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# Valdosta Project Change

September 1999

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# Affirmative Action May be Losing Ground

By Rebecca Yull

Through the many years of United States history, people have been stepped on, used and abused. In 1964 the Civil Rights Act was implemented to guarantee all people equal rights and protection under the law. Subsequently, in 1972 the Equal Employment Opportunity Act came about to give the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission the power to enforce the Equal Pay Act, the Age Discrimination in Employment Act, Title VII, Americans with Disabilities Act and sections of the Rehabilitation Act.

As a result, today we have affirmative action which is usually misunderstood and is increasingly coming under scrutiny. Many states have stopped requiring affirmative action policies in public and private enterprise. Here in the state of Georgia Southeastern Legal Foundation has filed a federal lawsuit claiming Atlanta's affirmative action program is unconstitutional. They've either sued or threatened to sue other local governments in the state prompting changes in the municipalities' so-called affirmative action contracting policies.

But these programs have been a positive for many businesses, Valdosta/Lowndes County Chamber of Commerce President Myrna Ballard said. "The set-asides for minority has made a big difference. Instead of maybe taking 10 years to get their business off the ground, they may have been able to do so in a couple years," she said.

Many people think affirmative action is a quota system when it is not.

Affirmative action is "a program that ensures every employee and every applicant has a fair opportunity for employment and promotion," Anna S. Lawhorn, civilian personnel officer at Moody Air Force Base, said. "No, it's not about quotas."

The problem some people have about affirmative action is that some policies are quota-dri-

ven. The contracting policy in Atlanta awards one-third of all city contracts to minority or female-owned businesses. This is a quota, and in an area where the national majority is the minority.

"We set goals," Lawhorn said. At Moody, the goal is to have the employee population mirror the population of the available work force in the area, regarding civilian personnel. "We're subject to

federal affirmative action standards, not state," Lawhorn said.

As far as employment, Lowndes County has no affirmative action plan, Mickey Tillman, director of personnel, said. "It's based on qualifications. (But) our hiring policy does not tolerate any discrimination."

And the county has no affirmative action plan for contracting. "The county's purchasing policy doesn't lend anything to

affirmative action," County Manager Alan Ours said. Contracts and purchases are based on quality and cost, he said.

The city of Valdosta is like the county, having no affirmative action program for purchasing and contracting. "It's the low and best bid," City Manager Larry Hanson said. "The only time we don't buy from the low bid is if it does not meet the specifications of the city."



The Valdosta Daily Times

4A — Wednesday, Sept. 1, 1999

## YOUR OPINIONS

### Where will the people go?

After reading about the substandard housing in our city, I decided to express some of my views on the issue. I thank God a common citizen still has the freedom to have his views published, even if not shared by most.

Concerning substandard housing, I feel we have a good example of good people with good intentions wanting to make all of our city beautiful and comfortable. Who could be against that? I'm all for it, but I know in the long run it is fantasy. It is a mental thing.

In order to have and keep the prettiest and the best neighborhoods there must be an outlet for those that won't conform, for whatever reason. You don't get rid of drug dealing by destroying substandard housing. You just disperse them all over the best neighborhoods.

If drug dealers hang out in vacant houses, we know where they are. Just lock them up. The city can't provide enough housing if the low-income landlords are forced out of business. Think about it.

Freddie L. Sirmans Sr.  
Valdosta

# Questions remain

Tribunal challenges official version of inmate death

By Brian Lawson  
THE VALDOSTA DAILY TIMES

VALDOSTA — With a blend of spiritual energy and critical analysis, the People's Tribunal pledged Thursday to let the "facts speak" concerning the death of Willie James Williams.

The group's rally included more than 250 enthusiastic supporters at St. James Baptist Church and marked the first anniversary of Williams' death while in sheriff's department custody.

