

Riot survivors take case to court

By *Abdur-Rahman Muhammad*
Special to Sentinel-Voice

WASHINGTON (NNPA) — Braving frigid temperatures earlier this month, five survivors of the 1921 Tulsa "race riot," in which a White mob burned and looted their community, took to the steps of the Supreme Court to bring national attention to their case for reparations.

"The Tulsa race riot was one of the greatest travesties in our country's history, but very few people know about it," said the group's lead attorney, Charles Ogletree, a professor of law at Harvard University.

A lawsuit was filed against Oklahoma and the city of Tulsa for failing to enact the recommendation of a state commission that reparations be paid to the community, the living survivors and their descendants.

The venerable residents of Tulsa, whose Greenwood community was once known as "the Black Wall Street," have petitioned the court to review decisions by a federal district court and the 10th

Circuit Court of Appeals last year that dismissed their lawsuit on the grounds that a two-year statute of limitation had long ago expired. Conceding the intense racial hostility of the period that precluded any legal action at the time, the courts, nevertheless, decided that 80 years was simply too long ago for them to grant relief.

In March 2004, U.S. District Court Judge James O. Ellison acknowledged that African-Americans were deserving of a delay in the statute of limitations. But even then, he fixed the 1960s as the cut off point. The appeals court, which affirmed the lower court's ruling, maintained the suit should have been brought no later than the 1980s. Lawyers for the survivors say that it was not until the release of an important commission report in February 2001 that the facts of the case could be established and, thus, the clock should have begun ticking at that point.

Selena Mendy Singleton, executive vice president of the TransAfrica Forum, said,

"The Supreme Court must rule in favor of these victims. The people of Rosewood, Fla., got reparations; the victims of the Holocaust got reparations; and the Japanese victims of the American internment in the 1940s were paid reparations. The people of Tulsa are due."

In addition to the five survivors, accompanying Ogletree to the nation's capital was a cadre of law students from both Howard and Harvard universities, who also lent support to the effort. Later in the afternoon, Ogletree had the opportunity to highlight the importance of the case and to discuss the rich history of Tulsa's Black community. During a lecture at Howard University, Ogletree said that before the riot of 1921, "this [Greenwood] was a place where the dollar circulated 35 times. It was a community that was self-sufficient... a 22-square-block Black Metropolis." He also said, "...from 1921 until 2001 Blacks were blamed for the riot." The Tulsa Race Riot Commission report in 2001 finally corrected the

record, laying the foundation for this landmark lawsuit.

On May 31, 1921, a White mob in the Greenwood section of Tulsa gathered to exact retribution on the Black community for its defense of Dick Rowland, an African-American rumored to have "raped a White woman." In actuality, he accidentally stepped on her foot while exiting an elevator. The rape accusation was merely a pretext to punish the Black community for its prosperity and business success —and, according to some historians, to seize its land. At 5:08 a.m., the mob set out on a rampage of murder and destruction, savagely torching every building in Greenwood, leaving the Black Wall Street in a smoldering ruin. "One hundred fifty drunken Whites were deputized" by city officials, Ogletree said, with the mandate to "go get those Niggers." Estimates have varied as to the exact number of casualties; at least 300 people are known to have perished, but some believe the number is as high as 3,000.

(See *Riot*, Page 15)

Austin, Texas experiences burning bias

By *Akwasi Evans*
Special to Sentinel-Voice

AUSTIN, Texas (NNPA) — Midtown Live was the most prominent African-American nightclub in Austin, Texas. African-American professionals from across the spectrum often dropped in at 7408 Cameron Road to unwind and share conversation with friends and colleagues. That camaraderie ended on February 18, around 7 p.m. when the club burned to the ground.

That catastrophe for the Cash family brought glee to some of the Austin police officers at the scene, as well as some of their dispatchers down at headquarters. Local television camera showed the words "Burn, Baby Burn" flashing across the screen of one of the patrol cars in the parking lot where Midtown was located.

As word spread, many in Austin's Black community became enraged. It wasn't just that one message, but a myriad of messages from dispatchers and officers expressing joy over the demise of the nightclub.

Officer John Lengfeld sent the "Burn Baby, Burn" message first, and Josue Martinez agreed saying, 'those were my exact thoughts.' Shane Duprey

sang, "The roof, the roof, the roof is on fire." Dispatcher Susan Negron said, "I've got some extra gasoline if they need it." Negron said she "hates the place. They can't read or write."

