

C O M M E N T A R Y

Atlanta murders: Not guilty by association

By George E. Curry
Special to Sentinel-Voice

When news broke that a prisoner awaiting trial on rape charges in Atlanta had overpowered a sheriff's deputy, taken her gun and entered a courtroom where he fatally shot the judge presiding over his case, the court stenographer and, later, two others, many African-Americans thought:

I hope it's not a brother.

That was the same reaction when it was learned in 2002 that two suspects — John Allen Muhammad and Lee Boyd Malvo — had been captured after a Washington, D.C.-area killing spree that left 10 people dead and three wounded. And it was the reaction just three weeks ago when a convicted man shot the husband and mother of a federal judge in Chicago.

This time, rather than just examining what propels certain people to go on violent rages, we should ask ourselves another question: Why do we think it is a collective fault when some confused African-American goes berserk? Why and how does that reflect on all of us?

Intellectually, we know this is nonsense. Still, when Blacks are thrust into the national limelight in a negative fashion, there is the frequently heard refrain: "Why did he have to be a brother?"

This wasn't a brother; evidently, he was a

violent criminal.

Brian Nichols, the suspect in the Atlanta case, was accused of holding his former girlfriend hostage for two days in her home because she was dating someone else, according to a spokesman for the Sheriff's office.

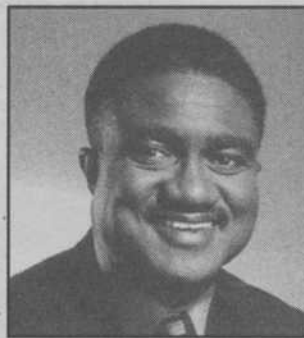
He allegedly bound her with duct tape and sexually assaulted her.

Inside the 8th-floor courtroom at the Fulton County Courthouse, prosecutors were preparing to cross-examine Nichols in connection with that case.

At the time, he was being moved from a basement holdover cell to a small room on the 8th floor where he could change into regular clothing and enter the courtroom without handcuffs or prison garb so as to not prejudice the jurors against him. Nichols, it is alleged, took that opportunity to kill Judge Rowland W. Barnes and Julie Ann Brandau, the court stenographer.

He is said to have descended to the first floor and murdered Deputy Hoyt Teasley during his escape.

After terrorizing Atlanta for more than 24 hours, Nichols surrendered peacefully after being surrounded by a heavily-armed SWAT team.



GEORGE CURRY

Telephone lines and the Internet were overheated during the weekend. And everyone was asking the question that remained: Why did it have to be a brother?

In many ways, it is an unfair question. Why should the African-American community feel shame because a person of the same race did something heinous?

At the root of that question is concern over how others, especially Whites, perceive African-Americans. Historically, there are many reasons for that concern. However, we should be at the point in our growth that we should care more about how we perceive ourselves than how others look at us.

Let's flip the script. When Ken Chenault became CEO of American Express, I didn't hear any Whites say, "Those Black people sure know how to run major credit card companies."

Similarly, when Stan O'Neil was elevated to CEO of Merrill Lynch & Co., I didn't hear Whites saying that if an African-American can run an investment firm, they can do so many other tasks previously denied them.

If Whites don't look at successful African-Americans and then generalize from that, we shouldn't allow them to look at some of

the worst elements in our community and somehow extrapolate that they typify Blacks.

It's untenable to accept the flawed notion that the D.C. snipers or Brian Nichols in Atlanta reflect poorly on Black people unless you're willing to say the likes of Jeffrey Dahmer, John Wayne Gacy, Ted Bundy, Charles Manson and Timothy McVeigh reflect negatively on all White people.

This is a tricky game, a game that we should not play, a game we should avoid. Yet, we play it.

I participated in the Region 7 conference of the National Association of Black Journalists over the weekend in New Orleans and my NABJ colleagues said they are still fielding questions about Jayson Blair, the serial liar who was once at the *New York Times*.

Yet, White journalists aren't getting questioned about the ethical transgression of Jack Kelley, the *USA Today's* White version of Jayson Blair.

Rather than being even-handed, these idiotic generalizations pop up every time something bad happens, such as the murders in Atlanta.

When the acts of Jeffrey Dahmer reflect poorly on all Whites, then and only then should the antics of Brian Nichols in Atlanta reflect negatively on all African-Americans.

George E. Curry is editor of *NNPA News Service* and *BlackPressUSA.com*.

Need spiritual healing? Just throw a music festival

By James Clingman
Special to Sentinel-Voice

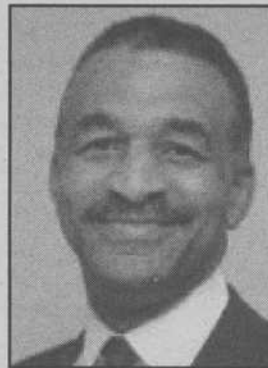
What a breakthrough! What an awesome elixir! This discovery could be the greatest thing since Jesus healed the lepers! That's right, a healing is about to take place this summer in Cincinnati, the city some have called "ground zero" for economic discrimination and police brutality against Black people. How will the city be healed? With a music festival, the same one we've had in this city for nearly 40 years. Of course, it must not have had the power to heal during its four decade reign, but now, it's back, fresh from its hiatus, which was caused by the boycott that still exists. It's back and it's ready to perform a miraculous healing before our very eyes.

