

Oklahoma sheriff, commissioner, accused of discussing killing a reporter and returning to Black hangings

 oklahoman.com/story/news/2023/04/16/oklahoma-sheriff-and-commissioner-accused-of-racism-and-threats/70119918007

Josh Dulaney

Oklahoman

In southeast Oklahoma, the sheriff of McCurtain County, one of his investigators and a county commissioner are accused by a newspaper of discussing killing a local reporter and lamenting that modern justice no longer includes hanging Black people.

The explosive accusations were published this week in the McCurtain Gazette-News.

According to the newspaper, Sheriff Kevin Clardy, investigator Alicia Manning and District 2 Commissioner Mark Jennings were part of an impromptu discussion after the March 6 meeting of the county Board of Commissioners.

The Gazette reported that it is in possession of the full audio recording of the discussion. The FBI and the Oklahoma Attorney General's Office also have copies of the recording, according to the newspaper.

A portion of the audio recordings were released online over the weekend, and while the audio matched some of the quoted material in the story, The Oklahoman could not identify who the speakers were in the recordings.

None of the allegedly recorded individuals could immediately be reached for comment.

Chris Willingham is the reporter for the Gazette who was discussed in recordings. He is also the author of the article.

Willingham declined to comment on the story, citing ongoing litigation between himself and the sheriff's office.

During the discussion, which was recorded without the trio knowing, the Gazette reported Manning saying she needed to take some packages to a shipping center near the newspaper's office.

She expressed concern about what could happen if Willingham walked out of the newspaper's office, according to the newspaper.

According to the Gazette, Willingham that day had filed a defamation lawsuit against the sheriff's office, Manning and the Board of County Commissioners.

The lawsuit claims were published in the Gazette about three months ago when the initial tort claim was filed, according to the newspaper's report.

"Oh, you're talking about you can't control yourself?" Jennings allegedly said.

In response, Manning allegedly said:

"Yeah, I ain't worried about what he's gonna do to me. I'm worried about what I might do to him. My papaw would have whipped his ass, would have wiped him and used him for toilet paper ... if my daddy hadn't been run over by a vehicle, he would have been down there."

Jennings replied that his 86-year-old father, in response to an opinion published in the newspaper, once "started to go down there and just kill him," according to the Gazette.

"I know where two big, deep holes are here if you ever need them," Jennings allegedly said.

Clardy, the sheriff, allegedly said he had the equipment.

"I've got an excavator," Clardy is accused of saying during the discussion.

"Well, these are already pre-dug," Jennings allegedly said.

Jennings allegedly talked about knowing hitmen in Louisiana who could "cut no (expletive) mercy."

A brief discussion about assaulting local judges followed, according to the Gazette.

Jennings, the commissioner, then discussed how many people might run for sheriff, according to the newspaper story.

"They don't have a goddamn clue what they're getting into," he said. "Not this day and age. I'm going to tell you something — if it was back in the day, when Alan Marston would take a damned Black guy and whoop their (expletive) and throw them in the cell, I'd run for (expletive) sheriff."

Clardy responded by saying, "Yeah, it's not like that no more," the newspaper reported.

Jennings then said Black people have more rights than others, according to the Gazette.

"Take them down to Mud Creek and hang them up with damned rope," he said. "But you can't do that anymore. They've got more rights than we've got."

The discussion followed a bizarre recounting of a house fire that killed a woman, according to the Gazette.

Clardy, the sheriff, recalled how his son, Kyler Clardy, a deputy with the Sheriff's Office, talked about preheating an oven to 350 degrees and leaving the dead woman's body inside of it for 15 minutes, according to the Gazette.

According to the Gazette, with the woman's corpse still wrapped in a body bag, Kyle Clardy joked about going to eat barbecue.