

Founder of 'Evening Whirl' crime rap sheet succumbs

Special to Sentinel-Voice

ST. LOUIS (NNPA) - Ben Thomas, for 57 years the publisher, editor and writer of the *Evening Whirl*, a weekly newspaper dedicated to exposing crime and promoting civic improvement, died recently in Los Angeles at the age of 94.

Thomas chronicled his adopted hometown of St. Louis in a way that defied characterization, stirred controversy, and attracted loyal, even fanatical, readers of his lyrically rewritten rap sheet. Thomas was called a blues lyricist and an ancestor of hip hop. Civil-rights editorials sat side-by-side with catchpenny verse and the most graphic prose.

In his own eyes, he was a crusader against crime. His subjects were lovers' quarrels gone homicidal, drug dealers who ruled over housing projects and any person who got on the editor's bad side. Thomas endangered himself by exposing criminals. Perhaps his favorite genre was the prominent citizen busted with a prostitute, and this led to libel suits by the dozens, amounting to millions of dollars. He spent his entire career in court.

In one of many defenses of his life work, Thomas wrote, "The Whirl has preached PURITY and condemned

CRIME. Those who don't like it can kiss our behind."

Thomas appeared as a guest on Arsenio Hall's talk show in 1989 and was hosted later by Peter Jennings on "ABC Nightly News." The *Wall Street Journal* profiled the publisher on its front page in 1990.

Just before he left St. Louis in July 1995, when relocated to California by family as symptoms of Alzheimer's began to afflict him, the Greater St. Louis Association of Black Journalists inducted Thomas into its Hall of Fame.

Thomas studied English literature at Ohio State University and became campus correspondent for the *Pittsburgh Courier*, an African-American newspaper, later writing for the (St. Louis) *Argus* before he, at age 28, started his own newspaper covering music, entertainment and gossip for the Black community.

Thomas was born in 1910 in Pine Bluff, Ark., the youngest of seven children born to Samuel Sebert Thomas and Addie Washington Thomas.

Thomas is survived by two sons, Barry Thomas and Kevin (Denise) Thomas; six grandchildren; one great-grandson; two nieces and over twenty grandnieces and nephews.

Hate

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a religious shrine.

"You don't have to do anything to be the target of hate. And certainly that's true of the African-American community," said Jack Levin, director of the Brudnick Center on Violence and Conflict at Northeastern University in Boston.

Even high-profile convictions don't seem to deter hate. Ex-Klan leader Edgar Ray Killen, 80, was sentenced to 60 years in prison for his 1964 role in the murder of three civil rights activists in Mississippi.

An important distinction is that although the number of hate groups has increased, the number of their members has shrunk, said Levin.

This means a lot of the groups who've lost their leaders now have members who are splintered and in a state of disarray.

"A lot of the members of these traditional hate groups have broken away and formed their own groups," Levin said. "So, what we're seeing now is a larger num-

ber, but smaller groups, sort of like the terror movement, cells... In other words, the threat is coming from a larger number with smaller memberships. And this is scary."

Because they're smaller, Levin says, the FBI is having a more difficult time infiltrating them and watching them.

Also exacerbating the spread of the groups and its potential violence is their dependence on the Internet.

"These groups may not have as much power in the traditional sense," Levin says.

"But, they've got the hate websites. There are now thousands of hate websites that influence our young people. And it's not just the websites, but chat rooms and bulletin boards, and youngsters who are hate-filled all of a sudden find they have lots of friends in the same boat. And all they have to do is log on."

This year alone, a string of big and small incidents have been recorded by the law center. They include:

- Durham, N. C., May 25: Three large crosses were burned in separate incidents throughout the city.

- Santa Fe, N.M., April 26: Four teenage boys were charged with spray-painting swastikas and racial slurs, burning a cross and leaving a noose on a tree at a Black

woman's residence.

- Mason, Mich., April 11: Ku Klux Klan fliers were distributed in a suburb.

- Springfield, Ore., March 27: Racial epithets were written on the inside of a Black woman's garage.

- Covington, Ga., March 24: Racial slurs and swastikas were spray painted on a Black man's truck. The windows were smashed, and the tires were also slashed.

- Needham, Mass., Feb. 23: A racial slur was spray-painted on the car of a White woman who has interracial children.

- Rock Hill, S.C., Feb. 10: Two 14-year-old boys were charged with malicious damage to property for allegedly spray-painting racist graffiti on the car of the police chief, who is Black.

- Elk Grove, Calif., Jan. 31: Two 16-year-old high school students admitted conspiring to commit murder in a hate crime attack planned at their school for February 2004. They'd planned to target Blacks and other racial minorities, including one particular Black student.

The 2001 terrorist attacks temporarily gave Americans a feeling of togetherness, Levin says. But it didn't last long.

