you can make any

modifications that you choose to, if the writer agrees, unless you are a hater of Black people or Black history. It's really sad to say that in 2005 we're experiencing problems during February every time Black history comes around. We don't have these problems any other time of the year when other holidays are celebrated."

Commenting on the fact that he has been reassigned to another facility, Turner said, "I would like to be placed back in my position at Canyon Springs High School. I would also like to see more Black counselors, Black De-

partment Chairs, Black Head Coaches, other Black representatives and Hispanic representatives, and a Black Principal at the school who would not give in to politics or financial rewards."

Concluding his remarks about the status of the play, Turner indicated, "They (school administrators) haven't shared anything with me. They just said that Dr. Matthew (the newly assigned principal) has carte blanche, and he will determine if the play will go on. It shouldn't be his right to decide if the play will go on — it should go on. He, (Matthew) said it (the play) wasn't historical, so apparently he doesn't understand the history and struggle of African-Americans."

"The only objections that they have to the play, is its reference to (the words) 'niggers,' the 'KKK' and 'wench.' These terms are in the text books and documentaries all over, so no one should be objecting to the airing of something that has

(See WAAK-UP, Page 6)

Civil rights figures mark Selma march

SELMA, Ala. (AP) - Aging civil rights-era figures and a bipartisan congressional delegation walked across an Alabama bridge with a throng of thousands Sunday to commemorate the 40th anniversary of the Selma voting rights marches that opened ballot boxes to Blacks across the South.

Among those participating was Coretta Scott King, whose husband, the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr., led a 1965 march to the state Capitol after participants in an earlier march were turned back by law enforcement.

"The freedom we won here in Selma and on the road to Montgomery was purchased with the precious blood of many," said King, who crossed the Edmund Pettus Bridge in a car.

Police estimated the crowd at nearly 10,000.

Others on hand to commemorate the marches across

the bridge included singer Harry Belafonte, who also took part in the demonstration 40 years ago, the Rev. Jesse Jackson, Senate Major-

ity Leader Bill Frist, and Lynda Johnson Robb, whose father, President Lyndon Johnson, signed the Voting Rights Act into law in 1965.

"President Johnson signed that act, but it was written by the people of Selma," said Rep. John Lewis, D-Ga., who

(See March, Page 2)



James Armstrong stands on the Edmund Pettus Bridge in Selma, Ala., Sunday, holding the U.S. flag and waiting for marchers to make their crossing. Armstrong was one of the original marchers 40 years ago and has carried the flag in every year's anniversary observance of the historic Selma voting rights march. This year's march was well attended.