

Civil Rights Journal

In The Valley Of The Shadow Of Death

At the beginning of this year there were 2,976 Americans on death row. In a country where African Americans make up 12 percent of the population, 40 percent of those on death row are black. In some states, like Pennsylvania, that percentage approaches 60 percent. They are those who live daily in the valley of the shadow of death, in the words of Mumia Abu-Jamal, who is on death row in Pennsylvania.

You hear a lot of talk today about the death penalty, whether in the government's resolve to invoke the death penalty for those responsible for the Oklahoma City bombing, or in the case of Susan Smith, the mother accused of killing her sons in South Carolina, or in the mouths of politicians seeking to sound tough on crime. What you do not hear about are the hundreds, perhaps thousands, of death penalty cases where innocent people are convicted or where poor or black prisoners receive very inadequate legal advice. Here is one such story.

Girvies Davis is scheduled to be executed by the state of Illinois today May 17. Girvies Davis may be innocent of the crimes for which he will be executed. Convicted solely on the

evidence of an alleged confession which he claims was coerced, Girvies Davis is trapped in a legal system which so far has been unable to respond to the very real inconsistencies of the case.

Girvies Davis, a 4th grade dropout from East St. Louis, admits that he was involved in an armed robbery in which a store clerk was killed, although he denies that he killed the clerk. Ten days after his arrest for the robbery, police came into Davis' cell at midnight and took him on a four hour drive to look for "evidence." When he returned, he is alleged to have written a confession to more than 20 crimes, including 11 murders -- virtually every unsolved murder in the Belleville - East St. Louis area at that time.

Girvies Davis was then convicted of four murders and sentenced to death for one of them, the murder of Charles Bibel, an 89-year-old Belleville man. The problem is that Girvies Davis could not have written that confession because at that time Girvies Davis was illiterate and unable to write more than his name, a fact of which the jury was kept unaware. The problem is that even the prosecution admits that other per-

sons committed three of those crimes to which he confessed. The problem is that the prosecution systematically used peremptory challenges to exclude all African Americans from the Davis jury, a practice which the Supreme Court later held unconstitutional in a ruling that they did not apply retroactively. In fact, in each of his trials, he faced an all-white jury.

The irony is that in the sixteen years since his incarceration, Girvies Davis is a changed man. He learned to read and write and earned a GED and experienced a religious conversion which his former prison superintendent described as "very legitimate." he finished a correspondence degree from a Bible college and became an ordained minister.

Despite all of these facts and a variety of other complications and complexities, Girvies Davis is scheduled to die today May 17 unless he receives a stay or unless he receives clemency from Governor Edgar. It would be a tragedy if an innocent man is executed for a crime he may not have committed. This is but one story from the valley of the shadow of death. But it could be the story for many, especially the poor and especially the black, on death row.

Seattle Black Publisher Raises \$15,000 For Oklahoma City Relief Fund



Shown above are Lecia Swain, editor/publisher of the Oklahoma City Ebony Tribune Newspaper, presenting a check on behalf of Chris Bennett Enterprises Charity of Seattle, to ministers of the Oklahoma City Christian Relief Fund. In photo from left: Rev. Dr. W. K. Jackson, pastor, St. John Missionary Baptist Church; Rev. Dr. J. A. Reed, Jr., pastor, Fairview Baptist Church and president of Concerned Clergy for Spiritual Renewal; Dr. Clyde C. Carroll, Baptist Ministers' financial secretary; and Rev. Dr. Major L. Jemison, co-pastor, St. John Baptist Church and 2nd vice president of the National Progressive Baptists Association. The Oklahoma City ministers also received letters from elementary students at Seattle's St. Therese School to be presented to the children and their families of the nation's worst terrorist act.

Chris Bennett Enterprises Charity, through a community radiothon, raised over \$15,000 to assist Oklahoma City's African American community in the tragic bombing of the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building April 19. Many African Americans--mostly women and children--lost their lives in the tragedy. Over \$70,000 has been raised in the Oklahoma City relief efforts. Chris Bennett is publisher of The Seattle Medium, Seattle Metro Homemaker, Tacoma True Citizen Newspaper, The Portland Medium Newspaper and Soul Town Review News Magazine. Bennett also owns radio stations KRIZ in Seattle, Washington, KZIZ in Tacoma, Washington and KBMS in Portland, Oregon.

--Photo Courtesy/Oklahoma City Ebony Tribune

Gospel Musical At Lutheran Inner City Ministries Community Center



Johnny Ray Watson

A Gospel Music Festival, Featuring Johnny Ray Watson and some

local talent will be held at the center on Saturday, June 2, beginning at 6: P.M.

The center is located at 4219 N. E. MLK. Jr. Blv., Portland.

Johnny Ray is no stranger in Portland. His last visit was two years ago at King School.

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A native of Lorenzo, Texas, he now resides in southern California with his wife, Brinda Kay and their five children. His wonderful God given voice has touched men and

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Johnny Ray will also sing during the 10:00 A.M. worship service of Martin Luther Memorial Church, which is held at the center every Sunday.

The public is invited.

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YPWW 6:30 P.M.
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