

FORUM

Black Mississippi judge to 3 white murderers

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Here's an astonishing speech by U.S. District Judge Carlton Reeves, who in 2010 became the second African-American appointed as federal judge in Mississippi. He read it to three young white men before sentencing them for the death of a 48-year-old black man named James Craig Anderson in a parking lot in Jackson, Miss., one night in 2011. They were part of a group that beat Anderson and then killed him by running over his body with a truck, yelling "white power" as they drove off.

The speech is long; Reeves asked the young men to sit down while he read it aloud in the courtroom. And it's breathtaking, in both the moral force of its arguments and the palpable sadness with which they are delivered. We have decided to publish the speech, which we got from the blog *Breach of Peace*, in its entirety below. A warning to readers: He uses the word "nigger" 11 times.



Reeves

Speech follows

One of my former history professors, Dennis Mitchell, recently released a history book entitled, "A New History of Mississippi." "Mississippi," he says, "is a place and a state of mind. The name evokes strong reactions from those who live here and from those who do not, but who think they know something about its people and their past." Because of its past, as described by Anthony Walton in his book, "Mississippi: An American Journey," Mississippi "can be considered one of the most prominent scars on the map" of these United States.

Walton goes on to explain that "there is something different about Mississippi; something almost unspeakably primal and vicious; something savage unleashed there that has yet to come to rest." To prove his point, he notes that, "[o]f the 40 martyrs whose names are inscribed in the national Civil Rights Memorial in Montgomery, AL, 19 were killed in Mississippi." "How was it," Walton asks, "that half who died did so in one state?" — my Mississippi, your Mississippi and our

Mississippi. Mississippi has expressed its savagery in a number of ways throughout its history — slavery being the cruelest example, but a close second being Mississippi's infatuation with lynchings. Lynchings were prevalent, prominent and participatory. A lynching was a public ritual — even carnival-like — with in many states in our great nation. While other states engaged in these atrocities, those in the Deep South took a leadership role, especially that scar on the map of America — those 82 counties between the Tennessee line and the Gulf of Mexico and bordered by Louisiana, Arkansas and Alabama.

Vivid accounts of brutal and terrifying lynchings in Mississippi are chronicled in various sources: Ralph Ginzburg's "100 Years of Lynching" and "Without Sanctuary: Lynching Photography in America," just to name two. But I note that today, the Equal Justice Initiative released "Lynching in America: Confronting the Legacy of Racial Terror"; apparently, it too is a must-read.

Lynch mobs

In "Without Sanctuary," historian Leon Litwack writes that between 1882 and 1968, an estimated 4,742 blacks met their deaths at the hands of lynch mobs. The impact this campaign of terror had on black families is impossible to explain so many years later. That number contrasts with the 1,401 prisoners who have been executed legally in the United States since 1976. In modern terms, that number represents more than those killed in Operation Iraqi Freedom and more than twice the number of American casualties in Operation Enduring Freedom — the Afghanistan conflict. Turning to home, this number also represents 1,700 more than who were killed on Sept. 11. Those who died at the hands of mobs, Litwack notes, some were the victims of "legal" lynchings — having been accused of a crime, subjected to a "speedy" trial and even speedier execution. Some were victims of private white violence and some were merely the victims of "nigger hunts" — murdered by a variety of means in isolated rural sections and dumped into rivers and creeks.

"Back in those days," according to black Mississippians describing the violence of the 1930s, "to kill a Negro wasn't nothing. It was like killing a chicken or killing a snake. The whites would

say, 'niggers jest supposed to die, ain't no damn good anyway — so jest go an' kill 'em.' ... They had to have a license to kill anything but a nigger. We was always in season." Said one white Mississippian, "A white man ain't a-going to be able to live in this country if we let niggers start getting biggity." And, even when lynchings had decreased in and around Oxford, one white resident told a visitor of the reaffirming quality of lynchings: "It's about time to have another [one]," he