While there were songs and passionate speeches, the focus of the meeting was a critical examination of the official version of the case involving Williams. Last year, a coroner's inquest jury determined by a 3-2 vote — split down racial lines with three white jurors in the majority and two black jurors dissenting — that Williams' injuries while being arrested Sept. 1, 1998, were not the result of involuntary manslaughter on the part of Deputy Kevin Farmer.

A Lowndes County grand jury later voted not to indict Farmer on the same charge.

Williams died Sept. 2, 1998, following a brain hemorrhage caused by "blunt force trauma" according to medical records. Farmer testified all of Williams' injuries were due to his hitting his face on the ground after being taken down by Farmer while resisting arrest.

The case was reviewed by the FBI and sent to the U.S. Department of Justice Civil Rights Division for review last fall. Efforts to



Paul Leavy/The Valdosta Daily Times

Dr. Ari Santas, second vice president of the People's Tribunal, presents evidence to the crowd gathered at St. James Baptist Church Thursday evening.

determine the case status from the Justice Department Thursday afternoon were unsuccessful, but Joseph Wiley Jr., the Williams family attorney, said the government has told him the case is still open.

Thursday's presentation, by Dr. Ari Santas, the Second Vice President of the Tribunal, challenged the findings, noting the of-

ficial record provides information discounted or not dealt with during the coroner's inquest.

"I've heard it said 'the facts speak for themselves.' But that's only true if the facts are allowed to speak," Santas said.

Santas noted several things that raise questions about Williams' death:

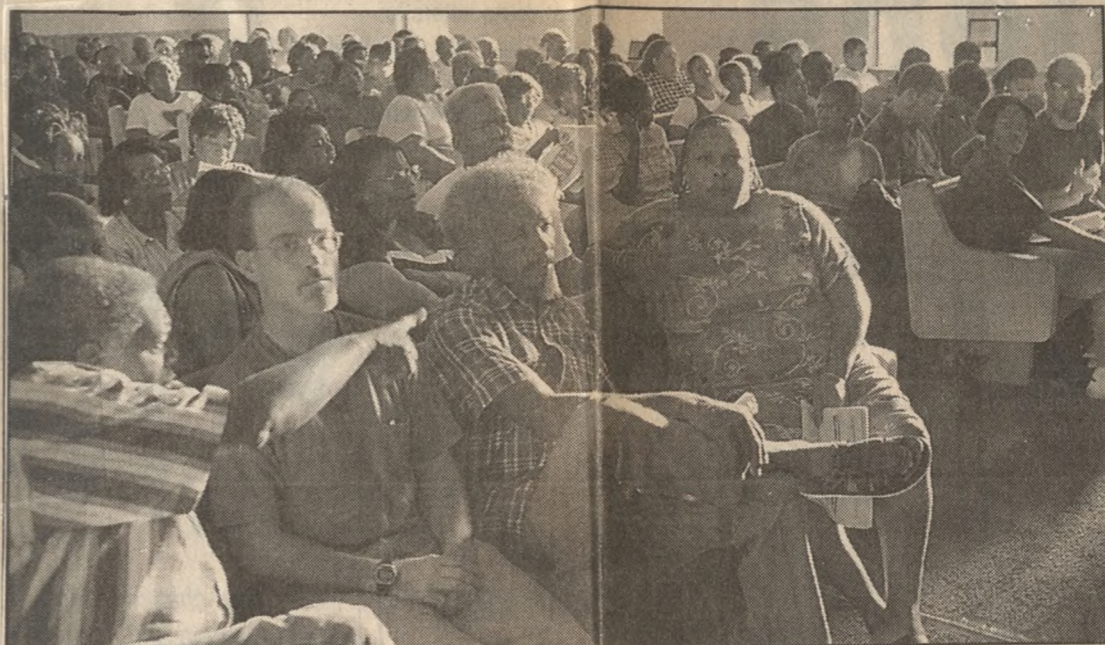
- A patrol car video tape,

which, while somewhat murky, appears to show Farmer striking a handcuffed Williams three times with a flashlight while he leads him to a waiting patrol car. The tape, enhanced by a company retained by a Williams family attorney, drew a mixture of gasps and angry murmurs from the

Please see **QUESTIONS**, page 3A

Friday, Sept. 3, 1999 — 3A

The Valdosta Daily Times



Paul Leavy/The Valdosta Daily Times

St. James Baptist Church filled to standing room only Thursday evening as members of the community gathered for the presentation given by the Peoples Tribunal.

