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## In Trayvon Martin case, history's ghosts linger

By Jesse Washington

Focus on the details, and the cases seem very different. One was led by virulent white racists, the other by a part-Hispanic neighborhood watchman who insists he faced a vicious attack. One was lighted down and dumped in a river; in the other case, police were led by the shooter himself.

Six decades and myriad details separate the deaths of Emmett Till and Trayvon Martin, two black teenagers felled by violence. Yet the way America reacted to Martin's death - and the issues that followed afterward - his case has created a national racial conversation much the same manner as the saga of Till, infamously murdered in 1955 for flirting with a white woman.

Plenty of people do not see the Martin case as about race at all. But for others who study America's racial past and present, each killing is a defining moment for its era - a fraught microcosm of what we are, and what we are trying to become.

"Trayvon Martin is today's race case," says Christopher Darden, a prosecutor in the O.J. Simpson murder trial, another defining American moment. "I don't know that anybody can really sit there and objectively look at the evidence. It arrives with so many different kinds of emotions."

Just as the Till saga remains a searing archetype of the brutal segregation that gave rise to the civil rights movement, the Martin case captures the ambiguous meanings of race in America at a time when both the president and the lowest segments of society are black.

(Continued On Page 7)



The rap group Chuck D and Public Enemy received the key to the City of Durham prior to their concert June 16 at DPAC. From left to right are: Brother James, Malik Muhammad, Mayor William V. "Bill" Bell, Chuck D, Professor Griff and Min. Paul Scott.



City Council member A.J. Howard Clement, III donated his papers to the North Carolina Collection of the Durham County Public Library. See photos on page 2)

## NC Senate passes gun expansion, new safeguards

By Chris Kardish

RALEIGH (AP) - A measure adding more places to where people can carry or store concealed firearms in North Carolina and repealing a requirement to get a license to buy a handgun passed the North Carolina Senate June 14.

The Senate measure has accumulated more opponents as it has broadened the scope of a bill that already passed the House. The bill also includes a number of tougher gun-related penalties and requires local clerks of court to report mental health findings to a national criminal background-check database.

The enhanced reporting requirements earned the approval of the North Carolina Sheriffs' Association, but the organization opposes the Senate version as a whole because it ends a law that requires people to obtain a license from a local sheriff to buy a handgun. Attorney General Roy Cooper, who also opposes the repeal, says sheriffs currently check applicants for citizenship, convictions for violent crime and other issues.

Gregg Stahl, the Sheriffs' Association's lobbyist, said federal background checks at gun stores aren't adequate in the state because reporting requirements that would be required under the bill have been optional, so the state needs sheriffs to help screen gun buyers.

Sen. Buck Newton, R-Wilson, said the law dates to the Jim Crow era and was reportedly used to prevent African-Americans from obtaining guns. He also says the five-year licenses allow people who are later convicted of crimes that would bar them from gun ownership to use the permit to obtain weapons.

Democrats generally opposed the bill, saying it oversteps popular opinion and encourages more gun violence. Republicans say the law targets illegal gun use while promoting the Second Amendment for well-trained and law-abiding owners.

The Senate's changes allow concealed-carry permit holders to store weapons in locked cars on the campus of any public university or school. It also clarifies state law to say permit holders can carry their firearms on trails, other passive recreation areas and playgrounds.

It keeps the House provision allowing concealed-carry permit holders to take weapons to places where alcohol is served or events that charge admission as long as an owner doesn't expressly forbid it.

## Racial Justice Act repeal heads to NC Gov. McCrory

By Chris Kardish

RALEIGH (AP) - A bill that Republicans say is designed to clear the way for executions to resume in North Carolina is headed to Gov. Pat McCrory's desk after receiving final legislative approval June 13.

The Senate approved changes made by the House to a bill that repeals the Racial Justice Act, a landmark 2009 law that allows convicted murderers to reduce a death sentence to life in prison if they can prove that race played a major role in their cases. The law had already been weakened last year by Republicans, who successfully pushed to restrict the use of statistics to prove bias and require other forms of evidence.

The bill also protects medical professionals who assist in an execution from disciplinary action, but the provision repealing a major Democratic initiative consumed most of the debate as the measure moved through the legislature.