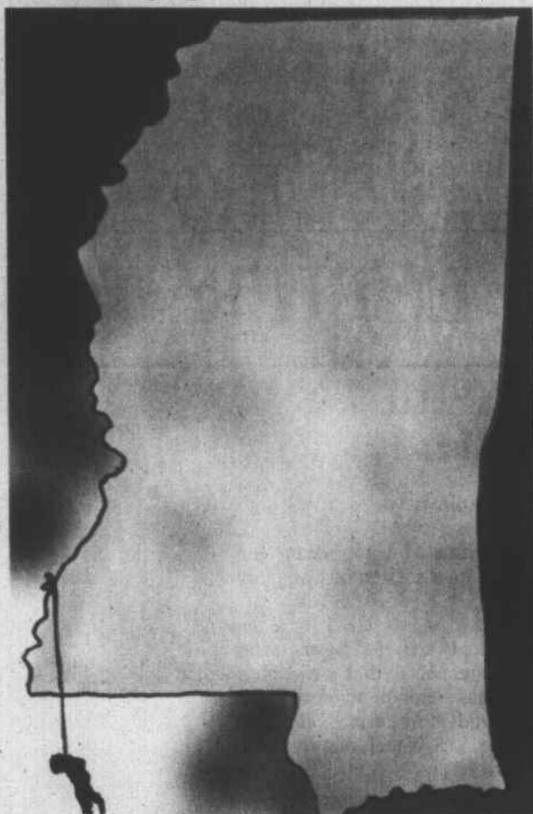
Andrew Goodman, Michael Schwerner, Vernon Dahmer, George W. Lee, Medgar Evers and Mack Charles Parker. But the blood of the lesser-known people like Luther Holbert and his wife, Elmo Curl, Lloyd Clay, John Hartfield, Nelse Patton, Lamar Smith, Clinton Melton, Ben Chester White, Wharlest Jackson and countless others, saturates these 48,434 square miles of Mississippi soil. On June 26, 2011, four

tions have attempted to pull Mississippi from the abyss of moral depravity in which it once so proudly floundered in. Despite much progress and the efforts of the new generations, these three defendants are before me today: Deryl Paul Dedmon, Dylan Wade Butler and John Aaron Rice. They and their co-conspirators ripped off the scab of the healing scars of Mississippi ... causing her (our Mississippi) to bleed again.

Hate comes in all shapes, sizes, colors, and from this case, we know it comes in different sexes and ages. A toxic mix of alcohol, foolishness and unadulterated hatred caused these young people to resurrect the nightmarish specter of lynchings and lynch mobs from the Mississippi we long to forget. Like the marauders of ages past, these young folk conspired, planned, and coordinated a plan of attack on certain neighborhoods in the city of Jackson for the sole purpose of harassing, terrorizing, physically assaulting and causing bodily injury to black folk. They punched and kicked them about their bodies — their heads, their faces. They prowled. They came ready to hurt. They used dangerous weapons; they targeted the weak; they recruited and encouraged others to join in the coordinated chaos; and they boasted about their shameful activity. This was a 2011 version of the nigger hunts.



Anderson



"A white man ain't a-going to be able to live in this country if we let niggers start getting biggity."

—One white Mississippian

explained, "[w]hen the niggers get so that they are afraid of being lynched, it is time to put the fear in them."

Crimes of the past

How could hate, fear or whatever it was transform genteel, God-fearing, God-loving Mississippians into mindless murderers and sadistic torturers? I ask that same question about the events which bring us together on this day. Those crimes of the past, as well as these, have so damaged the psyche and reputation of this great state.

Mississippi soil has been stained with the blood of folk whose names have become synonymous with the Civil Rights Movement like Emmett Till, Willie McGee, James Cheney,

days short of his 49th birthday, the blood of James Anderson was added to Mississippi's soil.

The common denominator of the deaths of these individuals was not their race. It was not that they all were engaged in freedom fighting. It was not that they had been engaged in criminal activity, trumped up or otherwise. No, the common denominator was that the last thing that each of these individuals saw was the inhumanity of racism.

The last thing that each felt was the audacity and agony of hate, senseless hate: crippling, maiming them and finally taking away their lives.

Mississippi has a tortured past, and it has struggled mightily to reinvent itself and become a New Mississippi. New genera-

American James Craig Anderson. On June 26, 2011, the fun ended.

But even after Anderson's murder, the conspiracy continued ... And, only because of a video, which told a different story from that which had been concocted by these defendants, and the investigation of law enforcement — state and federal law enforcement working together — was the truth uncovered.

Our children

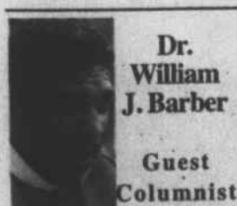
What is so disturbing ... so shocking ... so numbing ... is that these nigger hunts were perpetrated by our children ... students who live among us ... educated in our public schools ... in our private academies ... students who played football lined up on the same side of scrimmage line with black teammates ... average students and honor students. Kids who worked during school and in the summers; kids who now had full-time jobs and some of whom were even unemployed. Some were pursuing higher education and the Court believes they each had dreams to pursue. These children were from two-parent homes and some of whom were the children of divorced parents, and yes some even raised by a single parent. No doubt, they all had loving parents and loving families.