Continued from page 1A

## Questions: Farmer testified he never struck Williams

crowd.

● Differences in the autopsy report and inquest testimony by Dr. Anthony Clark, the medical examiner who performed Williams' autopsy. In his inquest testimony, Clark described several of Williams' injuries, including a broken vertebrae in his neck and internal bleeding due to broken ribs, as much less severe than described in the autopsy report. The autopsy report noted 32 injuries to Williams, including two oval bruises on the back of Williams' head. Clark also noted oval bruises with a linear pattern on Williams' back.

● Changes in Farmer's official statements, from the initial incident report that noted he "placed Williams on the ground until more help arrived" to a statement to the FBI where he is reported saying he "took him to the ground" because "Williams was moving his arms behind his back toward's Deputy Farmer's gun side and was trying to escape."

Farmer's patrol car tape shows a docile Williams, who struggled briefly while being handcuffed and lying atop his own car. There is no additional resistance by Williams recorded, but audio tapes reveal Farmer frustrated by Williams' refusal to spit out a cigarette or get into the patrol car. On the tape Williams asks repeatedly about the fate of his car being left in the road during that time. There are later sounds of a struggle and Farmer saying "get up." Williams later says, "you know you threw me to the ground."

Santas also expressed concern that no videotape has been made available by the sheriff's department on Williams' booking despite requests from attorneys. Requested medical records have also not been provided by South Georgia Medical Center concerning Williams' condition and treatment, Santas said.

During testimony at the coroner's inquest last year,

Farmer testified he never struck Williams. The grand jury noted there was no evidence Williams was beaten.

The People's Tribunal was formed following Williams' death and plans to march with supporters Saturday beginning at 8 a.m. from the site of Williams' arrest on S. Lee Street to the Lowndes County Jail.

The Rev. Floyd Rose, the tribunal's president, urged the crowd to participate, noting he promised the Williams family he would not rest until "the murderers" were brought to justice.

"I promise not to let Sheriff Ashley Paulk and those responsible to rest either until that happens," Rose said to cheers. "On Saturday we are going back to the Lowndes County Jail, and we have invited Mr. Paulk to come speak to us, to explain the difference between the story he told us and what we got now."

To contact reporter Brian Lawson, please call 244-3400, ext. 239

# SOUTH GEORGIA SUNDAY THE VALDOSTA DAILY TIMES

Sunday, Sept. 5, 1999

Valdosta, Ga.

One Dollar

Comm



Paul Leavy/The Valdosta Daily Times

**“We were not looking for an armed conflict, but we were prepared to handle any situation.**

— Capt. Ken Cooper  
Lowndes County Jail Administrator

Marchers wave banners and raise their arms as they cross the guard line after the Lowndes County Sheriff's Department allowed them to pass after a brief confrontation Saturday morning.

## Tense moments

March by People's Tribunal ends in prayer after brief encounter with law enforcement

By Brian Lawson  
THE VALDOSTA DAILY TIMES

VALDOSTA — Nearly 200 protesters risked arrest Saturday morning while seeking to pray on the jailhouse steps during a tense confrontation with the Lowndes County Sheriff's Department.

Led by the Rev. Floyd Rose, the group crossed the Lowndes County Correctional Center's "guard line" and was blocked in the parking lot for a few charged minutes by about 12 deputies and Valdosta Police Department officers.