And to whom does Cincinnati owe this healing? Joe Santangelo, from the family that has owned the festival for many years, and John Pace, a Black man who made the heal-

ing prophecy and was quoted in our local newspaper. This dynamic duo will bring the festival back to Cincinnati in August 2005, the boycott of downtown Cincinnati notwithstanding. They are coming to heal us. Wow! I can't wait!

Of course, no healing worth its salt would be without its corporate sponsors and its group of endorsers and sycophants. Black folks are excited again; they're ready to start spending their hard-earned money on new healing outfits. Cincinnati is alive again, folks, 'cause we gonna have a healing throw-down, y'all!

The healing fest will occur on the same weekend as the annual Black Family Reunion, brought to us by Procter and Gamble, of course, and even though Santangelo says, "pairing the two events initially was acciden-



JAMES CLINGMAN

tal," thank God for "accidents," huh?

I guess Uncle Joe, his sidekick, John Pace, and a few other Black Cincinnati sellouts, figured that since a whole lot of Black people will be at the Reunion they may as well extend their healing powers to as many of us as possible. What compassion! What caring! What concern they obviously have for the downtrodden Blacks that reside

in Cincinnati!

Oh yeah, perennial favorites and miracle-workers of the past, Patti LaBelle, and Joe Santangelo's old stand-by, Frankie Beverly —back for—the umpteenth time —will be the healing headliners. I am sure, just as Dick Gregory and Bev Smith "didn't know" about the boycott of Cincinnati, and didn't know about Nathaniel Jones and Roger Owensby

being killed, Pattie and Frankie must not know either, but I guess they are being paid well not to know.

And to think they will be performing their healing ceremony in the very stadium that caused much of the economic apartheid in this city. This is almost too good to be true. Martin Scorsese would have received an Oscar if he had written this script. Maybe, after the healing takes place, someone will do a documentary on what happened, and shop it to other cities that need healing.

Hey Chicago! You need some healing. How about you, Los Angeles, you could certainly use some. Detroit, you're in big trouble; you'd better get some of this. C'mon, New York, make Diallo proud; get healed. Columbus, Georgia, could use some, too. And, how about New Orleans? Oops! My bad. You already have your music festival, don't you?

I guess all I can say is, "It's about time." It's about time the Cincinnati music festival did something more than put millions of dollars into the pockets of people who mistreat Black folks. It's about time the festival did something other than pass out a few free tickets to Black folks. It's about time the festival did more than just provide wealth to the Santangelo family and income to a few Black folks. It's about time Black patrons of the festival get more to look forward to than a downtown that does not want them there anyway; a downtown whose businesses, just a few years ago, said in a survey that they didn't want "those people" in their stores; a downtown where a manager of one of its major hotels wrote a memo describing his fear of Black festival goers stealing their "ashtrays and salt shakers," and a downtown in which many restaurants closed during the

(See Clingman, Page 12)

La Grande

(Continued from Page 10)

was with their staff representation: there were White men, Hispanic men and White women at the meeting, not one Black. But more importantly, if they were serious, they don't even have to reinvent the wheel. Mr. Hawkins left them with the most comprehensive plan for inclusiveness that the City of Las Vegas has ever seen. Someone just has to have the guts to stand up and say it's the right thing to do — and —do it.

All of the municipalities should be ashamed of themselves as it relates to their procurement numbers with minorities. They need to stop using the bidding process as an excuse, and tell the truth: they have some discretionary dollars that they can use to make their numbers go up; and they do have some flex-

ibility to step outside of the box; but, silly me, that would require thinking outside of the box.

As I close, I am hard-pressed to find any elected official, organization or group that has a passion for or is willing to go against the grain to unconditionally represent the interests of Black folks. We allow the elected officials (Black and White) to take us for granted. We don't hold anyone accountable. And most of our organizations are bought, owned, or bamboozled, and they aim to please —just not each other. They're just going along to get along.

I question whether our elected officials are prepared to deal with the concerns and issues that affect African-Americans or if they are elected to be elected or if they are

elected to serve. The one thing that every African-American in a leadership position needs to realize is that God put them there to look out for the best interest of their people, and it is scriptural.

Esther 10:3 states that Mordecai, the Jew (who had originally been targeted to be killed because he was a Jew in a strange land), was promoted to second in command in a foreign country and was great among the Jews, accepted of the multitude of his brethren seeking the "wealth of his people."

Leaders rise up and live out your true calling; be blessed; seek the wealth and advancement of your people. The word of God says that those who are greatest in the kingdom of heaven are those "who serve," not those who pretend to serve."