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JAMES E. SHEPARD SERTOMA CLUB FRANK BURNETT SCHOLARSHIP FUND & AWARDS BANQUET - The James E. Shepard Sertoma Club of Durham held its annual Awards Banquet on Sat., April 21. The banquet honors club members, community leaders and students for their exceptional work done for service to mankind. At the banquet this year, recognition was given to the club's 2012 Sertoman of the Year, the 2012 Educator of the Year, the Service to Mankind award recipient and the recipient of the Frank G. Burnett Scholarship. Pictured from left to right are: (L-R) are Laura Wright - F. G. Burnett Scholarship recipient; John C. "Skeepie" Scarbrough - Sertoman of the Year; Dr. Evelyn Schmidt, MD - Service to Mankind award and Barbara Parker - Educator of the Year. The James E. Shepard Sertoma Club is a local affiliate of Sertoma International with a primary purpose of providing assistance to individuals with speech and hearing disorders. (Photo by Jerry Head)

The Conversation on Race We're Having Now

By Lee A. Daniels
Special to the NNPA from thedefendersonline.com
By this time 44 years ago - the two, three, four and five days after April 4, 1968 - the black ghettos of 110 of America's cities were still crackling with unchecked flames, the sound of broken glass, and sporadic gunfire. The fires had quickly wiped out much of those areas' miniscule business districts and some portion of their homes and tenements, swaths of scarred landscapes that in most ghettos would remain blighted for years.
The public's sense of dislocation, of a fear for the future, was the greater because that winter the Tet Offensive in Vietnam had forever erased its belief that U.S. military forces were winning the war against the communist-backed nationalist forces in that split country - an action which significantly influenced President Lyndon Johnson's decision to announce less than a week earlier, on March 31, that he would not seek another term in office.



Some of the lady golfers out for the NAACP Golf Tournament April 23 at Croaisdaile Golf Club. See photos on page 4. (Photo by Lawson)

Judge: Race played role in NC death penalty case

By Emery P. Dalesio
FAYETTEVILLE (AP) - A condemned killer's trial was so tainted by the racially influenced decisions of prosecutors that he should be removed from death row and serve a life sentence, a judge ruled April 20 in a precedent-setting North Carolina decision.
Superior Court Judge Greg Weeks' decision in the case of Marcus Robinson comes in the first test of a 2009 state law that allows death row prisoners and capital murder defendants to challenge their sentences or prosecutors' decisions with statistics and other evidence beyond documents or witness testimony.
Only Kentucky has a law like North Carolina's Racial Justice Act, which says the prisoner's sentence is reduced to life in prison without parole if the claim is successful.
"The Racial Justice Act represents a landmark reform in capital sentencing in our state," Weeks said in Fayetteville on April 20. "There are those who disagree with this, but it is the law."
Race played a "persistent, pervasive and distorting role" in jury selection and couldn't be explained other than that "prosecutors have intentionally discriminated" against Robinson and other capital defendants statewide, Weeks said. Prosecutors eliminated black jurors more than twice as often as white jurors, according to a study by two Michigan State University law professors Weeks said he found highly reliable.
Robinson's case is the first of more than 150 pending cases to get an evidentiary hearing before a judge. Prosecutors said they planned to challenge Weeks' decision, and District Attorney Billy West declined further comment.
Weeks ruled race was a factor in prosecution decisions to reject potential black jurors before the murder trial of Robinson, a black man convicted of killing a white teenager in 1991. The jury that convicted Robinson had nine whites, two blacks and one American Indian.
Robinson and co-defendant Roderick Williams Jr. were convicted of murdering 17-year-old Erik Tornblom after the teen gave his killers a ride from a Fayetteville convenience store. Tornblom was forced to drive to a field, where he was shot with a sawed-off shotgun.
Robinson came close to death in January 2007, but a judge blocked his scheduled execution. Williams is serving a life sentence.
Nearly a dozen members of Tornblom's family left the courtroom without commenting. Robinson's mother, Shirley Burns, said she would advocate for the law, which a new Republican majority in the state's General Assembly is trying to eliminate.
"Everybody is not guilty, everybody is not innocent, but at least be fair," Burns said after the ruling. "It wasn't all about Marcus. It's about anyone who suffers discrimination."
Central to Robinson's case was the Michigan State University study. It reported that, of almost 160 people on North Carolina's death row, 31 had all-white juries, and 38 had only one person of color.
Study co-author and Michigan State professor Barbara O'Brien told a North Carolina legislative panel last month the review of more than 7,400 potential capital jurors couldn't find anything other than race to explain why potential black jurors were rejected by prosecutors more than twice as often as whites.
Robinson's defense attorney James Ferguson of Charlotte told Weeks, who decided the case without a jury, that the study showed race was a significant factor in almost every one of North Carolina's