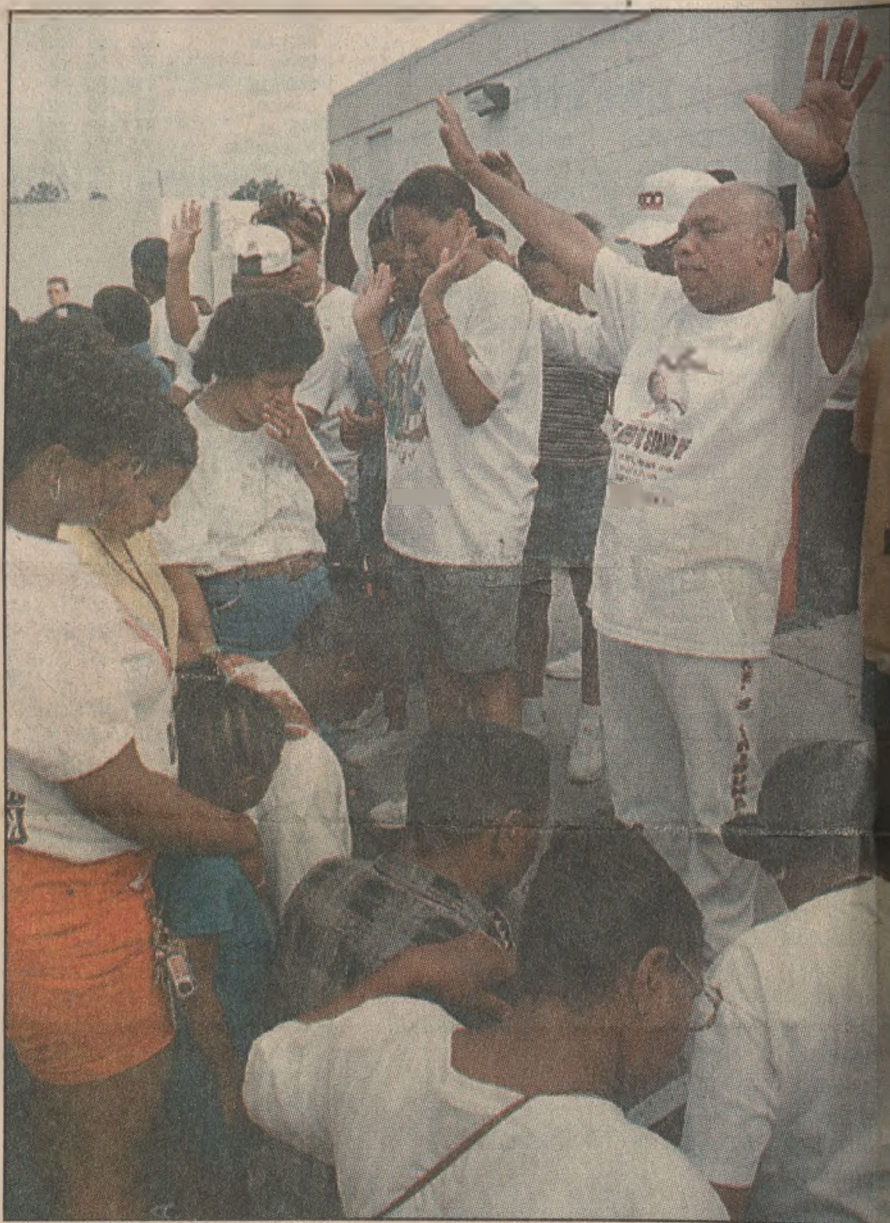
Jail Administrator Capt. Ken Cooper sought to disperse the crowd, but Dr. Ari Santas challenged the request, saying it was public property and noting the guard line was established to keep out weapons, drugs and alcohol, not to bar peaceful assembly.

"If you keep us out, you're violating the law," Santas said.

