

# Mississippi still hotbed of racial animosities

By George E. Curry  
Special to Sentinel-Voice

With the conclusion this week of the trial of an 80-year-old White supremacist in Philadelphia, Miss., state prosecutors have probably tried the last person connected with the 1964 abduction and murder of civil rights workers James Chaney, Andrew Goodman and Michael Schwerner. The trio's deaths were the basis for the movie, "Mississippi Burning." Although there has been significant progress made since 1964, Mississippi is still burning with injustice.

The defendant, Edgar Ray Killen is a perfect example of justice delayed. Neither of the slain civil rights workers had reached his 25th birthday, yet Killen, an unrepentant racist and member of the Ku Klux Klan, has been allowed to walk free for 41 years. Now, with one foot in the grave, he has been finally brought to justice.

In an argument that strains credulity, Killen's lawyer suggested that we should let bygones be bygones.

"This is a sad day for the state of Mississippi, after 40 years of moving forward, going back and opening up an old crime like this," said Attorney James McIntyre. "The state of Mississippi needs to be going forward, not backwards." Murdering three innocent young men — two Whites from New

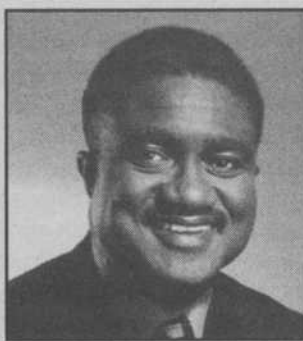
York and one native-born Black — interested in registering African-Americans to vote is about as backwards as one can get. Mississippi can never go forward until it deals with its blood-soaked past.

We need to go back in order to understand what put Killen, a self-described minister, in his present predicament.

On July 21, 1964, Chaney, 21, Goodman, 20, and Schwerner, 24, went to Neshoba County to inspect the Mount Zion United Methodist Church, a Black church that had been burned the previous week by the KKK. The vehicle, driven by Schwerner, was pulled over around 3:30 p.m. for allegedly speeding by Cecil R. Price, a deputy sheriff whom witnesses described as a member of the Klan. The civil rights workers were taken to the Philadelphia jail and retained until 10:30 p.m.

Local Klansmen were rounded up while they were in custody. When the civil rights workers were released, they were trailed by two carloads of KKK members, driven off the road, shot at close range and buried in an earthen dam. Their bodies weren't discovered until 44 days later.

In 1967, federal charges were filed for



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conspiring to deprive the three young men of their civil rights. Seven men were convicted, serving sentences ranging from three to 10 years, and seven others were set free, including Killen. The jury had voted 11-1 to convict Killen but a lone holdout blocked the verdict, saying she could not vote to convict a minister.

Mississippi decided to bring murder charges against Killen after Sam Bowers, former imperial wizard of the Mississippi Knights of the Ku Klux Klan, boasted that Killen, the ringleader of the murders, had escaped punishment. During the course of the investigation, Mississippi prosecutors interviewed former Klansmen who stated that Killen, leader of a Klan chapter in nearby Meridian, had orchestrated the attack on the civil rights workers. Combative to the end, Killen was escorted to court by two men who identified themselves as members of the KKK.

Killen's trial was the latest in a series of long-overdue legal proceedings that involve bringing murderers to court. Justice is finally being served because of a combination of the victims' families' life-long campaigns for

justice and young White prosecutors — many of whom were kids at the time of the original crimes — having the courage to reopen the cases.

It was only in recent years that the murderers of Mississippi civil rights leaders Medgar Evers and Vernon Dahmer were imprisoned. The case of Emmett Till, the 14-year-old murdered in 1955 for allegedly whistling at a White woman in Money, Miss., has been reopened by the Justice Department.

While progress has been made on the legal and political fronts — Mississippi has more Black elected officials than any other state — there is ample evidence that old attitudes die hard.

As recent as Dec. 5, 2002, Senator Trent Lott (R-Miss.) praised the 1948 segregationist campaign of Strom Thurmond and noted that Mississippi had supported the Dixiecrat.

"We're proud of it," Lott said. "And if the rest of the country had followed our lead, we wouldn't have had all these problems over all these years, either."

If well-meaning White Mississippians had provided true leadership at the time, we wouldn't have the problem of doing today what should have been done 40 years ago.

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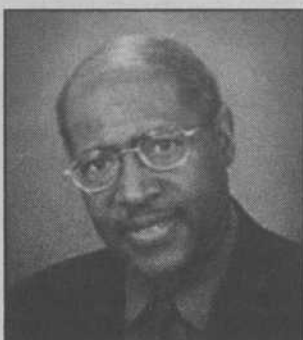
## Justices Janice Rogers Brown, Clarence Thomas: Birds of a...

