



# Sanders given two life without parole sentences plus 30 years

**Associated Press**  
A Mississippi man admitted Thursday, June 21, that he killed two Roman Catholic nuns, pleading guilty to murder in an agreement that avoided the death penalty, which was opposed by the women's families and their religious orders.  
Rodney Earl Sanders made the pleas to two counts of murder in state court in Lexington, blocks away from where Sisters Margaret Held and Paula Merrill had worked as nurse practitioners in a medical clinic.  
Holmes County Circuit Judge Jannie Lewis gave the 48-year-old Sanders two life

without parole sentences, plus 30 more years for burglary and car theft, accepting a recommendation from District Attorney Akillie Malone-Oliver.  
Sanders stabbed to death Held and Merrill in the home they shared in nearby Durant in 2016. He also pleaded guilty Thursday to burglarizing the house and stealing Held's car. Sanders was also indicted for raping both women, but did not admit guilt on those charges Thursday.  
Shackled hand and foot in a loosely fitting orange jail jumpsuit, Sanders stood at times with his arms crossed

before the judge. Lewis at times had to ask him to speak up.  
Sanders was a resident of Kosciusko, but had been temporarily staying in a shed



Rodney Sanders pictured (AP Photo/Rogelio V. Solis)

across the street from the sisters in Durant. Sanders told investigators he went through the back door of the sisters' home, uninvited. Sanders said Merrill saw him first before a struggle took place with both women, an investigator testified in 2016. Court filings indicate DNA

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# HCCSD: Board of Ed, new supe and parents want best for Durant's 9-12 students

**HC Consolidated School District**  
doubt, made the same recommendation. Therefore, he will not be making a recommendation to reverse the previous Board's decision. The consolidation was established by the Mississippi Department of Education.  
"I know this is personal to you, ladies and gentlemen, and I understand your concerns and uncertainties," Henderson stressed as he presented an informative PowerPoint presentation as to why the approved transfer should stand.  
"According to the data I gathered from the Mississippi Department of Education website, your students (ninth through twelfth grade) were only receiving a basic education," he said. "There were few Advanced Placement (AP) courses. And, several teachers had more than one

assured James L. Henderson, Ed.D., new superintendent of the newly formed Holmes County Consolidated School District as he met with concerned Durant parents Saturday, June 16.  
Henderson told the parents at Durant High School that he is a "Students-First" school administrator.  
The parents requested the community meeting to see whether he would recommend a reversal of the decision made by the previous School Board, prior-to-his-coming, to transfer Durant High School's (DHS) 98 students to Holmes County Central High School (HCCHS) in Lexington.  
Henderson told the parents that he would have, no

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# County horse exhibitors to compete in Georgia

**By Betsy Padgett**  
**Holmes Co. Ext./4-H Agent**  
It is a hope each year that one of the Holmes County 4-H horse exhibitors will be successful enough at the State 4-H Horse Championships in Jackson to qualify for the bigger stage in Perry, Georgia. (That event being the Southeastern 4-H Horse Regionals where 4-H kids from all over the Southeastern United States gather to compete.)  
This year our youth bested that hope for one to qualify. Three did!! And, two will be

going. But, that was not all the success that our youth accomplished at the State Championships held last week in Jackson.  
On Thursday, Jay Jay McCaskill and Marquail Primers, Jr. accumulated the most points in the Goat Tying and Roping Events to earn Senior and Junior High Point trophy buckles, respectively, for their efforts.  
Marquail started the day with fifteenth in Goat Tying, but later placed second in Breakaway Roping and partnering with Jay Jay scoring another 2nd place in Dally Team Roping. Jay Jay took 7th in Goat Tying, 2nd in Calf Roping, 1st in Breakaway Roping and 2nd in Dally Team Roping partnering with Marquail. It was quite fitting that these two

partners in practice and contest stood shoulder to shoulder accepting their buckles. Sinatra Clayton placed first in Jr. Breakaway Roping with a time of 10.666 seconds qualifying him to advance to Regionals with the second fastest time to Jay Jay's 5.117 seconds. Olivia Howell placed 10th in the Ranch Sorting class while Tredell Meeks and Anthony Meeks partnered to take 7th. Emma Cotton placed 6th in Ranch Trail and Ranch Riding and 9th in Ranch Ground Handling.

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Holmes County 4-H Horse team carries their momentum into State 4-H Horse Championships in Jackson this past week. Pictured above are (from left): Semaja Clayton; Sinatra Clayton, 1st place Jr. Breakaway Roping Champion & Regional Qualifier; Jay Jay McCaskill, High Point Cattle & Goat Division Champion & Regional Qualifier; and Tredell Meeks- 1st place Sr. Pole Bending & Regional Qualifier. Not pictured is Marquail Primers, Jr. High Point Cattle & Goat Division Champion.

(Photo by Betsy Padgett)

# It's a jungle (gym) out there!



Oregon Memorial Church off of MS Highway 12 near Lexington held Vacation Bible School for area youth the week of June 17. The fun included crafts, swimming and lots of food. Pictured above, children pile on the jungle gym swing one day during play time. See more photos from the event in this week's edition on page 6.

(Photo by Erica Wentworth)

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**Thursday**  
Partly Cloudy  
94/75  
Precip. Chance  
20%



**Friday**  
P.M. T'Storms  
93/74  
Precip. Chance  
80%



**Saturday**  
A.M. T'Storms  
93/74  
Precip. Chance  
80%



**Sunday**  
Partly Cloudy  
92/73  
Precip. Chance  
20%



**Monday**  
Partly Cloudy  
92/73  
Precip. Chance  
20%



**Tuesday**  
P.M. T'Storms  
92/73  
Precip. Chance  
40%



**Wednesday**  
Scattered T'Storms  
92/73  
Precip. Chance  
40%

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