As protesters chanting "no justice, no peace" sought to move forward, they were blocked and in some cases shoved back by law enforcement. As the shoving and jostling continued, the crowd was finally allowed to surge ahead after Rose explained to Cooper the group was there to pray.

The prayer, calling for "change to come" and punctuated by cries of thanksgiving to God, culminated a memorial march and rally sponsored by the People's Tribunal to protest the Sept. 2, 1998, death of Willie James Williams while in sheriff's department custody.

Cooper said the department stopped the marchers to determine what was planned.



Paul Leavy/The Valdosta Daily Times

Rev. Floyd Rose leads other marchers in a prayer in front of the Lowndes County Jail Saturday morning, culminating a memorial march and rally sponsored by the People's Tribunal to protest the Sept. 2, 1998, death of Willie James Williams while in the custody of the sheriff's department.

"We were basically looking to find out what their intentions were," he said. "We were not looking for an armed con-

flict, but we were prepared to handle

See MARCH on Page 7A

The Valdosta Daily Times

Continued from Page 1A

## March: Authorities, crowd disagree on inmate's death

... situation. I was concerned there could be a few hotheads, on both sides, who might over-react. Once we got them calmed down enough to find out what they wanted to do, we let them move on."

Pat Santas, who had earlier spoken to the assembled crowd about the need to "connect with people in this community," was briefly handcuffed and led away by a Valdosta Police officer after she sidestepped his efforts to push her and others back. As the crowd was allowed to move ahead, Santas was escorted to a patrol car. Her husband and several other supporters drew attention to her plight, and Valdosta Police Commander Johnny Fason soon secured her release.

"She disobeyed the officer, but I told him to let her loose because they let everybody else go on," Fason said.

The Tribunal has argued Williams' death was not due to a fall during an arrest Sept. 1, 1998, as was officially determined by a coroner's inquest jury and a Lowndes County grand jury, but the result of a law enforcement beating.

Sheriff's department officials have noted three witnesses testified they did not see Williams being beaten by Deputy Kevin Farmer. Farmer also testified he did not strike Williams during the arrest, but only struggled with the suspect to control him after he refused to follow repeated requests to get into the squad car. Both juries determined Farmer did not commit involuntary manslaughter in the course of the arrest which led to Williams' death.

A U.S. Department of Justice spokesman said Friday there is an ongoing criminal investigation into the case.

The Tribunal disputes those findings and presented evidence Thursday night suggesting Williams was beaten. At a rally Thursday, Dr. Santas outlined to about 250 people information he said raises important questions about the case. He described evidence from the autopsy report showing oval bruises on the back of Williams' head, which could have been caused by a flashlight.



Paul Leavy/The Valdosta Daily Times

Maggie Woods waves police tape as she and others leave the march Saturday morning. The tape was used by the sheriff's department to mark off the guard line at the Lowndes County Jail, and was removed by marchers at the end of the march.

Santas also noted the state medical examiner downplayed the severity of Williams' injuries at the inquest, while the autopsy report paints a more serious picture. And he showed an enhanced videotape, provided by a Williams family attorney, which is murky, but appears to show a deputy striking Williams with a flashlight while leading him to a patrol car.

The protesters, many of whom insisted they were marching for justice — not out of any kind of hatred — walked about two miles Saturday morning from the site of Williams' arrest on South Lee Street to the jail complex. Rose told the crowd there he had sent a letter to Sheriff Ashley Paulk inviting him to explain differences between the official version of Williams' death and the inconsistencies described by Santas. Paulk did not appear at the rally.

Rose had earlier warned the crowd they might be arrested for crossing the guard line and assembling near the jail.

"I'm not asking what's going

to happen to me if I cross that line," Rose said. "I'm asking what's going to happen to the next Willie James Williams if I don't cross that line. I'm not asking anyone to go with me, that's a choice you make. This is all about non-violence. If they arrest you, go quietly, respectfully. Don't let them trump up some bogus charge that you resisted arrest."