By Ron Walters  
Special to Sentinel-Voice

Judge Janice Rogers Brown has been confirmed by the Senate to a seat on the federal circuit court for the District of Columbia that deals with a number of regulatory economic matters that involve whether the classes or the masses will benefit. Judging from Judge Brown's past decisions, this court that will add additional pain to the lives of the nation's working people and the poor. Republicans have talked a lot about Brown's past as the daughter of a sharecropper and the last time I looked, Black sharecroppers were not only poor, many were treated like slaves. So, how is it that someone from this background could be so callous and insensitive to the plight of poor people, especially Blacks? That is not the whole story, because her father spent his career in the Air Force and her mother was a nurse. Brown graduate from Cal State Sacramento and took her law degree from

UCLA. The fact is that her family had overcome sharecropping early on in her life — and at government expense — a route which made them middle class.

To say that Brown grew her conservative judicial muscles by following Republican orthodoxy is too easy an explanation. Republicans also made a lot out of the background of Clarence Thomas, also to evoke the sense of someone overcoming against tremendous odds to achieve the American dream, but also to show how he might have acquired his conservative values at such an early age. Nevertheless, there is something of a pattern here. Clarence Thomas was not a conservative growing up. At one point in his college career, he was a Black Nationalist, bowing to the political sentiments of his age that chal-



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lenged White racism. When he emerged from college, however, he was faced with a choice to continue to follow the road most Blacks traveled in seeking professional advancement while not bowing to racism. Thomas, however, chose to go another way, accepting the tutelage of a member of the Republican establishment whose path was ex-

ceedingly different from his, valuing a very different history, class, race and ideology. It is said about Janice Rogers Brown by someone who knew her in college that she wore the "biggest 'fro there was," again a personality that appeared to adapt easily to the prevailing orthodoxy. The fact that at one point she was even a Maoist suggests that she not only embraced the orthodoxy but sought an exalted, if extreme, role in the prevailing cul-

ture of opposition to the political establishment.

However, when it came time to leave UCLA, she knew she was in Ronald Reagan's California and in the midst of a growing conservative political movement that shaped the path of upward mobility as conservative. So, what did you have to do if you wanted to succeed — to become really, really successful — as a lawyer in California then? You do what Clarence Thomas did and make a choice to join that group you considered to be most powerful and that was most likely to assist you in achieving your personal version of the American dream. It also helps, in both cases that joining the conservative movement provided absolution to upwardly mobile professionals who had been radical Black Nationalists and Maoists in college. This may also explain Richard Horowitz, a radical Jewish activist in the 60s and 70s who now rails

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cial hurdle for BiDil because the FDA usually follows the recommendations of its advisory panels when considering whether to approve a drug.

The heart specialist who has worked on BiDil for the last 25 years, Dr. Jay N. Cohn, now a professor of medicine at the University of Minnesota School of Medicine, said the controversy "reflects the discomfort that has grown up in this country regarding the racial issue. Unfortunately, that's taken a lot of attention away from the science."

With Dr. Cohn's help, the biotechnology company Medco Research filed an application with the FDA for the drug's use in all patients, relying on the earlier V.A. trials to prove its benefit.

During 1997 hearings, Dr. Cohn urged an FDA panel to keep an open mind, because the Veterans Heart Failure trials called V-HeFT lacked the sophistication of more mod-

ern trials. Several panel members agreed that BiDil seemed to extend the lives of patients, but the trials fell statistically short, and the panel voted down the drug. Even though the drug failed for general use, after going over the data from the first trial, which involved 630 people, 180 of them African-American, Dr. Cohn noticed that the African-Americans showed a statistically significant benefit. The reason, Dr. Cohn suspects, involves a substance called nitric oxide. Several studies have suggested that African-Americans have deficiencies of the substance (nitric oxide is a compound that occurs naturally in the human body).

Based on Dr. Cohn's findings in the V.A. studies, the F.D.A. gave NitroMed, which specializes in nitric oxide therapy, an "approvable" letter in 2001, saying that a positive study in African-American heart failure patients could be a basis for the drug's approval. Dr. Cohn said that despite any flaws

in the first studies, the similar findings in the new trial suggest the original data was accurate.

"The replication gives me confidence that this combination is more likely to be effective in people who call themselves Black than in people who call themselves White," he said. "Do I believe this drug should work in Whites? Biology would tell me it should."

In heart failure, the heart is too weak to beat effectively and fluid builds up in the lungs. The usual treatment is with drugs called ACE inhibitors, but research has indicated that they do not work as well in Blacks as in Whites. In a study of 1,050 African-American patients taking BiDil, there was a 43 percent increase in survival, a 39 percent reduction in the rate of first hospitalization for heart failure and an improved quality of life.

Many people believe this is a dangerous slope to begin to define treatment decisions

according to race, but I called a pharmacist and asked if there were any other drugs that had race specific criteria and he indicated to me that Cozar, a hypertension drug, notes on the label that the drug's effects in reducing blood pressure is "somewhat less" in Blacks and that there was no evidence that the drug's benefit of reducing heart attack, strokes and death in the overall population applied to Blacks.

Forget the controversy regarding whether or not race should play a role in determining treatment and get the drug on the market so that the unmet medical need of eliminating disparities for heart failure rates in African-Americans can be met. Kudos to the FDA advisory panel that voted 9-0 on June 16 in favor of allowing sales of BiDil. If the FDA follows suit, African-Americans will be living longer by the end of 2005 when the drug goes on sale becoming the first drug in the U.S. marketed to a specific racial group.