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OPINION

Abolish the Unfair Death Penalty

An assault on human rights and racial equality

BY JUDGE GREG MATHIS



On April 29, a death row inmate in Oklahoma died of a heart attack after a botched execution.

At age 23, Clayton D. Lockett was convicted of murder and had been on death row for 15 years. During his recent execution, shortly after the anesthetic drugs were administered, Mr. Lockett began to writhe in extreme pain and died shortly after. The drug mixture used to execute him was not wholly ad-

ministered due to a vein failure.

His death has raised serious questions about the humane nature of capital punishment and following Mr. Lockett's death President Obama indicated that the U.S. Department of Justice would begin a review into capital punishment in America. Mr. Lockett's death has provoked all of us into an overdue conversation on the merits of the death penalty.

For years research has indicated that there is a disturbing racial bias when deciding who gets sentenced to the death penalty. According to statistics from the U.S. Department of Justice - Bureau of Justice Statistics there were 3,082 death row inmates in 2011 and more than half of them were African American or Hispanic.

African Americans and His-

panics only make up about 30 percent of the U.S. population, but more than half of prison inmates on death row. There is significant evidence that suggest jurists are more likely to sentence minority offenders to the death penalty than white offenders.

A Michigan State University review of North Carolina's court system found evidence that African-American's were systematically excluded from juries determining sentences for convicts eligible for capital punishment. They found that qualified black jurors were twice more likely to be removed from juries than whites.

In addition, the review found that individuals who committed crimes against whites were more likely to receive the death penalty. More than 80 percent of

executions in North Carolina involved white murder victims.

I also am concerned with the number of individuals on death row who have been wrongfully accused. Since 1973, more than 130 people have been released from death row due to wrongful convictions. The most recent case occurred in 2012.

A joint study led by University of Michigan Law Professor Sam R. Gross found that 4.1 percent of death row inmates during the modern era have been wrongfully executed. Famously, in 2004 Cameron Todd Willingham was executed after being accused of burning his home down and killing his three children. After his death investigators discovered there was no evidence to suggest the fire was started by arson. Mr.

Willingham and several others have been wrongfully executed under our nation's existing capital punishment laws.

Attorney General Eric Holder, an established opponent of the death penalty, will be responsible for the upcoming review on capital punishment. I welcome this upcoming inquiry and hope to see changes in current policy. The death penalty in America runs contrary to our nation's commitment to international human rights and racial equality and it should be repealed.

Judge Greg Mathis is known for his advocacy for equal justice. His inspirational life story of a street youth who rose from jail to Judge has provided hope to millions who watch him on the TV court show Judge Mathis.

Sadly, We have Not Overcome Racism

How to heal the wounded souls of many

BY THE REV. BENTLEY DE BARDELABEN



Racist comments have been metaphorically showering through the airways. Nevada rancher Cliven Bundy, Virginia KKK imperial wizard Frank Ancona, and California billionaire real estate mogul Donald Sterling have all recently made absurd comments about race.

Since the election of President Barack Obama, there are people who claim that we live in a post-racial American society. Unfortunately, that is not the case.

It is true that people, especially the youth, are more accepting of others who are of different races and ethnicities, religions, sexual orientation and beyond. But sadly, the United States has not overcome racism. How could she?

Our legal system was founded on such evil and abhorrent thinking. It has only been 50 years since the signing of the Civil Rights Act. Prior to that, America had 250 years of chattel slavery and an additional 100 years of legal terrorism against people of color commonly known as Jim Crow.

I am not sure how many

people of color based solely on race. Moreover, religion has played an extremely large role in this blasphemous distortion against humanity. Therefore, I receive no pleasure in saying, "Yes, Virginia: There are still racists in North America!"

In a society which created the 24-hour news cycle and reality television, people having capac-

tunity for all citizens of all races/ethnicities to publicly engage in a much needed conversation on race. Not for the purpose of blaming or shaming one another. But to educate, share experiences, lament and most importantly to acknowledge the pain and sin this nation unjustly heaped upon a group of people based on skin color. This would be no easy action to initiate. However, it is a necessary step to begin healing the wounded souls of many and this nation.

Fortunately for all, there are many skilled persons to aid in helping America launch this voyage. We need only the will (and perhaps, mandate) to do it. In my humble opinion, it is the only way we can begin to get at the desired outcome of a post-racial America.

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people realize that between 1790 and 1952, the only immigrants guaranteed to receive naturalization in order to become legal American citizens were white. I am not saying that others did not obtain it. I am saying it was legal to deny people who were not white. This is our nation's historical truth.

With this as the larger backdrop of our history as a republic, some people, as well as laws and/or systems in 2014 still harm

ity to record audio and video, or take pictures with their mobile phones, anyone's thoughts or behaviors (rightly or wrongly) can be utilized to fill air time on news programs or make profit. It may not be right, but it is what happens. There are people who crave "fifteen minutes of fame" and there are multiple venues through which they can achieve it. Racists included.

Yet, what is missing in this current landscape is the oppor-

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