Nearly all of the crowd followed Rose and his wife. Some older participants, those with young children and those with difficulty walking stayed back.

To contact reporter Brian Lawson please call 244-3400, ext. 239

## ► YOUR OPINIONS

### We must learn to respect all people

Recent race relations discussions emphasize how few people understand that we have no choice of birth parents or skin color.

A growing variety of individuals resulting from miscegenation makes racial categories outdated. Few pure blood lines exist today. Blindness toward appearances is a wonderful asset and a meaningful necessity. Natural blindness sets the example by preventing prejudice toward others based simply on how they look.

What should it matter the color of skin since it's all outside and not within? Biblical and historical texts ignore skin color characteristics, while significantly stating other differences.

Once we learn to respect all others as people we will be rid of the constant prejudice and charges of discrimination that plague our relationship.

William M. Eanes  
Valdosta

with men and women who were non-violent, respectful and dignified.

Cooper knows in his heart that he and his men were not "in control" last Saturday, regardless of what he tells the press. Instead, a peaceful, God-fearing, dignified group of women, men and children of various races and backgrounds were in control. They wanted to pray and assemble peacefully and they did.

I must also add that not a white minister was to be found at either event. Having called four of Valdosta's largest white churches to invite ministers (and their congregations) to come out to the gatherings and get the facts themselves, I find this disheartening. As a Christian, I find it confusing and sad.

With that in mind, I again ask my white brothers and sisters in Valdosta's religious communities (Christian and non-Christian) to step up and not repeat the past. Our God is watching.

Mark George  
Albuquerque, N.M.

### Marchers 'in control' of Saturday event

I would like to commend The Valdosta Daily Times on the fine job of reporting the rally and march held concerning Willie Williams' death. Stories were fair, balanced and well-written.

Having been at both events, I would also like to point out that the behavior of Capt. Ken Cooper and his men proved that the time for change is at hand. They proved that by the following acts.

They denied several peaceful women and children at the march the right to use the restrooms at a facility that tax dollars bought. This was disrespectful, inhuman and a sin.

The only threat of violence at the march came from Cooper and his men when they attempted to deny Valdosta taxpayers the right to peacefully assemble and pray. It was "our" law enforcement officers who were the ones that got physical

# THE VALDOSTA DAILY TIMES

www.sgaonline.com

Thursday, Sept. 9, 1999

50 cents

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## Funds

# Weed and Seed funds run dry

### Budget delay halts 'Granny's House' program and community policing efforts

By Brian Lawson  
THE VALDOSTA DAILY TIMES

VALDOSTA — For 30 small children, the news that Weed and Seed budget funds are held up in Washington, D.C., is probably hard to understand.

But the message became clear

Friday when the children were told they could no longer go to their "granny's house" because there is no money to continue the local safe haven program.

The local Weed and Seed budget of \$225,000 was submitted in March and officials expected the money in July. Funding is expect-

ed to be approved, but the U.S. Comptroller's office has yet to sign off on it, said Sharron Fletcher, Weed and Seed program manager for the U.S. Department of Justice.

Fletcher said the money is not delayed.

"There is no set time for the

money to come out, it comes when it comes," Fletcher said. "It may take three weeks, it may take three months."

Weed and Seed officials said they learned in early August the money's release was likely to be timed to the federal fiscal year, which runs Oct. 1 to Sept. 30.

That interval halted the Granny's House program. They cannot provide necessary matching funds for liability insurance for the young children who stay in the homes of area residents from 4-6 p.m. on weekdays.

See FUNDS on Page 3A

"Last Friday we had to tell the kids they couldn't come anymore," said the program's coordinator, Deloris Mitchell Brown. "We partner with Coastal Plains (Area Economic Opportunity Authority Inc.) and they provide half the stipend for the grannies and the liability insurance. We don't have the funds to match."

