

scene on campus

Actor-director Tim Reid previewed his new film 'Asunder,' starring Blair Underwood, at Blackman Auditorium on Feb. 7.



CRAIG BAILEY

One story, 'two towns'

Filmmaker tells story of murder in Jasper, Texas, through both white and black voices

BY BRIAN LEE

It was almost five years ago when James Byrd Jr. fell victim to a vicious hate crime in Jasper, Texas.

John William King and Russell Brewer were executed, and Shawn Allen Berry was imprisoned for life without parole for tying Byrd to the back of a pickup truck before a two-mile drunken joy ride decapitated him.

Byrd's murder occurred June 7, 1998, a day and age when such an act would have been thought unthinkable just about anywhere.

Or was it?

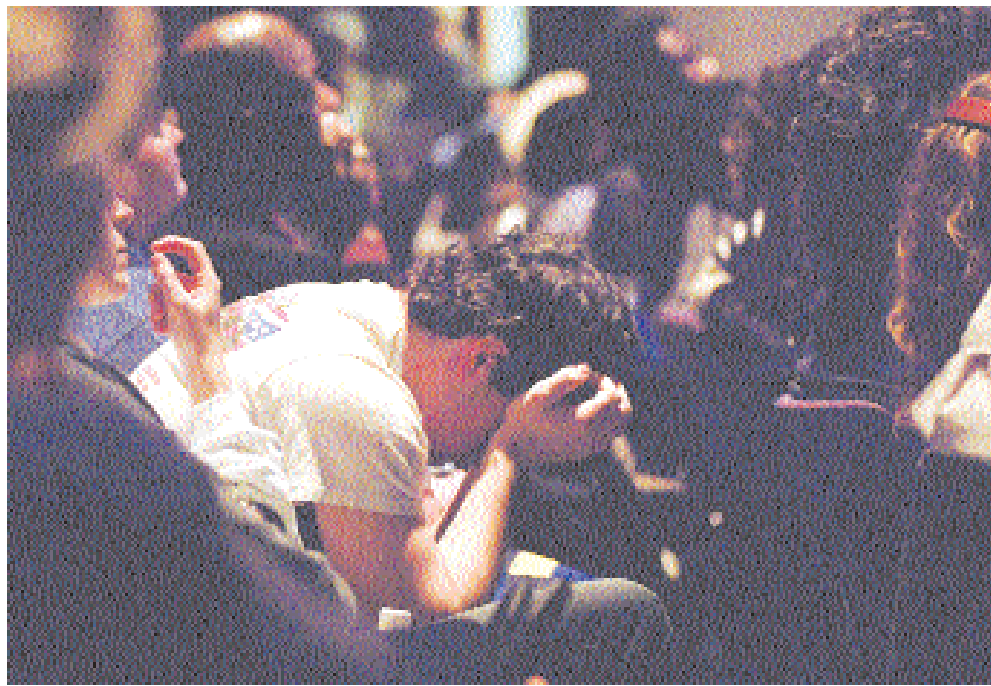
"These could have been the two towns of Washington, D.C., of Los Angeles, of Boston," said Professor Jack Levin, director of the Brudnick Center on Violence and Conflict.

Levin was one of three panelists who discussed the documentary "Two Towns of Jasper" at the Egan Center's Raytheon Amphitheater Jan. 15. The event, hosted by Northeastern's Institute on Race and Justice, preceded the public-TV showing of the documentary Jan. 22. Approximately 300 attended, said moderator Robin Chandler, associate professor of African-American studies. The large turnout forced an additional offering of the 90-minute documentary upstairs from the amphitheater.

Toward the end of the documentary, as the final sentence was rendered, family members of the victim expressed jubilation that justice had been served. "Proud to be a resident of Jasper!" one cried out to Berry.

Panelist Samuel Williams, co-chair of the Institute on Race and Justice advisory board and a program director at Youth Opportunities Boston, said, "When the comment was made, I thought to myself, 'Would that eliminate the pain? Would justice being served eliminate the pain?'"

