

Missing blacks ignored by most media

By Hazel Trice Edney
NATIONAL NEWSPAPER
PUBLISHERS ASSOCIATION

WASHINGTON — When 24-year-old Tamika Huston of Spartanburg, S.C., did not return home on June 2 last year, her mother, Gabriella Simehehe, her friends and family began relying on every resource to find her.



Huston

Hoping to get quick, widespread coverage on the 4-foot-11, 125-pound aspiring singer, they called in a missing person's report to the Spartanburg, S.C. Police Department, they reached out to the local news media, missing persons agencies, and to the national news stations. It seemed, however, the national airwaves were already crowded as day after day the stories of missing white women took precedent over people of color.

"In reference to Natalie Holloway and the others, I mean, I'm going through the same thing they're going through. They've gotten the attention that they deserve to get and I wish we could receive the same attention they've been getting," says Simehehe. "I guess they just

pick a formula that the public would like to see. I'm angry behind this because every person should be treated equal."

The sagas of Holloway, the American student who vanished on the Caribbean island of Aruba; Atlanta's Jennifer Wilbanks, the "runaway bride," who returned home safely from New Mexico after faking an abduction; and Fresno, Calif.'s Laci Peterson, whose husband, Scott, has been convicted and sentenced to death for the murder of her and their unborn son, are a few among those that Simehehe watched being aired day after day while her daughter and others were not mentioned.



Figueroa

The stories that have been aired are quite diverse, but the victims all have one thing in common. They are all white, young and pretty. That mold only compounded the pain for Huston's aunt, Rebekah Howard, a public relations expert in Florida.

Howard recalled the morning that the news of a Salt Lake City, Utah case of missing jogger Lori Hacking hit the airwaves July 19 last

year.

"Literally within hours after her not returning from her morning jog, it was all over the news," Howard says. "I was so frustrated because literally all the same programs, all the same correspondents who I had been reaching out to — to no avail — were all over that story. That's when it really hit home for me. 'What makes her story any more compelling than my niece's? What makes her any more important than Tamika?'"

Within four months of national news coverage, Hacking's husband, Mark, confessed to having murdered his wife and her body was recovered.

Meanwhile, Spartanburg police say they have discovered blood belonging to Huston under a carpet inside the former apartment of a man she had been dating. Police won't release his name, but say he has been incarcerated on an unrelated parole violation until the investigation yields enough evidence to charge him in Huston's disappearance.

Investigators say major news coverage of a case always help to bring leads by putting pressure on the police and the community and by broadening the name and face recognition of the person

being sought.

"There does appear there may be some difference in the national news coverage says Lt. Steve Lamb, the lead investigator on the Huston case. At this point more than a year later, he says, "Hope that she is still alive is very slim."

The family holds on to what little hope is left.

"Every time Tamika gets a single coverage from a national program, new leads come in," says Howard. America's Most Wanted was the first national media to pick up the story in March, nine months after she was reported missing. More than a year later, MSNBC and NBC have also aired the story.

"I understand that not every case can be covered as widely as they've been covering Natalie Holloway, for example. But why don't you cut back on that coverage? We don't have to know every single time her mother meets with the police. We don't have to know if her Mom got up this morning and had scrambled eggs," Howard says. "We don't have to know every detail. Report when you have something to report; then you will be able to open it up to make the coverage a little bit more broad."

Meanwhile, Howard has established a Web site, www.tamikahuston.com, that features 22 other missing persons, mostly black, who are having difficulty getting exposure in national media. The cases include nine missing adult black males.

Among other cases of missing persons is the case of Latoya Figueroa, a pregnant 24-year-old Black woman missing since July 18.

The news coverage may not have saved her niece's life, Howard says, "But what I think it could have saved is a lot of heartache for our family because I certainly believe

had the intense media scrutiny been on this case initially, I think we would have found her by now. I think we would have had at least a confession or an arrest in the case. That's where I think the media could have made the difference."

THE CHARLOTTE POST (USPS 965-500) is published weekly for \$40.00 per year by the Charlotte Post Publishing Co., 1531 Camden Rd. Charlotte, NC 28203-4753. Periodicals postage paid at Charlotte, NC. **POSTMASTER:** Send address changes to **THE CHARLOTTE POST**, PO Box 30144, Charlotte, NC 28230

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Crises facing black males needs solutions, panelists say

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he admonished politicians for not assuming responsibility for improving the plight of Blacks and criticized the media's influence on black men.