Valdosta Police Department's community policing efforts have also been affected by the funding delay.

Police Chief Frank Simons said 8-hour-shift extra patrols, both on foot and in vehicles, in the high-crime Weed and Seed areas were pulled back due to the lack of federal funds. Simons said he is looking at his budget to find ways to fund the patrols until the expected funding comes in, but no decision has been made.

Simons, who sits on the Weed and Seed Steering Committee that oversees operations, said he was not aware the funding schedule had been changed until he was informed by a city employee who attended a Weed and Seed national conference in early August.

Fletcher said programs will be reimbursed for the funds they have to spend while waiting for the budget, noting the budget date is likely to be retroactive to Aug. 1.

She said the comptroller's office is expected to review nearly 30,000 grant applications before the end of the fiscal year.

In the meantime, programs like Southside Recreation Center and Pinevale Youth Center, which provide after-school programs, must find other ways to pay for supplies and other materials. Those programs traditionally have difficulty attracting outside support.

"We're surviving," said Jeremiah Lawton, executive director of Valdosta Weed and Seed. "So far, the impact hasn't been that bad. Last year, we didn't get moving out with funds until early August. We're kind of on hold until we get the budget approved."

To contact reporter Brian Lawson, please call 244-3400, ext. 239.



Associated Press

Stella Brumley, right, embraces her sister, Betty Boatner, both sisters of James Byrd Jr., inside the Bazos County courtroom Monday in Bryan, Texas, following the guilty verdict in the capital murder trial of white supremacist prison gang leader Lawrence Russell Brewer, 32. Brewer's is the second conviction of three men charged with killing Byrd in a horrific dragging death last year where he was chained behind a pickup truck and pulled for three miles over a bumpy East Texas road.

## Second white supremacist guilty in black man's dragging death

BRYAN, Texas (AP) — A second white supremacist was convicted Monday in the dragging death of a black man whose gruesome end shocked the nation.

Lawrence Russell Brewer, 32, could get the death penalty for murdering James Byrd Jr. in the town of Jasper last year.

The jury of 11 whites and one Hispanic took just four hours to reach a verdict. Standing with his lawyers, Brewer showed no reaction. The judge had admonished spectators against any show of emotion. There was none.

The jury returned immediately to begin hearing testimony on whether Brewer should be sentenced to life in prison or death.



Lawrence  
Russell  
Brewer

Testimony in the punishment phase was set to continue Tuesday and Jasper County District Attorney Guy James Gray said he did not anticipate the case returning to the jury until Wednesday.

"Whatever they come up with we will accept that, of course," Mary Verrett, Byrd's sister, said after emerging from the courthouse. "I want to see the ultimate penalty ... I can't begin to describe how good we feel."

Brewer's former prison buddy John William King, 24, has been on death row since his February conviction in Byrd's slaying. A third man, Shawn Allen Berry, also 24, is awaiting trial next month.

Prosecutors said they believe the three men killed Byrd to promote their fledgling white supremacist organization — the Confederate Knights of America — and initiate Berry into the group.

The slaying was one of the grisliest racial crimes since the civil rights era.

"I don't like the death penal-

ty but that's what he deserves. The just punishment for this case and these facts and circumstances is death," Gray said after the verdict was announced.

Unlike the first trial, the case against Brewer was moved out of Jasper, 150 miles away, after the defense argued that the people of Jasper would be inclined to convict to redeem their small town in the eyes of the nation.

Brewer, sometimes sobbing, testified last week that he was with King and Berry when Byrd, 49, was chained by the ankles to the bumper of Berry's pickup and dragged for three miles.

Brewer said when he got in the truck he didn't realize Berry had chained Byrd to the back of the truck until they began driving. Brewer said he was convinced Byrd had died when Berry slashed his throat.

But a pathologist testified there was no evidence of a knife wound and no knife was found. Byrd was alive until his head was torn off when it slammed into a culvert, the pathologist said.