

15 YEAR OLD GIRL, GETS SEVEN YEARS IN PRISON FOR PUSHING A TEACHER!!!



Creola Cotton (left) and Shaquanda Cotton

By Tracy Stokes, BET.com News Staff & Wire Services

Posted March 28, 2007 - In Paris, Texas , last year, a 14-year-old White girl burns down her family's home. Her punishment? Probation. In the same town three months later, a 15-year-old Black girl, Shaquanda Cotton, is sentenced to seven years in prison for pushing a hall monitor at her high school.

Shaquanda had no prior arrests, and the monitor, a 58-year-old teacher's aide, was not hurt, according to Black leaders in the northeast Texas town of about 26,000 residents. But in March 2006, the same judge, Lamar County Judge Chuck Superville, who let the White teenage girl go on probation, convicted Shaquanda of 'assault on a public servant' and sent her to prison at least until she turns 21.

Officials at the Texas Youth Commission declined to discuss the case with BET.com, citing Texas law.

'State law forbids us from acknowledging whether we have any youths are in our system, despite the 50 million issues of print that's been run,' said Jim Hurley, a spokesman for the Texas Youth Commission. 'We'd have to break the law to talk about it.'

Civil Rights Uprouar

While the U.S. Department of Education is investigating the incident, the case has civil rights groups in an uproar.

'I don't understand the judge's rationale for his decision,' Dr. Howard Anderson, president of the

San Antonio Branch of the NAACP, told BET.com.

In highlighting what he called an egregious miscarriage of justice in a town with a long history of civil rights abuses, Anderson pointed to the case of the 14-year-old convicted arson (whose name was not released because of her age), who was slapped with probation, and the case of a 19-year-old White man in Paris, convicted of killing a 54-year-old Black woman and her 3-year-old grandson with his truck. The latter, he said, was also sentenced to probation and told to send the family a Christmas card every year.

'Then you have Shaquanda's case,' Anderson said. 'She pushed a hall monitor, and she gets seven years confinement? If I look at all three of these sentences, and I'm not a lawyer, I have to wonder what the judicial system is doing. In this particular case, what is this judge doing?' Gary Bledsoe, an Austin attorney who heads the state NAACP branch, told BET.com that Shaquanda was merely trying to defend herself.

'All she (Shaquanda) did was grab the aide to prevent a strike,' Bledsoe said. 'It's like they are sending a signal to Black folks in Paris that you stay in your place in this community, in the shadows, intimidated.'

Sad History

And keeping Blacks in their place is nothing new in Paris, say leaders, who remind that it's the site of the first highly publicized lynching of a Black by a large White mob. In 1893, fugitive Henry White was captured in Arkansas and brought to Paris, where he was tortured and burned alive on a train bed as more than 10,000 angry townsfolk cheered and jeered.

Activists say that the Shaquanda sentence is nothing more than a modern-day lynching.

Cotton has been incarcerated at a youth prison in Brownwood, Texas, for the last year on a sentence that could run until her 21st birthday. But like many of the other youths in the system, she is eligible to earn early release if she achieves certain social, behavioral and educational milestones while in prison.

But according to *The Chicago Tribune*, officials at the Ron Jackson Correctional Complex repeatedly have extended Shaquanda's sentence because she refuses to admit guilt and because she reportedly was found with contraband in her cell - an extra pair of socks.

'She's not admitting any guilt, because she doesn't feel that she did anything,' Anderson told BET.com. 'Not to mention, who saw the pushing, if it did occur?'

Cotton's mother, Creola, who Anderson describes as 'strong-willed,' said her daughter was singled out because she accused the school district of racism on several occasions.

In fact, 12 discrimination complaints have been filed against the Paris Independent School District in recent years. District officials dispute the charges, but the U.S. Department of Education, which is still investigating the case, has reportedly asked the U.S. Department of Justice to get involved. In 1998, Paris, Texas, was named the 'Best Small Town in Texas' by Kevin Heubusch in his book *The New Rating Guide to Life in America's Small Cities*.

*******FORWARD THIS ON TO AS MANY PEOPLE AS POSSIBLE!!!**

WE NEED TO BRING THESE INJUSTICES TO LIGHT*****

Are you interested in reaching out to Shaquanda? You can write a directly to her at the address below:

She also receive mail here:

Ron Jackson Correctional Complex,
Unit 2, Dorm 4
P.O. Box 872
Brownwood, Texas 76804
1125308

Protest letters can also be sent to Judge Chuck Superville, who handed down the sentence at the address below:

Honorable M.C. (Chuck) Superville, Jr., Judge
Lamar County Courthouse
119 North Main
Paris, TX 75460
Phone # 903-737-2410
Fax # 903-785-3858