He continued, "Race-related hate crimes expose the history of pain that exists in our society, in our communities, in our homes, in our hearts. This incident, I believe, could have happened 20 years ago. A lot of the feelings that arose by the mentioning of a lot of the powerful historical symbols mentioned (in the film) would have resurfaced to expose a lot of that pain that oftentimes live silently and quietly in all of us because we don't talk about this stuff."



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Though not explicit, 'Two Towns' shocked many in the Raytheon Amphitheater.

The film producers' method of black- and white-led film crews appeared to draw honest reactions from Jasper residents. The first to discuss the crime, a white family, seemed to search for rationalization of the act, reminding that Byrd was "not a pillar of the community. He should be looked at for how he lived, not how he died."

Another white, interviewed toward the end of the film, offered a contrasting viewpoint and was in favor of the death penalty for the accused.

The first black family to be interviewed remarked, "It will never be the same again (in Jasper). It still exists. You look around and ask yourself, 'Why is there only one black (working) at the bank?' It brings these things to light."

Walter Diggles, a black county official in Jasper, explained that he was miffed by the act because nearly half of Jasper's population was black. "How could someone commit a crime, in 1998, this bizarre?" he asked.

Panelist Zina Jacque, founder and director of Trinity Church in Boston, explained, "When things get too easy, we get too complacent and forget who we are. I think God allows deep hurtful tragedy so that rooms like this are filled with young men and women who are on the front-line. Am I sorry it happened? Absolutely. Can we benefit from it? One hundred percent."

The diversity at the event was an encouraging sign, as discussions on race often do not draw a significant number of white participants, Levin said.

The free screening was open to the public and sponsored by the Independent Television Service's Community Connections Project in conjunction with public broadcaster WGBH and NU's institute.

Levin predicted that Byrd's death would forever taint Jasper, despite progress by the town since the murder. For example, the fence separating blacks from whites at the town cemetery was removed immediately after Byrd's death.

"When people think of Jasper, Texas, now they're going to think of James Byrd's murder, that's all," he said. "And yet, Jasper, Texas did a better job than many other towns of responding to this murder."

Local filmmaker reflects on MLK's Boston years

BY JIM CHIAVELLI

When Martin Luther King Jr. was earning his doctorate at Boston University, he was living next door to Northeastern.

In the early 1950s, King stayed in an apartment on Massachusetts Avenue, between Columbus Avenue and St. Botolph Street. He prayed at the 12th Baptist Church on Warren Street. And he fell in love with Alabama native Coretta Scott, who was studying voice at the New England Conservatory of Music on Huntington Avenue.

"MLK: The Boston Years," a documentary by Emmy-winning producer Karl Nurse, was shown Jan. 23 at the African-American Institute.

Nurse, who worked at Boston's WCVB-TV for decades before opening his Allston filmmaking studio, said he produces a King documentary every year for local television stations.

"The thing is to come up with a different



Karl Nurse grew up around NU.

angle," he said.

The 22-minute "Boston Years" features interviews with King's former mentor at BU, with fellow ministers and with Elma Lewis, longtime maven of the Roxbury arts scene. It tells how King developed his views on the role

of theology in real life, and how he tested those theories in regular discussion groups in the neighborhood.

Photos — some from BU, some from Northeastern's own archives and some from the legendary Wally's Café on Massachusetts Avenue — paint a picture of Boston, and especially Boston's black cultural scene — in the 1950s.

It's a scene Nurse is familiar with: He was raised on St. Botolph Street, and "ran through Northeastern when I was a kid."

Alas, he has no memories of bumping into a young King on the sidewalk of their neighborhood. "I would have been 6 years old, and he was virtually unknown when he was here," Nurse said.

In a discussion after the viewing, he told students he was drawn to the topic because "I like black history, and I like telling the stories."

Nurse was introduced by Dr. Joseph Warren, special assistant to the president.