Race factors into Vick's dog-fighting case

RICHMOND, Va. (AP) -The difference between those sporting Michael Vick jerseys and those urging his swift conviction on dogfighting charges is glaring: Vick's supporters are mostly Black; his critics are mostly White.

The racial divide emerged early in the case against the Atlanta Falcons quarterback, apparent at rallies filled with cheering - and overwhelmingly Black - Vick supporters and at anti-Vick protests that are noticeably White.

Vick's opponents say the evidence against him is overwhelming. For many Black supporters, that judgment evokes uncomfortable questions about race and guilt in America.

"White folks 'been grindin' on an ax... and that ax ain't got sharp enough for them," said Earnest Hardy Sr., who called the case a witch hunt targeting a successful Black man.

Hardy's Surry County home borders Vick's property, where an April raid turned up evidence of dogfighting.

Federal authorities indicted Vick on dogfighting charges, and he faces jail time and fines. He has pleaded not guilty.

In the rural county split 50-50 between Whites and Blacks, the case quickly took a racial bent. At the county courthouse, angry letters urged that Whites "take back their town."

Critics accuse the commonwealth's attorney, Gerald Poindexter, of stalling an investigation to protect one of his own.

"The only thing I'm doing is protecting my personal integrity and protecting the integrity of the office," said Poindexter, who is Black. "I'm not going to be pushed into bringing charges that won't stand."

Hardy spotted Surry's ra-

cial divisions long ago - in bility to save him." the farmland developers are sweeping up and selling at prices working-class folks can't afford, and in the new neighbors who don't look

Hardy suspects that Vick — famous, rich and Black is just the fall guy behind big-

"A hundred-million-dollár Black man?" he huffed. "They can't stand it."

His view is reflected from the Newport News region where Vick was raised to Atlanta, where a rally supporting the former Virginia Tech standout drew several hundred fans, but barely 50 Whites, said Gerald Rose, with Atlanta-based New Order National Human Rights Organization.

Rose said the outcry stems from what he said is Vick's premature conviction in the media - not support for dogfighting. But he said the case also awakens anger over a perceived smear campaign targeting famous Black men from Kobe Bryant to Michael Jackson.

He argues Black men who stumble draw excessive scrutiny and especially harsh public judgment.

"It's been too many cases involving African-Americans [where] they got through the court of law, they've been found not guilty, but damage has been done," Rose said.

Vick and two co-defendants are scheduled to stand trial Nov. 26. The Southern Christian Leadership Conference had planned to recognize Vick at its annual convention but changed its deci-

"We're in support of Michael as a human being," SCLC president Charles Steele said. "Right now, he's feeling discarded, ostracized by people who are rushing to judgment. It's our responsi-

Tempers flared at Vick's July 26 arraignment in Richmond, where outside the courthouse Blacks and Whites debated everything from animal rights to slavery.

"It's racial profiling," said Bill Brown, a Richmond store owner who held a sign urging Vick's fair treatment. "We're always trying to brush everything up under the rug when it comes to racial things."

People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals, leader

tests, says the issue isn't ra-

"We're reacting very strongly to this case because Michael Vick is someone who's a hero... If this were Peyton Manning or Brett Favre, we'd be out there," spokesman Dan Shannon

Both NFL quarterbacks

Vick's case is a "crack in the dam" of American racial tension, explained Jeff Menzise, assistant director of

of the most vocal Vick pro- the Race Relations Institute at Fisk University in Tennes-

> Whites, he said, may have underlying anger at Blacks they feel constantly play the race card. Blacks, meanwhile, may feel Whites rush to judge Black suspects, but are more lenient to White ones, Menzise said. A case like Vick's offers a vent for those frustrations.

"When you dam up a river, any crack in that dam and every drop of water is going to try and get out," he

Menzise said Blacks may despise dogfighting but support Vick as a figure of Black success in a society in which there are relatively few.

At his Richmond clothing store, Brown said he'll continue stocking Vick merchandise, though others have pulled it from shelves. He likened Black support for Vick's cause to the support for O.J. Simpson's acquittal.

"Black people didn't care about O.J.," he said. "But we felt like we finally won."

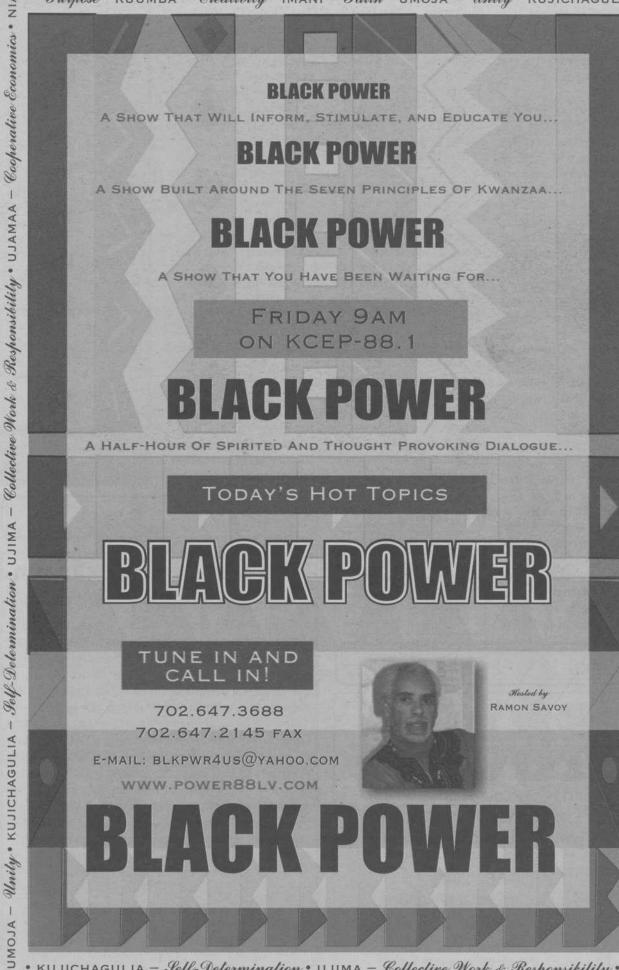
Pelf-Determination . UJIMA -

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• KUJICHAGULIA - Self-Determination • UJIMA - Collective Work & Responsibility •

(Continued from Page 5) ment, basically, in football?"

The made-for-Internet studio environment was considerably more austere than that of his last major TV appearance, when he was interviewed for NBC by Katie Couric in 2004.

On several occasions, Simpson and Delaney sat silent.

At another point, he called toward an off-camera section of the studio, "Hey, please close that door, guys."

Dallas-based Market News First said Simpson was not paid for his hour-long appearance, the first of four to be broadcast throughout the week. Simpson said in the interview that he agreed to participate because the website's staff made him feel like he would be able to express "what's really been going on," rather than being "cross examined."

"Sometimes you want to have a voice," he said. "I'm tired of people talking for me."