

More minorities in Criminal Justice System; Police Police etc.
(Affirmative Justice by Race)
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NORTH CAROLINA

Death sentences tossed; judge cites jurors' race

By Michael Biesecker
Associated Press

FAYETTEVILLE, N.C. — A North Carolina judge Thursday commuted the death sentences of three convicted killers, including two who killed law enforcement officers, to life in prison without the possibility of parole after ruling that race played an unjust role in jury selection at their trials.

Cumberland County Superior Court Judge Gregory A. Weeks based his ruling on evidence presented over four weeks of hearings that he says showed prosecutors in each case made a concerted effort to reduce the number of black jurors.

The three who had their sentences commuted were among the most notorious killers on North Carolina's death row. Two had killed law enforcement officers.

Family members of the victims and more than 60

uniformed police officers packed the courtroom. Before Weeks could finish issuing his ruling, the brother of a murdered state trooper stood up and yelled an expletive at the judge.

The Republican-controlled Legislature recently scaled back the state's Racial Justice Act, on which Thursday's ruling was based. Weeks said his ruling applies under both the old and new laws.

He cited evidence that included handwritten notes of prosecutors indicating they worked to get blacks eliminated from the pool of jurors, resulting in panels that were overwhelmingly white.

"This conclusion is based primarily on the words and deeds of the prosecutors involved in these cases," Weeks, who is black, said from the bench. "Despite protestations to the contrary, their words, their deeds, speak volumes."

The cases involve con-

victed murderers Christina "Queen" Walters, Tilmon Golphin and Quintel Augustine. Earlier this year, Marcus Raymond Robinson became the first to have his sentence commuted to life without parole under the provisions of the landmark 2009 law.

Walters is a Lumbee Indian. Augustine and Golphin are black.

Walters was the leader of a Fayetteville street gang convicted of killing two women and shooting another during an initiation ritual in 1998.

Augustine was convicted of killing Fayetteville police Officer Roy Turner Jr. in November 2001.

Golphin killed N.C. Highway Patrol Trooper Ed Lowry and Cumberland County sheriff's Deputy David Hathcock during a traffic stop in September 1997. Golphin's younger brother is also serving a life sentence for the homicides.

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