

# District 12 Challenged By Supreme Court

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opinion which sends the case back to a three-member panel of federal judges in Raleigh, O'Connor criticized the "snakelike" appearance of the 12th. "It is unsettling how the N.C. plan resembles the most egregious racial gerrymanders of the past. ...Racial gerrymandering, even for remedial purposes, may balkanize us into competing racial factions..." she said.

Watt said the court's ruling is confusing at best. "It really doesn't make a lot of sense. There is absolutely no standard for bizarre appearance. How do you define what is a bizarre appearance? There is no definition, no criteria."

The case, Shaw vs. Reno, could ultimately mean that configuration of the 12th and other majority-minority districts will change. Because of the likelihood of appeals over any decision from U.S. District Court, Watt predicts that if there are any changes, they won't happen soon.

Watt and Rep. Eva Clayton of Warrenton, who serves the 1st district, made history last fall when they became the first African Americans from North Carolina to be elected to the U.S. House in this century. Based on the 1990 census, the N.C. General Assembly redrew districts to reflect changes in



Watt

population. Originally there were 11 districts, with one black district. Responding to

a mandate from the U.S. Justice Department, the legislature had to redraw lines to include a second majority black district.

Just how far reaching the opinion will be is hard to tell. If anything, it is indicative a prevailing conservative mood that spawns challenges to the 1965 Voting Rights Act, which is designed to improve the chances for minority representation.

"The contention that North Carolina's majority African American congressional districts 'bear an uncomfortable resemblance to political apartheid' is merely a smokescreen," said a statement issued by the North Carolina NAACP. "...In addition close scrutiny must be given to whether the decision is truly based on how districts are shaped or ...the fact that as a result of odd shaped majority-minority districts, African Americans and Hispanic currently have their strongest representation in the United States Congress."

The ruling indicates that the justices have been reading press accounts, Watt contends. "It sounds more like political commentary rather than legal opinion. It's almost hilarious. What you have is a pristine, almost innocent sounding white woman who is saying that she has discomfort with the notion...that she could live in a society that could base decisions solely on race."

Also, an indication of a more conservative Reagan-Bush court, the decision flies in the face of some of the court's earlier decisions that said it is OK to draw districts to favor particular groups. "There are a number of strange things about the rul-

ing," said Ted Arrington, a UNC Charlotte political science professor. "It puts the court in a strange position. The court has said that you can draw strangely shaped districts for incumbents, political parties, to suit some particular economic interest and suburbanites."

Court challenges over district lines is destined to increase, Arrington predicts. "You're going to see litigation all over the place. There are districts like this in places like Florida and New York."

The problem for North Carolina is that its African American population is so dispersed that it is difficult for lawmakers to come up with compact districts to ensure black representation. "The 12th is only a little more than one-half black," Arrington pointed out. "It is a mixed district, not a black district. There are lots of other characteristics. It is totally urban. It means that Watt represents the central cities. There are lots of white central city residents in this district. There is urban decay and lots of socioeconomic reasons for drawing the district."

The question emanating from the court's ruling is whether more compact, better looking districts provide more accurate representation. "You have to look at the voting patterns to answer that," Arrington said. "You don't have to have a compact district. You have to ask is the court saying that form is more important than function, that it wants nicely shaped districts."

In U.S. District Court, the state could justify the districts by demonstrating that there has been a historical

pattern of racially polarized voting and the districts were made in the interest of eliminating that pattern, Watt said. Also, the commonality of urban residents could be offered as rationale for the shape of the district.

In the meantime, Watt said he is doing business as usual. "The reaction among constituents is that there are more important issues such as jobs. In that sense there is not nearly the mood that there is in the civil rights community. I've been in every newspaper all over the country. There is a fascination with race for the media. If you can get a race angle, it's more sexy to talk about," he said.