In letters received on his behalf, Dylan Butler, whose outing on the night of June 26 was not his first, has been described as "a fine young man," "a caring person," "a well mannered man" who is truly remorseful and wants to move on with his life ... a very respectful ... a good man ... a good person ... a lovable, kindhearted teddy bear who stands in front of bullies ... and who is now ashamed of what he did. Butler's family is a mixed-race family: For the last 15 years, it has consisted of an African-American stepfather and stepmother, plus his mother and two sisters. The family, according to the stepfather, understandably is "saddened and heartbroken."

These were everyday students like John Aaron Rice, who got out of his truck, struck James Anderson in the face and kept him occupied until others arrived. ... Rice was involved in multiple excursions to so-called "Jafrica", but he, for some time, according to him and his mother, and an African-American friend shared his home address. And, sadly, Deryl Dedmon, who straddled James Anderson and struck him repeatedly in the face and head with his

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As we mark Bloody Sunday, North Carolina is our Selma



Dr. William J. Barber

Guest Columnist

In 1950, fifteen years before the Selma-to-Montgomery march, William Faulkner, one of the South's greatest authors, wrote, "The past is never dead. It's not even past." In 2015, as we commemorate the 50th anniversary of Bloody Sunday, Faulkner's insight is as true as ever.

Nearly two years ago, the United States Supreme Court ruled to hollow out the Voting Rights Act of 1965, allowing several state legislatures, mostly in

the South, to open their bags of disenfranchisement tricks and pass voter suppression laws aimed at curbing the progressive vote. Chief Justice John Roberts tried to justify the Court's 5-4 decision by writing, "Our country has changed, and while any racial discrimination in voting is too much, Congress must ensure that the legislation it passes to remedy the problem speaks to current conditions."

Underscoring the naive nature of that statement, then-North Carolina House Speaker Thom Tillis and his regressive coalition in the General Assembly promptly signed into law the worst voter suppression bill since Jim Crow. The Supreme Court gutted the VRA on June 25, 2013. Forty-eight days later, on

Aug. 12, North Carolina's elected leaders enacted a law that not only requires a government-issued photo I.D. to vote in 2016 and after, but also reduced the early voting and Sunday voting period and eliminated same-day-registration, out-of-precinct voting, and pre-registration for 16- and 17-year-old voters who would be 18 on Election Day.

Last fall, Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg wrote, "These measures likely would not have survived federal preclearance," which had been maintained for nearly five decades to prevent exactly the sort of legislation we saw passed in North Carolina weeks after the Shelby ruling.

In our state, the voter suppression law has often been referred to as a Voter

I.D. law, thereby giving it an air of "common sense," as our legislators like to say. But it has done so much more to disenfranchise North Carolinians than merely require a photo I.D. — although that has been proven to be discriminatory enough in itself.

Isaiah 10 states: "Woe to those who make unjust laws, to those who issue oppressive decrees, to deprive the poor of their rights and withhold justice from the oppressed of my people, making widows their prey and robbing the fatherless." This summer, two years after the Supreme Court ruling and the enactment of North Carolina's voter sup-

pression law, the North Carolina NAACP and other progressive constituencies — along with the U.S. Department of Justice — will challenge the discriminatory motives and effects of the Tillis law aimed at obstructing progressive votes in North Carolina. We are confident that we will win our case, which we filed 47 minutes after the legislation was passed in 2013.

We should never have had to prosecute it in the first place. We should never have had to file this lawsuit.

And our work would be much more difficult were it not for the tireless, pro-bono work of the Advancement Project.

But our own legislators forced us into this corner. Instead of finding ways to

make voting easier for all North Carolinians, they spent their time building new barriers around our right to vote.

We are glad that Ava DuVernay made a powerful movie ["Selma"] based on a very powerful moment — and movement — in this nation's history.

But Selma is much more than a movie. It is a symbol of challenging those who would limit access to the most fundamental practice of a democracy.

In North Carolina, we are called to challenge those who, in the 21st century, have decided to make voting much more difficult for thousands of people.

Selma is not dead. It's not even past. It is alive in North Carolina.

Dr. Barber is president of the N.C. NAACP.