"My night is made. I just had a lady ask me if it was burning. I said, 'yep.' She was upset. I was enthralled," said officer William White. White also was quoted as having said, "John confirms Midtown is burning. There is a God."

Steven Krippner thought it was "Fun Stuff." He said the patrons of the club where "always shottin' or stabin' each other in this little area," adding, "at least midtown is no longer an issue and 600s should be out soon."

Under heavy pressure from the Black police officers association (Texas Peace Officers Association TPOA), Chief Stan Knee issued the harshest punishment possible to six officers and four dispatchers involved in the incident. Knee apologized to the club owners Mike Cash and his mother Selena Cash.

Knee suspended Lengfeld and White for 15 days without pay for using the computers in their patrol vehicles improperly. Knippner was suspended for

eight days, Dupre for five and Martinez three. One unidentified officer was reprimanded. Dispatchers Susan Negron was suspended for 15 days. Two of her colleagues, Robert Uribe and Erica Coffman, were suspended for three days and Tamera Mojica was given a written reprimand.

Nelson Linder, president of the local NAACP said the officer's conduct was not an isolated incident. Many White police officers are angry at the recent loss of a female officer in a accident in East Austin. Officer Amy Donovan's partner hit her with the patrol car while trying to apprehend a young Black man accused of smoking marijuana. At one point the police tried to charge the man with the death of the officer because he ran from them.

Linder said the officer's behavior regarding the fire is a reflection of their attitude toward Black people. "There is a lack of respect and regard for our community," by many of these officers, Linder stated. He said part of the problem is there is "no real accountability" when rogue officers are callous toward people of color.

This incident was not

about Midtown, it was just another incident in a long line of abuses by Austin police toward Black people," Linder stated.

The Black-White divide on police conduct toward African-Americans in Austin was clearly reflected on local talk radio. On the most prominent conservative radio station callers where heard making angry comments like, "The cops were just doing their jobs, who cares what they said. They have a right to say whatever they want, as long as they do their job, and they did their job."

Meanwhile, on a Black community radio program (KAZI-FM's Breakfast Club) one commentator, Tommy Wyatt, publisher of the *Villager* Newspaper, said that police in East Austin often show a lack of sensitivity toward Blacks, but that the disciplinary action taken by Knee was appropriate for the occasion.

The Cash family does plan to rebuild the club and they say they have no animosity toward the officers. Meanwhile, relations between Austin police and the Black community has both sides hot beneath the collar.

Akwasi Evans writes for NOKOA

Jackson judge bars computer material

SANTA MARIA, Calif. (AP)—Prosecutors presented the jury in Michael Jackson's child molestation trial Wednesday with an avalanche of sexually explicit magazines and videos seized from his home, but lost a bid to include adult material from Internet sites found on the pop star's computers.

Superior Court Judge Rodney Melville said he examined the computer material, and agreed with the defense it may have been automatically stored by the computers and "there wouldn't be any way of knowing if anyone looked at the material or not."

The judge also agreed the material did not appear related to the time period of the alleged crimes.

The ruling came as District Attorney Tom Sneddon put into evidence hundreds of adult magazines, DVDs and photos, but none involving children or bearing DNA from Jackson's accuser or the boy's family.

In arguing for the computer evidence, the prosecution said technicians isolated material on three computers at Jackson's Neverland ranch that included teen-themed adult Web sites and information about adopting children.

Prosecutor Gordon Auchincloss said he felt the adoption sites related to Jackson's statements in a documentary that he was interested in adopting children.

"We intend to use this evidence to show ... Michael Jackson knows how to use a computer ... that he knows how to access adult materials on Internet sites," he said.

Defense attorney Robert Sanger called the material prejudicial and noted all of it was dated either two years before Jackson met his accuser or several months after his involvement with the child and his family had ended.

Jackson, 46, is accused of molesting a 13-year-old cancer patient at Neverland in February or March 2003. He also is accused of conspiring to hold the boy's family captive to get them to make a video rebutting the 2003 documentary in which he appeared with the boy and said he let children sleep in his bed, though it was innocent and non-sexual.

Sanger said there was no proof Jackson was the person who accessed the Web sites and suggested much of the material was "cached," or automatically saved by the computers, from material that popped up in e-mail when others used the computers.

The judge noted testimony from the young accuser and his brother was not that Jackson operated a computer

(See *Jackson*, Page 13)



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