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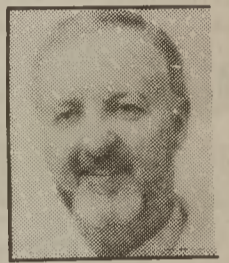
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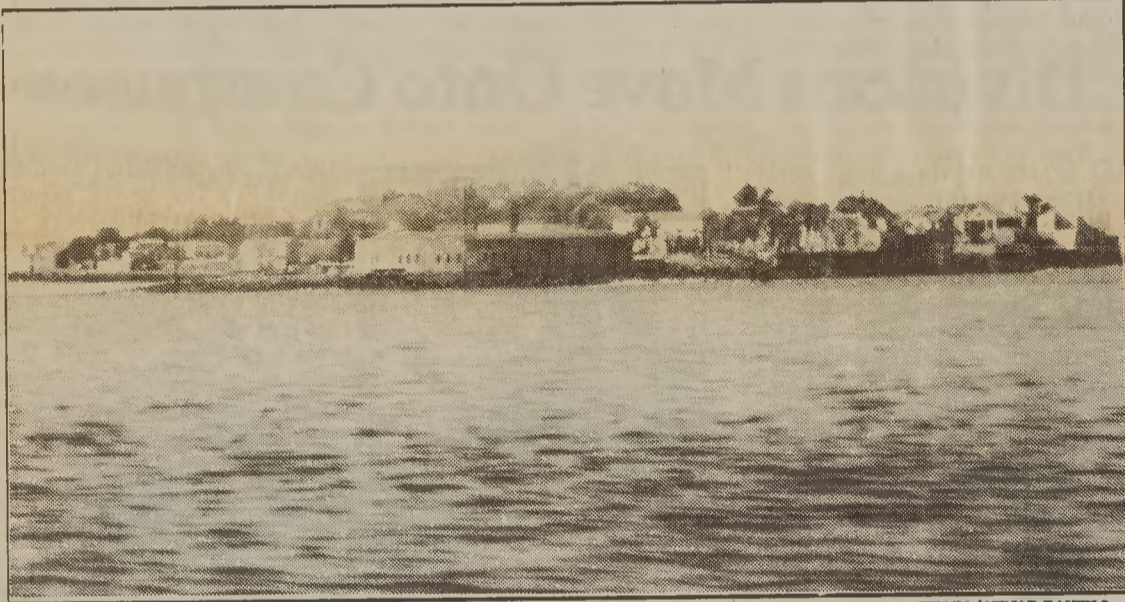
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Goree Island became an important point in the transportation of slaves during its control by the Dutch. Goree is located off the coast of Senegal.

## Goree Island Holds Place In History SENEGAL

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many who were shipped out to Europe, South America, North America, and Central America. Goree Island, where Africans who were enslaved were held hostage and the "seasoning" process begun for their distribution throughout the diaspora.

The Portuguese were the first Europeans to establish themselves on the Island of Goree in 1444. By the end of the 16th century, the Dutch had replaced the Portuguese and named the island "Goede Reede" after its natural harbor thus the name "Goree." It was during the time of the Dutch inhabitation of Goree when shipowners, businessmen and bankers with the protection of their respective governments formed the Triangular Trade route which involved humans, sugar and merchandise.

Africans were frequently captured in the interior of the countries, sold on the coast sometimes by other Africans, other times by the European of the day. These people were then shoved into rooms in places like Goree with people of different languages, shackled around the neck under whip and gun, and kept in cage like rooms on the coast until they were picked and sold. Two out of every five Africans died during this process.

Once picked up and on board other ships, the conditions were so horrible that the decks of the ships was said to have resembled a slaughter house floor be-

cause they were covered with so much blood and mucus. It is estimated that one out of every three people died in the Middle Passage (the boat ride between Africa and the dispersed country). Figures are estimated to be at 100 million people who lost their lives during the entire process, which is the worst holocaust in human history.

Under the control of the Dutch, Goree became an important transit point for the slave trade. The English, however, seized control of the island in 1633 and in 1678, the island was transferred to France by the Treaty of Nimeque. (I find all of this trading and declaring incredible).

The present-day island with its Maison des Esclaves (house of slaves) dates from 1776 and was built by the Dutch. The maison des esclaves is comprised of two levels. The upper level was for Europeans with their high ceilings and large rooms. The lower level was for humans who were interred. The living conditions were deplorable, with "cells" containing some 150-200 men, women and children. Frequently, these people sat with their backs against the wall with shackles around their necks feet and arms. Often entire families would be separated depending on their "purchasers." The father may go to Louisiana, the mother may go to Brazil and the children to Haiti. The Africans left Goree through a passageway called the Door



of No Return and were loaded onto ships called "Jesus" or other names like "Desire." This process lasted for almost 400 years on Goree until 1848, the date of abolition of slavery by France. Next week, we will look at the beauty of Senegal.

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