Republicans argue the 2009 law allows virtually any death-row inmate to contest a conviction on racial grounds, which has led to 152 of 156 felons awaiting execution to appeal. They say that even white convicts can prompt an appeal merely by showing a higher frequency of capital cases in their jurisdictions involve people of their race, and plenty of avenues already exist to legitimately contest a conviction on racial grounds.

The true intent, Republicans say, is to force a de facto moratorium on the death penalty for murderers fairly convicted through jury trials. "RJA has only been able to be used in cases we know we have a cold-blooded, first-degree murderer who attempts to call the District Attorney a racist and himself the victim," said Sen. Thom Goolsby, R-New Hanover and the bill's lead sponsor.

Republicans have veto-proof majorities in both chambers of the General Assembly.

Democrats argue there's plenty of evidence that those juries are racially biased. They cite a Michigan State University study of North Carolina that found evidence of prosecutors striking black jurors from capital cases at more than twice the rate of others over two decades.

Sen. Floyd McKissick, D-Durham, said a majority of the law's original backers support capital punishment but saw a system that doesn't provide adequate justice for all.

"In my mind it's really a sad, shameful day in North Carolina to turn our backs on our commitment to eliminate racial bias from court rulings in capital cases," he said.

McCrory opposed the Racial Justice Act during his 2012 campaign. He called the Racial Justice Act "a lousy bill" at a gubernatorial debate last fall.

"By the way, it's not just African Americans who are using the Racial Justice Act to delay the death penalty, it's everyone ... and that shows the joke that it's become," he said. "And it's just a delay tactic that's costing the taxpayer a lot of money."

Kim Genardo, McCrory's communications director, wouldn't say whether or not he will sign the bill.

"When and if the Racial Justice Act repeal comes our way, the Governor will have ten days to make his decision," she said in an email.

## Senate Democrats discuss need for 'black agenda'

By Suzanne Gamboa

WASHINGTON (AP) - The sole Democratic African-American senator cast doubt on the need for a "black agenda" from the president and on its chances of passage in Congress during a Democratic forum with largely African-American reporters June 13.

Massachusetts Sen. William "Mo" Cowan said the issues that black Americans are concerned about are the same as those causing white Americans concern, although to different degrees.

"I think he has to stick with the agenda and what he thinks is going to move the country forward," Cowan said referring to President Barack Obama. Cowan is temporarily filing the seat vacated by John Kerry who is now secretary of state. Republican Sen. Tim Scott of South Carolina also is African-American.

Since his election in 2008 as the first black president, Obama has been hounded by questions about how well his administration has addressed the needs of the black community.

He has had some vocal detractors but also supporters, like Cowan.

Cowan and other senators participating in the forum organized by the Democratic Steering Outreach Committee, agreed that if Obama had sent a package of legislation as a "black agenda," its chance for passage would be slim.

"It would not be dead on arrival in the Senate. It would be dead on arrival in the House," said Sen. Debbie Stabenow, D-Mich.

On the other hand, Obama has had some pieces of legislation that could positively impact black Americans, such as the Affordable Care Act intended to provide access to affordable health care, Cowan said.

"I think once we come to grips with our budgetary situation and dealing with those realities, getting out of this sequester nonsense, it will go a long way to improve not just the lives of black Americans, but all Americans," Cowan said.

Sen. Mark Begich, D-Alaska, said entrepreneurship, education and unemployment in the black community, whether called part of the black or American agenda, do deserve more attention.

Separately on June 14, the Urban Institute issued a report revisiting issues raised in a landmark 1965 report that became known as the Moynihan report, named for then-Assistant Labor Secretary Daniel Patrick Moynihan. The report focused on the roots of poverty in black America and blamed the growth of single-mother families, causing controversy.

The study notes the black community still is struggling with the same problems of joblessness and poverty.

Unlike Moynihan, the Urban Institute study said the issues faced by black Americans cannot be solved only by raising more children in two-parent families. Instead, broader strategies are needed to address criminal justice policies, residential segregation and concentrated poverty, the state of public schools in black communities and lingering discrimination.

Sen. Chris Coons, D-Del., said Congress needs to be prepared "to act legislatively to deal with the likely consequences of a federal government that will be more reined in" should the Supreme Court strike down protections against discrimination in the Voting Rights Act and prohibit colleges from considering race in admissions.

"There is, in my view a black agenda because there is a very real experience of ongoing discrimination going on in this country," Coons said.