"Sadly enough, we're right back in the same boat that we were," says Levin. "We're just as bad as we were then — maybe worse."

PBS

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we still have grave concerns about politicization. We believe that as long as members of the CPB use their positions to attempt to remake public broadcasting into a mouthpiece for official views, things will get worst."

The members that Karr is referring to are Corporation for Public Broadcasting Chairman Tomlinson, who is the Bush-appointed chair of the Broadcasting Board of Governors, and newly-elected CPB President, Patricia de Stacy Harrison, a former chairman of the Republican committee.

According to some, Tomlinson has been on a mission to correct what he calls a liberal bias in public television. He secretly commissioned someone to review programs like "NOW" with Bill Moyers in an attempt to prove that public broadcasting is too far to the left. He also hired a Bush White House staffer and has moved to create separate ombudsmen review content for so-called liberal bias.

Several congressmen agree that public broadcasting no longer needs government funding.

"Public broadcasting has developed a major base of private donors, corporate donors and licensing fees and royalties from programs... In

other words, Big Bird and Public Broadcasting have grown up; it's time for them to fly on their own," said Congressman Ernest Istook (R-Okla.), testifying before the House.

"It is getting harder and harder to distinguish public broadcasting from the rest of America's broadcasting. This is because other broadcasters... now carry the same type of programs that were once the hallmark of public broadcasting... Public radio has been moving away from classical music and more toward the talk radio that is common to the profit sector...," he added.

Jackson, an African-American program director, doesn't agree.

"Most of the people that are making accusations about public media being biased are probably not listening to it. Public media tends to be the most informative of the news gathering operation. When you look at the quality of the work being done in public radio, I think it's far better than commercial radio in terms of its exhaustive nature, its depth, etc.," Jackson said.

Washington, D.C., resident, Irv Lotten, agrees. He listens regularly to NPR [National Public Radio] programs "News and Notes with Ed Gordon" and "Democ-

racy Now."

"It seems like everyday the government does something else to try and regulate what the American public does and doesn't have access to. First, it was our civil rights with the Patriot Act, now it's our right to receive information," he said. "I listen to mainstream news all the time, but it's not until I listen to stations like NPR that I feel I'm hearing the truth — the pure, unadulterated truth."

Frustrated with the government's attempt to defund and politicize public broadcasting, the Free Press, along with local stations across the county, has begun to pressure Tomlinson to step down from his position as chair.

"There are certain members of the board — and now staff — who share certain political objectives, and this organization [CPB] was never set up to be a political vehicle; it was set up to support the institution of public broadcasting in as non-partisan fashion as possible," said Karr, who has spearheaded a campaign against Tomlinson.

"We will continue to organize people on the ground to speak out locally and nationally to pressure CPB to take the politics out of public broadcasting and put the people back in. We think he

[Tomlinson] has clearly violated his role. However, if he were to decide to step back or step away from this highly partisan agenda I think we would consider that a partial victory."

In the meantime, public broadcasting stations encourage people to put pressure on local congressmen and senators. Without it, some say people in the Black community will miss out on the only fair, unbiased, balanced news available.

"Clearly the senators and the people on the Hill took note to the response of the public. It wasn't the stations they were listening to; it wasn't the organized effort that media operations have been doing to defend their own interest or character. Clearly, they were listening to people of the audience who have been calling and telling them how important we are to their everyday lives; and I think that's really rewarding to us, to have that respect and support for the work that we do," Jackson of WETA said.

"That is one of the real situations where you have invested a lot of energy and time into cultivating an audience as so many public radio and T.V. stations do. If you've done that really well, I think you've bore the fruits of that effort."

• PUBLIC NOTICE •

Notice Of Comment Period And Public Hearing On Transportation Improvement Program 2006-2008

The Regional Transportation Commission of Southern Nevada (RTC), the designated Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) for the Las Vegas Urban area, is seeking public comment on proposed Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) projects to be funded during Fiscal Years 2006 through 2008, and based on the adopted Regional Transportation Plan FY 2004-2025. The document is available at the RTC Administrative Building (see address below) or on the Internet at www.rtc-southernnevada.com (click on "Documents" under Planning).

30-day Public Comment Period:
8:00 am, Monday, July 11, 2005
through 5:00 pm, Tuesday, August 9, 2005

Public Hearing:
Wednesday, July 20, 2005
RTC Administrative Building, Meeting Room 108
Open house format; come any time between 4:00 p.m. and 7:00 p.m.

Submit Comments/Questions:
Attn: Maria Rodriguez
Phone: (702) 676-1500 (8:00 am to 5:00 pm weekdays)
TDD: (702) 676-1834
Fax: (702) 676-1518

Mail to: RTC of Southern Nevada
600 S. Grand Central Parkway
Las Vegas, Nevada 89106-4512
Web site: <http://www.rtc-southernnevada.com>
or during public hearing listed above

