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WHAT ARE YOU DOING?

The time they did, they should not have done



By Cheryl Smith

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ONE AFRICAN AMERICAN WOMAN'S OPINION

Victor and Chris are two very nice men. They both have a sense of humor and they are very candid in their discussions about life, love, politics, and anything that crossed their minds.

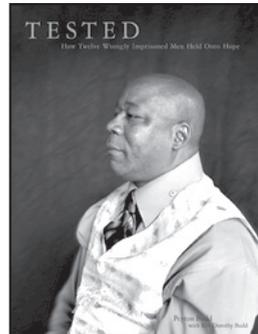
As we talked, I waited to see anger, a mean streak, bitterness, or maybe even sadness.

Surely they had to hold a grudge.

Wouldn't you be angry if you had spent any amount of time in prison, convicted of a crime you did not commit?

Victor Thomas and Christopher Scott each spent several years in prison and were eventually vindicated. They are two of the featured subjects in the book, *Tested: How Twelve Wrongly Imprisoned Men Held Onto Hope*, By Peyton Budd, in collaboration Dorothy Budd.

Victor was charged with kidnapping, rape and robbery. He was a youthful 26 years old and continued to profess his innocence in the October 24, 1985 incident where a convenience store worker was robbed and raped. He spent 15 years, seven months and 6 days before his release.



Victor Thomas, one of the "Tested" 12 in the book

If he has one regret said Victor, it's that he never got a chance to raise a son. He considered himself to be a good athlete and longed for the time when he would be showing his son the ropes. Unfortunately he never had a chance because

through no fault of his own, he found himself hearing the dreaded word, "Guilty," followed by the judge's declaration of two life sentences plus 20 years.

About 12 years later, Chris found himself joining Victor at the Texas Department of Criminal Justice's Coffield Unit. Initially the charge was capital murder. "I was looking at a lethal injection," he recalled.

Despite no physical evidence, and he said he had an alibi; Chris was identified by Celia Escobedo, as the murderer of her husband, Alfonso.

Chris said he had to toughen up, and fast. He was a mere 130 pounds and in order to survive prison life, he said, he had to be strong.

Were there fights? "Of See SMITH, on page 11



Quit Playin' By Vincent Hall

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Mi Casa Ain't Su Casa!

What the study proved is that North Texas is a big house, but it doesn't open its doors without looking out to see who's on the front porch.

Frances Espinosa, the executive director of the North Texas Fair Housing Center that opened last July, dispatched secret shoppers in pairings to predominately white properties between January and March. The testers were unaware of their purpose and recorded their observations after they left.

In the end, the study that was developed to detect discrimination did just that. The study proved that blacks, Hispanics and families are on the receiving end of treatment that was all too common during the days preceding Civil Rights legislation.

There was a 55% disparity when it came to the amount of rent. Minorities and families faced "no vacancy" signs 64% of the time; 27% of them faced higher security deposits and 36% were denied "move-in specials."

Three-fourths or 30 of the 40 properties tested for the report revealed open bias based on race or national origin, mostly against blacks. In the



Corrett Scott King and Cesar Chavez

remaining 10 instances, applicants were shunned because they had families.

And it wasn't just in Dallas and Collin counties; 26 of the properties shopped were near or in the vicinity of Funky Town; aka Fort Worth for those of you who are new to this area. The Tarrant County locations included Fort Worth, Bedford, Keller, Grapevine, Arlington, North Richland Hills, Grand Prairie and Colleyville. The center would not disclose the exact locations of the complexes.

Here's how it went down. In the majority of the tests, a black or Hispanic person asked about an apartment. Then, within an hour, a white person was sent to do the same. Each minority tester reported better income, credit scores or some other fa-

vorable attribute than the white tester. The minorities were rejected and so were some applicants who had families with children.

What is even more damning about this study is that competition has forced hundreds of area rental properties to lure and entice residents. Move-in specials and other offers are commonplace for a reason; full occupancy is always the goal of any leasing company or agent.

Sadly some in North Texas are still clutching and clinging to the ignorance and intolerance of the "segregated South." What's worse is that minorities and families are being barred in many cases from areas with better schools, safer neighborhoods and a quality of life that America promises to those who play by the "house" rules.

"Mi casa es su casa" is a Mexican-American colloquialism that translates as an invitation to inclusion and hospitality. It is a greeting of goodwill and acceptance. But in the DFW Metroplex it's obvious that mi casa ain't su casa. And even if it were you may pay more or suffer discrimination if you're black, brown, or bringing your family.

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