

WORLD & NATION

Simpson defense team atypical of most trials

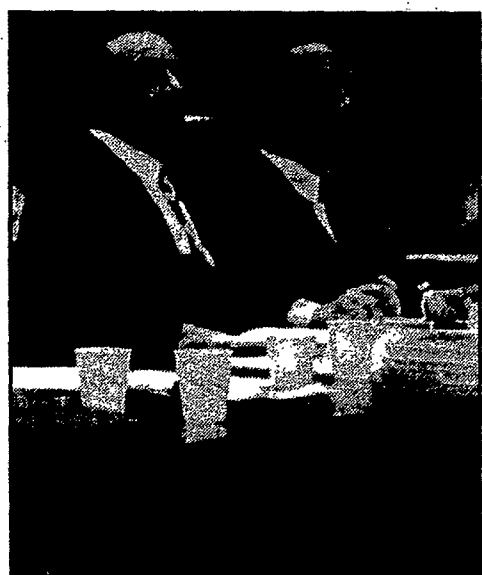
Few defendants could pay for it

By Patricia Zapor
Catholic News Service

WASHINGTON — The O.J. Simpson verdict wasn't even known yet when an attorney at a Washington press conference lamented that the result would only cloud the public's understanding of how the justice system works for people without Simpson's money.

"I wish the public were as concerned about the innocent people who are found guilty as they are about those who seem guilty based on sound bites and get off," said Stephen B. Bright, director of the Atlanta-based Southern Center for Human Rights.

Congress this fall eliminated the \$20 million funding for a network of 20 death-penalty resource centers created by Congress in 1988 to recruit and train attorneys and support the defense of death-row inmates appealing their convictions. A House budget report argued



File photo
Defense attorney Robert Shapiro sits with his client, O.J. Simpson, during Simpson's preliminary hearing July 5, 1994.

that the resource centers were a significant factor in the delay between convictions and executions of criminals.

But Bright contended at an Oct. 2 press conference sponsored by the Death

Penalty Information Center that many of the more than 3,000 people on death row would not be there if they had had even marginally better defense counsel, let alone the "dream team" Simpson hired at an estimated cost of \$10 million or more.

Without understanding what most people experience in the criminal justice system, "people are going to assume that everyone went through a process like the Simpson case," Bright said.

To illustrate more typical experiences, two one-time death-row inmates told reporters how they came to be sentenced to death and ultimately were released.

With no previous criminal record, a stable career and two children, former schoolteacher Andrew Golden was atypical of most Florida death row convicts.

Golden told reporters that he had fallen into a depression after his wife killed herself. He said he was barely aware of what was happening when he was arrested several months after her death and charged with murder. His attorney assured Golden that the prosecution had no case. But the attorney also did nothing to prove there was no case.

Although police investigators and

medical examiners testified no sign of foul play was evident in Ardelle Golden's death, jurors were never told about her depression and evidence pointing to suicide. Golden was convicted and sentenced to death.

His 18-year-old son found a new lawyer who eventually proved the prosecutor lied and withheld evidence of innocence. The Florida Supreme Court ruled no crime had occurred and Golden was freed, but the process took more than two years.

Shabaka Waglini spent 14 and a half years on Florida's death row, once coming within 15 hours of execution. He'd already been measured for a burial suit and had his head shaved before a stay was granted.

After 11 courts considered his case, the 11th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals overturned his murder conviction when previously undisclosed evidence about the time of death exonerated him. It also turned out that the one "witness" was in jail at the time of the crime and had actually only been shown photos and taken to the crime scene by police, Waglini said.

"People want to believe that if someone is charged with a crime they must have done something," Waglini said. "Twelve people said I was guilty... I wasn't."

In the days following the Simpson verdict, newspapers around the country reported that the lengthy televised trial distorted the course of most cases.

The fact that most murder trials take a few hours or at most a few days is lost on people who heard about Simpson's trial for nearly a year. Expert witnesses and DNA testing are simply too costly for most criminal defendants, attorneys say.

According to Bright, what is more typical are situations such as those outlined in "With Justice for Few," the Death Penalty Information Center's report about court-appointed attorneys who are under-funded, inexperienced, over-worked or, sometimes, incompetent.

Mother Teresa boosts India prison ministry

NEW DELHI, India (CNS) — Mother Teresa of Calcutta has given her support to a Catholic humanitarian project designed to help rehabilitate prisoners.

"It is a beautiful gift of God to care for men and women in jail," the Nobel peace laureate said during a talk inaugurating the second national convention of Prison Ministry, a Catholic initiative.

"I am very happy that the church is the first one to be there to start this beautiful work," the founder of the Missionaries of Charity said.

Forty nuns and priests and 20 lay people who work with prisoners in 10 states gathered in New Delhi to help spread the program to 926 Indian prisons housing more than 200,000 prisoners.

Mother Teresa said her first experience in dealing with prisoners came

when the head of the Marxist-led government in West Bengal state asked her to help jailed prostitutes.

She said that when she visited Bengal state's Presidency Prison in Calcutta, 34 inmates convicted of prostitution said they wanted her help.

Mother Teresa said the pleading of the women prompted her to launch Shanti Dhan (gift of peace) to help men and women prisoners rebuild their lives.

She said the home has brought "tremendous change in their life."

"The faces of these women are completely changed because they are so much at peace and so anxious to be loved and to grow," she said. "We never thought there would be so much of peace, unity and love among them."

Mother Teresa said her programs are

attracting hundreds of volunteers.


Several families bring food and clothes, others help in teaching while a group of men, members of an organization known as The Banner of Hope, helps the inmates of Shanti Dhan by raising money and obtaining needed goods, she said.

A Prison Ministry convention resolution urged the Indian bishops' conference to recognize the ministry under the Justice Peace and Development Commission in order "to facilitate setting up special prison ministry units in all the dioceses of the country."

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