"We must stop allowing people to gain politically from us and then not reciprocate with dealing and being held accountable to our people," he said. "As long as we allow people to get elected off of us and deliver nothing to us, then part of our problem is that we have such low political self-esteem that we think that the role of our vote is to sponsor others' careers rather than solving the problems of our youth ... Every time we give them support for no support, we add to the marginalization of Black men."

Sharpton said record companies and media have not provided positive images and messages for youths. He pointed to the current movie *Hustle and Flow*, saying young Black men might be imbued by "models of success" shown in the movie's glorification of the "pimp" lifestyle, instead of having positive images to emulate.

"People emulate what they see, and people can't see what is not shown to them," said

Sharpton.

But given the numerous issues facing black men, are they really on the brink of extinction?

Cose and Adelaide Sandford, vice chancellor of the New York State Board of Regents, responded with a resounding No.

"If you look at American culture and take Black males out of the equation, there is no American culture. So no, I don't think they're in danger. But I do think that there is a significant portion of our community that is under siege, and I think that constitutes a devastating problem," said Cose.

Sandford spoke of her concern with using the term "endangered species" to describe African-American males.

"Historically, an endangered species is protected, is given sanctuary, is given support. And then, when it is released again into the ocean or into the air, it goes with a unit that allows for a monitoring of its progress," she said. "How can we possibly use the term 'endangered species' as it applies to men of African ancestry? They are not an endangered species. They have no protection; they have no sanctuary."

Ga. massacre re-enacted

By Alexander M. Ford
THE ATLANTA DAILY WORLD

ATLANTA — These microfilm copies of the Atlanta Daily World show the original headlines reporting the "Monroe Massacre" from 1946. The first one, "LYNCHING BEE STAGED AT MONROE" is from the July 27, 1946 paper.

It was followed up the next day with photographs from the scene and calls for the Governor and FBI to act, beneath the headline "\$10,000 REWARD OFFERED FOR GA. LYNCHERS."

The July 30, 1946 headline shows "FBI Probers Take Over Monroe Massacre; Harrison Guarded." Additional stories on that page note "Lynch Victims Laid to Rest On Ga. 'Black Sunday,'" "White Methodists Blast Monroe Mob," and "Negro Publishers Ask Arnall, Truman to Act On Mobsters."

The July 31, 1946 story headline says, "TRUMAN ORDERS LYNCH PROBE," and reports "Mass-Meet At Wheat Street Thursday Night — Leaders To Seek Statewide Aid for Sorrow-Stricken."

The ADW continued to follow the story and build support for the community. It continues to recall the story on each anniversary.

Streams of sweat slithered down the faces of close to 200 spectators who huddled closely together at the entrance of

the Moore's Ford Bridge in Monroe, Ga. the day that marked the anniversary of the Monroe Massacre on July 25, 1946.

It had been nearly 60 years since the Walton County landmark shrouded a tear-inducing act of hatred. This was the scene of the brutal slayings of two black couples and an unborn child — Roger and Dorothy Malcom (seven months pregnant); George and Mae Dorsey. They were dragged from a car by an estimated 15 to 25 Klansmen, beaten and shot dozens of times along the Apalachee River with shotguns and pistols until they were unrecognizable to their own families.

According to reports in the Atlanta Daily World in 1946, the shootings took place a few days after Roger Malcom went to jail for stabbing a white man who allegedly made advances toward his wife.

After years of investigation, the case remained unsolved and eventually was closed by the FBI.

However, in the mind of state Rep. Tyrone Brooks, president of the Georgia Association of Black Elected Officials, the road to justice was just being paved and pushed him to assemble a motivated and focused crop of activists that included National SCLC president, Charles Steele, who shared his vision of bringing the

events of the past into the conscience of the present.

Through years of careful planning and contemplation, Brooks finally unveiled the fruits of his tireless labor in front of an audience mixed with local residents, media and interested visitors to the area, who viewed a shockingly realistic reenactment of the events that occurred decades ago in late July.

With no formal theatrical training and direction, several volunteers from the local community gathered by activist and narrator of the reenactment, Bobby Evans, used thick tree branches, globs of ketchup and toy guns with fire crackers to recreate a scene in front of the Moore Ford Bridge convincing enough to stun the audience and powerful enough to draw national attention to a mystery that has yet to be solved.

White theatrical masks or sacks with "KKK" scribbled on the sides and placed over the heads of volunteer actors symbolized the Klansmen of the time. The all-black cast used racially degrading language and struggled brusquely while portraying the angry mob. Those representing the victims let off hair-raising screams as they were smeared with ketchup resembling blood.

"This was awesome," said Monroe resident Sandra Glover, who helped behind the scenes.

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