

'Black Wall Street' victims seek justice

By Hazel Trice Edney
Special to Sentinel-Voice

WASHINGTON (NNPA) - Nine-year-old Hazel Franklin was awakened from her sleep by the sound of her father's loud voice around 5:30 a.m. June 1, 1921.

"He told my mother, 'We've got to go.' He said, 'We've got to get out now. They're burning up the town.'"

For a moment, her father, Jackson W. Franklin, tried to convince her mother, Frances, to take the children and leave as he stayed to defend the family home with a pistol.

"But she stood her ground, 'If you don't go, we don't go.'"

Within minutes, the Franklin family, three children and their parents, with nothing more than a change of clothing in a sack, fled their Tulsa home, which was later destroyed by an angry White mob.

What has been called the worst riot in American history was triggered by an accident. Dick Rowland, a 19-year-old African-American, accidentally stepped on the foot of Sarah Page, a White elevator operator in a downtown Tulsa office building. She attempted to hit Rowland with her purse, and he quickly fled.

After being told by Page that the young man attempted to assault her—a story that was later changed to his having grabbed her—police arrested Rowland.

Word (malicious rumor) spread among Whites that



The Mount Zion Baptist Church, dedicated only two weeks earlier, was burned to the ground by White rioters. Mount Zion was one of at least seven churches that were burned.

Rowland had attempted to rape Page and more than 400 Whites intent on lynching the Black teenager gathered at the county jail. Meanwhile, two waves of armed Blacks showed up at the jail, offering to help protect the prisoner. The second wave of Blacks, like the first, was told their services were not needed. As they began to depart, a White man, possibly a deputy, attempted to disarm one of the African-Americans and a shot was fired. Other shots followed, leaving more than a dozen dead.

Within hours, mobs of Whites converged upon the Black residents of Tulsa's Greenwood Avenue district, a 40-block showcase of Black businesses and homes, known as the Black Wall Street. The governor activated the Oklahoma National Guard and two companies of soldiers from nearby Fort Sill were called to duty.

Machine guns were used to shoot any Black person in sight; airplanes dropped nitroglycerin on the neighborhood. When it was over, 16 hours later, at least 300 Blacks were dead, 1,503 residences had been destroyed and more than 600 businesses had been closed, including two Black newspapers, the *Tulsa Star* and the *Oklahoma Sun*.

Now, more than eight decades later, victims of the White riot are still seeking justice. A Supreme Court ruling on Tuesday means they will have an even longer wait.

Without comment, the court upheld lower court rulings that the statute of limitation had expired to file claims in the case.

"The justice system has once again denied the survivors of the 1921 Tulsa Race Riots what they so richly deserve — after 84 years of

concealment and suppression of evidence: their day in court," says Harvard Law Professor Charles Ogletree, one of the attorneys for the victims. "We will continue this fight in every venue imaginable," he added.

In addition to the court defeats, more than 100 insurance claims and lawsuits have been filed seeking damages, but not one has been successful.

Although they have faced legal setbacks, survivors (See *Tulsa*, Page 4)

Flawed data hinders death penalty study

COLUMBUS, Ohio (AP) - While state law requires the collection of data about Ohio's capital punishment system, the records are incomplete and often wrong, according to a review by The Associated Press. The result is information that makes analysis of that system difficult, countering a goal of lawmakers who hoped to use the data to make the system as fair as possible.

"You can't mix apples and oranges and expect to get some sort of conclusion," said State Public Defender David Bodiker.

Ohio Supreme Court files contain documents relating to 2,543 capital indictments submitted by county clerks from 1981 through 2002.

But a two-year study by the AP found that more than 600 of those were not for death penalty cases, and that at least 18 capital indictments were not reported to the court.

In the 1,936 capital indictments reviewed by the AP, defendants were more than twice as likely to receive a death sentence for killing a White victim than for killing a Black victim. The study also found discrepancies in death sentences based on the county where the crime was committed.

Nearly half the capital punishment cases ended with a plea bargain.

In sending records for non-death penalty cases to the Supreme Court, clerks were likely playing it safe, said Mark Lime, director of the Cuyahoga County Clerk's criminal division.

"It's always safer to send paperwork and let them discard it or throw it out," Lime said. He added the burden of accuracy should be on the Supreme Court to ensure its figures are accurate.

Chief Justice Thomas Moyer said he wasn't aware of the wrongly filed reports and hasn't decided whether the reporting requirement should be changed.

Emmett Till's family dispute settled

By Herb Boyd and
Tanangachi Mfuni
Special to Sentinel-Voice

NEW YORK (NNPA) - A disagreement among relatives over the handling of remains of Emmett Till that had the potential of developing into an embarrassing feud has been resolved, according to a family member.

At issue was whether to exhume the body of Till, who, at the age of 14, was murdered in Mississippi and dumped in the Tallahatchie River. Some family members supported efforts to exhume the body, while others were adamant that it was unnecessary.

"We have resolved the dispute," said Simeon Wright, Till's cousin who was with the slain youth that fateful night in Money, Miss.,

when Till was taken from his bed and murdered. Wright said that Bertha Thomas, a fourth cousin of Mamie Till Mobley, Emmett's mother, who died three years ago, has changed her position and will no longer block efforts to exhume Till's body.

Thomas, who runs the Emmett Till Foundation, could not be reached for comment. For weeks, she, along with Jesse L. Jackson Sr., have been two of the strongest critics of efforts to exhume Till's body, saying that Till's mother did not favor the procedure.

The two sides of Till's family had squared off over the planned exhumation. Till, who was killed by at least two White men, according to a documentary made by Brooklyn filmmaker Keith

Beauchamp, never received an autopsy.

Spurred by Beauchamp's documentary about Till's murder, the Justice Department decided to reopen the 1955 case. U.S. Senator Charles Schumer and Rev. Al Sharpton are among the many voices who have called for an investigation into the murder.

Till was abducted from the home of his Uncle Moses Wright by Roy Bryant and his half brother J.W. Milam after they learned that Till had whistled at Bryant's wife three days earlier. The youngster's battered and disfigured body was found three days later in the Tallahatchie River with a 75-pound cotton gin strung around his neck with barbed wire. His

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