

Lomax recalled as rights champion

By Betty Pleasant and Gene C. Johnson
Special to Sentinel-Voice

LOS ANGELES (NNPA) - Funeral arrangements are still pending for civil rights attorney and former Los Angeles Police Commission President Melanie Lomax, her brother Mark Lomax, said. A native Angeleno, Lomax, 56, was a feisty, in-your-face civil rights attorney who fought all forms of racial, sexual and economic injustices and was an early champion of efforts to end police abuse and institute reform of the Los Angeles Police Department.

She gained national prominence after the March 1991 videotaped police beating of Rodney G. King fanned the Black community's ire against then-Police Chief Daryl Gates. Lomax, who was president of the Police Commission at the time, was the first to call for Gates' resignation, and she beat the drum for police accountability and reform through a series of in-community commission meetings and motions and City Council presentations. The Christopher Commission was convened to investigate the practices of the LAPD and to make recommendations for change. Gates resigned and major steps toward police reform ensued.

Police said Lomax was killed in a single-vehicle automobile accident last week when her 2005 Jaguar plummeted down a steep slope in front of her Hollywood Hills home around 7:45 p.m., Sunday, Sept 11. Her body is being retained by the county coroner and the cause of her death and circumstances are still under investigation.

Paramedics found her in full cardiac arrest, hanging by the seat belt in the overturned car when they arrived at the crash site. She was transported to Cedars-Sinai Hospital where she was declared dead a short time later.

Police at the scene said Lomax had no visible signs of physical trauma from the accident, but the results of an autopsy have been "deferred pending further investigation," said Coroner's Lt. David Smith.

Many in the community wondered whether Lomax died from a heart attack that occurred before she lost control of her car or



Melanie Lomax made a name for herself as a feisty, in-your-face civil rights attorney.

while the vehicle was falling off the hillside beneath her driveway.

Smith said "doctors have ordered that additional tests be done" on Lomax's body before announcing the cause of her death.

Lomax was the daughter of a Black Brahmanic Los Angeles family, which included her grandfather, who owned the historic Dunbar Hotel on Central Avenue during the area's Black cultural heyday. Her father was the late Louis Lomax, noted author and civil rights activist in the 1960s. Her mother, Almena Lomax, is a former journalist for the *San Francisco Chronicle* and *Examiner* and publisher of the *Los Angeles Tribune*, and her older brother, Michael Lomax is the CEO and president of the United Negro College Fund.

The goddaughter of the late mayor Tom Bradley, Lomax was a founding member of the Black Women Lawyers Association and a member of several legal associations. She had received civic and professional awards from numerous organizations, including the ACLU and the NAACP.

After her 1974 graduation from the Loyola University School of Law, Lomax became active in the Los Angeles NAACP chapter and served as one of its vice presidents. As

such, she chaired the Economic Justice Committee and made national NAACP officials take note of its West Coast branch by grabbing a heretofore untouched issue by the throat: Lomax convened a press conference in Hollywood in which she criticized singers Michael Jackson, Prince and Lionel Richie for making millions of dollars off Black people and giving nothing back to the community — either in the form of jobs or economic enterprise.

Veteran NAACP bigwigs were apoplectic. They publicly reprimanded Lomax, apologized for her actions and took over the issue of entertainment industry inequities themselves. They have since tried, to the best of their ability, to deal with the issue Lomax raised.

"But that didn't bother her," said Anthony Samad, who himself was an NAACP-Los Angeles chapter vice president at the time. "She maintained her love for the L.A. branch and continued supporting it. Her issues were economic discrimination and police abuse, and she went from there to establish herself as a civil rights advocate," Samad said.

As a civil rights advocate, Lomax specialized in fighting abuses of all kinds. She was the managing attorney of Lomax & Associates, which she founded in 1984, and handled hundreds of civil rights, discrimination, employment law, sexual harassment, law enforcement practices, police brutality and victims' rights cases.

She represented former Los Angeles Police Chief Willie Williams in 1995 when the city released his personnel record and later when the City Council moved to dismiss him from his job.

A Roman Catholic, Lomax was also involved in lay efforts to investigate Catholic priests' alleged sexual abuse of minors. She wrote several articles on that subject, with special emphasis on the accountability of the church's hierarchy for terminating or prosecuting priests sexually involved with children.

Lomax began her practice of law as an attorney for the County of Los Angeles, and her most recent civic duties included her appointment by former Mayor James Hahn to the Information and Technology Commission, which has jurisdiction over the cable TV companies in the city.

Prominent civil rights attorney Connie Rice, who knew Lomax well, said of her death: "It is an awful tragedy... She was a good civil rights attorney. She was fearless. She was a fierce opponent and a really good ally. You wanted her on your side."

Cynthia McLain-Hill, another noted attorney in the community, said Lomax "displayed a powerful combination of intelligence, integrity and conviction and she never wavered in her determination to stand up for the rights of all people."

She is survived by her mother, Almena, of Pasadena; her brothers, Michael of Atlanta, Lucius of Minneapolis and Mark of Pasadena; her sister, Nia of Pasadena, and her adopted children, Sarah and Jeremy, ages 16 and 15, respectively.

Mark Lomax said his family requests that in lieu of flowers, donations be made in Melanie Lomax's name to the United Negro College Fund.

Betty Pleasant and Gene C. Johnson write for the WAVE Newspapers.

Sheriff: Racism viewed as factor in kidnapping crime

SALEM, N.H. (AP) - A Maine couple accused of tying up their 19-year-old daughter, throwing her in their car and driving her out of state to get an abortion were upset because the baby's father is Black, a Maine sheriff said Tuesday.

Katelyn Kampf, who is White, told Cumberland County Sheriff Mark Dion that her mother "was pretty irate at the fact that the child's father was Black, and she had made a number of disparaging remarks about that," he said.

Katelyn Kampf escaped Friday at a Salem shopping center and called police, who arrested her parents, Nicholas Kampf, 54, and Lola, 53, both real estate developers

from North Yarmouth, Maine.

The Kampfs were apparently taking their daughter to New York to try to force her to get an abortion there, police said.

The parents were arraigned Monday on kidnapping charges. The judge set bail at \$100,000 each and ordered the Kampfs to have no contact with their daughter. Salem District Court officials said that representatives for the Kampfs were posting bail Tuesday afternoon and that the couple should be released later in the day.

If convicted of kidnapping, the Kampfs face 7 1/2 to 15 years in prison. Dion said he expects to bring

charges in Maine also, after investigators consult with the district attorney Wednesday.

Defense attorney Mark Sisti said Tuesday that a sworn statement by Salem police who interviewed both Katelyn Kampf and her parents said nothing about the father's race.

"This whole race-card thing is ridiculous and objectionable," said Sisti, who represented both of the Kampfs for their arraignment Monday, but is now representing only Lola Kampf. "There wasn't any mention in the sworn affidavit to the court about race being a factor in any way, shape or form."

Sisti also maintained there was no evidence a kidnap-

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