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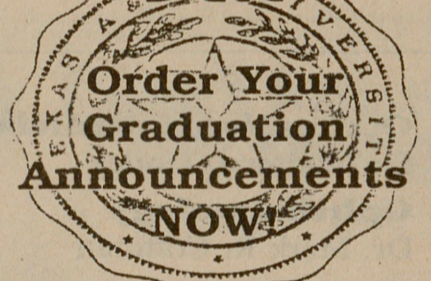
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G&S STUDIES, INC.
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776-6236

\$100 \$200 \$100 \$200

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Gang-rape trial reopens Texas town's old wounds

SAN DIEGO (AP) — The approaching trials of 10 men accused of abducting and gang-raping a 19-year-old mother of two, have reopened old wounds in this South Texas town that for years has lived under the cloud of Duval County's bad reputation.

Many in the dusty city of 5,000 think the negative image is undeserved, that sins of the past should be forgiven and forgotten.

"They always felt like the county had been given a bad name, and now they're saying, 'Here we go again,'" said Rodolfo Gutierrez, assistant district attorney for the 229th Judicial District covering the counties of Duval, Starr and Jim Hogg.

Locals tell stories of shopping out of town since the alleged rape, and after writing checks, having to put up with store clerks' comments about San Diego, the seat of Duval County.

Gutierrez has the formidable task of prosecuting the case here, where many of the potential jurors at least know the defendants and might even be related by blood or marriage.

The alleged victim and a key prosecution witness — a 12-year-old boy — have virtually been exiled to undisclosed locations in another city because of alleged threats and intimidation they suffered in San Diego after reporting the incident.

"Indirectly, they may blame her for all that has happened and the publicity," said Gutierrez, who nonetheless expects to find an impartial jury.

The alleged victim and the boy will testify at the trials, the prosecutor added.

The woman told authorities that she was taken against her will to a colonia — an unincorporated area — north of town where an illegal cockfight was being held the night of March 26. There, and in two other locations, she said she was repeatedly raped and sodomized by as many as 20 men before she was released several hours later, early on the morning of Sunday, March 27.

Charges against the 10 men indicted in the case range from kidnapping to aggravated kidnapping to sexual assault.

All 10 have pleaded innocent to the charges. The first trial in the case begins Monday.

An atmosphere of lawlessness

"All of South Texas is on trial. People from the outside are upset about this. They want these guys to hang."

— Jaime Garza, court-appointed defense attorney for Felipe Chew

formed by decades of political corruption in the county made such a brutal crime possible, former Duval County Judge Gilberto Uresti said.

"When you have a family with discipline, the kids usually behave, but with no discipline, they don't act right," said Uresti.

Uresti was appointed county judge in 1975 with the final collapse of decades of control by the Parr family. He held the office until 1986.

In Uresti's view, the old "patron" system of political control through control of the main sources of employment in industry-poor Duval — the county government and school district — continues today and causes a general disregard for law.

Archie Parr, known as the Duke of Duval, became ruler of the county shortly before World War I. In 1914, when his use of county funds was coming under investigation, a fire destroyed courthouse records essential to the probe.

Parr passed the power down to his son George, who was convicted of income tax evasion in 1934.

George Parr in 1948 altered the course of history by directing the famous Box 13 ballot-stuffing incident in neighboring Jim Wells County that won Lyndon Johnson an 87-vote margin in the Democratic Party's primary runoff for the Senate.

George Parr fought off 656 indictments from county probes during the 1950s and '60s, but after another conviction for income tax evasion he committed suicide in 1975.

His nephew, Archer Parr, was later convicted of committing perjury during a grand jury investigation. Part of his probation was that he not live in Duval County until after the probation ends in December.

Yet the Parrs, who contributed more than any other individuals to

the county's history this century, are not mentioned or pictured once at the Duval County Historical Museum on the main plaza in San Diego.

It is as if the town is uncomfortable carrying certain parts of its history.

"Write something good about a woman working at the museum, told a visiting journalist, 'Poor women, nice, friendly people.'"

The gang rape case puts Duval County on trial once again, Uresti said.

"The county is in a helluva position," Uresti said. "If they don't do anything, it will make everyone look bad. The vast majority of people in Duval County are law-abiding citizens."

Jaime Garza, court-appointed defense attorney for Felipe Chew, a 21-year-old Mexican national arrested in the San Diego case subjects the town to unfair scrutiny.

"All of South Texas is on trial," said Garza. "People from the outside are upset about this. They want these guys to hang."

The community, he said, is unable to defend itself from the blow to its image. He would not reveal the names of the men in the trial, but said, "In any rape case, consent is a potentially important question."

Nago Alaniz, who with County Attorney Albert Pena represent five of the defendants, said he expects 23-year-old Orlan Garza of San Diego to go on trial first.

Lawyers on both sides said they expect the first trial or two to set the stage for what happens with the rest of the defendants.

"Regardless of the outcome of the case," said defense attorney Garza, "it's going to be felt for years."

Richard Garcia Yaeger, a friend of the victim, said he does not think he will be able to move back to San Diego, because people will make him unbearable by pretending they do not exist in a town where the friendliness is a way of life.

Lawyers on both sides said they expect the first trial or two to set the stage for what happens with the rest of the defendants.

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