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Dr. Krammer

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November 15, 1999 at 7:30p.m.

Rudder 302

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Brazos Valley Chorale

Texas A&M Century Singers

Pre-concert Lecture

Dr. Laurine Marlow,

Associate Professor, Dept. of Performance Studies, TAMU

3:00 P.M., Rudder Complex, Room 292B

Sunday, November 14, 1999

4:00 P.M., Rudder Auditorium

Tickets may be purchased at the MSC Box Office, 845-1234

Tickets cost: \$20.00 adults, \$5.00 students and children

Additional support provided by Texas A&M University Departments of Performance Studies and the Arts Council of Brazos Valley

Trial begins for final suspect in Byrd murder prosecuting attorney changes court strategy

JASPER (AP) — Shawn Allen Berry was an active participant in the dragging death of a black East Texas man last year and may have been influenced by the racist beliefs of two other white men now on death row for the same killing, prosecutors said yesterday.

"Maybe some of what they were saying rubbed off on him," Jasper County District Attorney Guy James Gray said as Berry's trial began. "Maybe he was a thrill seeker. ... Maybe he wanted to play with a rattlesnake and see what happened."

Berry, 24, faces life in prison or death by injection if found guilty of capital murder in the June 7, 1998, chaining and dragging of James Byrd Jr.

Byrd, 49, was walking along a Jasper County road after midnight when he was offered a ride by Berry, who had King and Brewer in his truck.

The four then drove to a remote area where a scuffle broke out. Byrd was attached to the truck with a 24-foot logging chain, then dragged nearly three miles along a bumpy country road in what authorities said was a racist hate crime.

Byrd's shredded and dismembered body was found after daybreak.

"I think by the end of the case, you're going to decide Shawn Berry is simply not the kind of guy that would do something like this," Joseph C. "Lum" Hawthorn, Berry's attorney, said in opening remarks to the jury.

The trial began yesterday after State District Judge Joe Bob Golden denied a defense motion to move the trial from Jasper, about 125 miles northeast of Houston, because of intense media coverage and jury prejudice.

In the previous two trials, it was near the conclusion of the testimony when prosecutors showed jurors the logging chain and played a video that retraced the killing route.

Yesterday, however, Hawthorn played a copy of the video the first morning of testimony during cross examination of a police detective.

The defense attorney also gave jurors a look at the heavy chain, defusing a dramatic moment prosecutors had built in their cases against King and Brewer.

Bush disputes Byrd's claim

AUSTIN, Texas (AP) — A spokesperson for Gov. George W. Bush yesterday disputed a claim by James Byrd Jr.'s family that he never telephoned his condolences or offered to attend the funeral after the Jasper man was dragged to his death behind a pickup truck.

"That's wrong," Bush said yesterday in South Carolina when asked about the family's claim. He said he called a member of the family and "has the evidence to prove it."

"You need to pay attention to the chain because that's going to come up later and it will be relevant," Hawthorn said, but declined to elaborate.

"It's a pretty good move," Gray said of the chain's early entrance. "We really didn't intend to rattle the chain in this one like we did in the first."

Attorneys for both sides agreed Berry lacked the same racist history as King and Brewer, known

Later in the day, a spokesperson Scott provided The Associated Press with a copy of the telephone call that shows a two-minute conversation from Bush's private phone in the governor's office on the morning of June 10, 1998, to James Byrd's home in Jasper.

The Byrds contend that the front-runner for the presidential nomination contacted the family

for their white supremacist writings and beliefs.

King was sharing an apartment with Berry at the time of the murder. Brewer, who served time with King, had a home in Sulphur Springs, northeast Texas about 100 miles earlier and was staying in Jasper.

Gray said Byrd's bloodstained clothing and that Berry drove in his truck when the chain was his.

Television stations broadcast false report of shooting

SAN ANTONIO (AP) — Erroneous reports of a shooting at an elementary school alarmed parents and embarrassed broadcasters who later said they had relied on secondhand information.

The misunderstanding began when a janitor at Coker Elementary School told police Tuesday morning that six bullets had hit his car as he drove to work.

Francisco Flores, who said he sustained minor injuries from shattered glass, filed the report after arriving at the campus.

Two television stations and at least one radio station, relying on information gleaned from monitoring police and emergency medical service radio transmissions, reported a shooting at the school. One report said up to 14 students had been hurt.

"When you consider Columbine High School and the overenthusiasm [of local reporters], those elements went together to result in the wrong in-

formation," Victor Garcia, a spokesperson for the North East School District said.

"We believed we had confirmed the story, but we were wrong."

— Jim Boyle
KSAT news director

Dozens of parents who heard the reports rushed to the school, where they learned their children were safe.

"When you hear that there was a shooting at your daughter's school, you age 50 years and your

stomach just drops," Julie Sarsaver, a parent whose children were at the school for the day said.

"I was freaking out thinking that my daughter had been hit or maybe killed," said Russ said. "I was getting ready to go to work and heard 14 kids had been hit by flying glass and went to pieces."

Television stations KSAT and KENS, and radio station KTSA, took up to 15 minutes to correct the reports.

KSAT news director Jim Boyle said he authorized the report.

"We believed we had confirmed the story and we were wrong," he said. "We need to do a better job double-checking our information."

KENS news director Nick Simonetti said reporters wanted to give the public accurate information from police as quickly as possible.

LAW TALK from STCL

Join Professor of Law Helen Jenkins and a panel of attorneys taking live call-in questions

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