prosecutorial districts as prosecutors decided to challenge and eliminate black jurors.
"This case is important because it provides an opportunity for all of us to recognize that race far too often has been a significant factor in jury selection in capital cases," Ferguson said when the hearing opened in January.
Union County prosecutor Jonathan Perry, who helped the Cumberland County District Attorney's Office argue the case against Robinson, said the study was untrustworthy because it was based on a too-limited sample of death penalty cases to provide meaningful results. The study also failed to detect numerous nonracial reasons that a person might be struck from a jury, Perry said.
The Republican-led Legislature tried to repeal the Racial Justice Act earlier this year, but lawmakers failed to override a veto by Gov. Beverly Perdue, a Democrat.
In 1998, Kentucky was the first state to enact a similar law. But the American Bar Association said in a report it was unclear exactly how often it has been used except for during the 2003 trial of an African-American man accused of kidnapping and killing his ex-girlfriend, who was white. In that case, the defendant's lawyers used the Kentucky Racial Justice Act during jury selection to include questions that would address the issue of racial discrimination.

Man charged with killing 2 in Durham

(AP) - Police have arrested a man and charged him with shooting and killing a man and woman in an apartment in Durham.
Twenty-five-year-old Timothy Lonell Bell of Durham was arrested April 16 and was charged April 17 with first-degree murder.
Twenty-nine-year-old Faarah Christine Anderson and her live-in boyfriend, 27-year-old Farrahquan Idre Glenn died in the shooting.
Neighbors said Anderson's four children were sleeping upstairs when the shooting occurred.
Police have not released a motive in the shooting.
Bell's family said they did not want to talk with reporters. It was not clear if he has an attorney.
The Durham Department of Social Services picked up the children.

NC highway marker to honor Robert Lee Van

AHOSKIE (AP) - North Carolina placed a highway historical marker in honor of a man born in Ahoskie who served as editor of what became the nation's largest weekly newspaper for blacks for 30 years.
The marker in honor of Robert Lee Vann went up April 20 at the intersection of Academy and First Streets in Ahoskie. Vann was born in 1879 on a nearby farm.
Vann completed college and law school at the Western University of Pennsylvania, then became attorney for the Pittsburgh Courier. Within a few months, he became the newspaper's editor. He also served as special assistant to the attorney general under President Franklin D. Roosevelt.
He died Oct. 24, 1940, in Pittsburgh and is buried in a cemetery there.

Just ahead, on June 6, the assassin Sirhan Sirhan, would be lying in wait in a hotel kitchen in Los Angeles for Senator Robert F. Kennedy. And two months after that, the Democratic National Convention would erupt in pandemonium both inside and outside the convention hall in Chicago.
At that moment in the late 1960s, with Martin Luther King, Jr. dead; with Bobby Kennedy dead, with students on several highly visible college campuses seemingly committed to unending rebellion; with the Democratic Party shattered; with the white "Silent Majority" in a full-throated bellow; with Richard M. Nixon ascending; blacks, it was said, were on their own: the majority of white Americans were in no mood to be sympathetic to, or even listen to their concerns. Many observers - some with barely-contained glee - predicted bad times ahead for America's black Americans.
But those predictions were wrong. What lay ahead for black Americans were complicated times - which, for all the considerable burdens blacks as a group would bear, proved a far better era than any they had ever experienced in their native land.
Those eight months in 1968 - when apocalyptic pronouncements about the nation's imminent crack-up did not seem so far-fetched - are my personal touchstone whenever I hear or read someone bemoaning our distance from that mythical mirage, the Promised Land, or the continuing sharpness of "the racial divide," speaking generally, between blacks and whites.
Such Cassandras, female and male, misread our American racial past and our American racial present. There have been few "Kumbaya" moments in American history, and those that occurred lasted far more briefly than the conventional wisdom admits.
The latest example of this all too common pose is Reniqua Allen's op-ed column in the March 23 /Washington Post/ asserting that President Obama, by not discussing race more often and more bluntly has made it harder to talk about race in America.
"Once Obama became president," Allen, a fellow at the New America Foundation, in Washington, writes at one point, "I thought he might be able to somehow help us break through the status quo of awkwardness and /silence/ (my emphasis) on race." She declares at another point that Obama "hasn't grappled with [the killing of Trayvon Martin], or with the racial disparities and divisions, along with us, guiding us in a way that /only/ (my emphasis) he can - as the commander in chief, as a lawyer, as a community leader and as a black man. The Obama presidency is "post-racial" only in the sense that it gives us an excuse not to grapple with race anymore."
Allen's views constitute an extraordinary misreading of Obama's role in this moment of the racial history of America.
One reason why is that this isn't the early 1960s when the issue of race was, literally, a virtually exclusive matter of black Americans and white Americans, when blacks' direct challenge of the evils of the South's racist system compelled the rest of white America to make a stark choice between supporting good or supporting evil. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s religiosity, commitment to nonviolence and oratorical skills made him the perfect spokesman for the Civil Rights Movement's seemingly single-minded (but not really) objectives of civil equality. He was, in fact, the perfect equal across the color line to the cool, pragmatic John F. Kennedy, whose wariness of strongly supporting the Movement's goals for two years benefited black Americans in two ways.
First, his waffling - which accurately mirrored that of most whites who were not committed segregationists - gave the Movement time (Continued On Page 2)