

Better understood nationally than at home

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By **HEBER TAYLOR**

Anthony Griffin, perhaps Galveston's most famous attorney, is giving up his law license. He's been pursued by the bar for years.

As a much younger lawyer in the 1980s, he was pursued by the Galveston County bar. He prevailed then. He's surrendering his license to practice law now to resolve another series of complaints with the state bar.

The latest series is complicated. Griffin had a widely publicized row with former U.S. District Judge Samuel Kent, who later went to prison, but not before wreaking havoc on Griffin's case load. Hurricane Ike hit in 2008, wrecking Griffin's office and destroying his files. He was given precious little time to rebuild some of those files before appearing in court.

Depending on which side you're one, Griffin let some of his clients down and should be disbarred or Griffin wasn't given a chance by a vindictive judicial system to take care of his clients. From a practical point of view, it doesn't make much difference. Griffin is no longer a lawyer, and he seems to be fine with that.

He's enjoyed a long run as a lawyer. He talks about those years with equanimity and frequent flashes of amusement. At 60, he's ready to do something else. He has passions, which include writing and cooking. He's a published author. He has an agent, and his website is up at athanthonygriffin.com.

The fact that he's moving on seems strange to some Galvestonians, but he's always been more understood — and celebrated — nationally than at home. At the time when the first round of local bar wars was barely over, he was summoned to receive the Thomas Jefferson Center for the Protection of Free Expression's first William J. Brennan Jr. Award. Justices from the Supreme Court attended the ceremony in Georgetown, including Justices Ruth Bader Ginsburg, Sandra Day O'Connor and Brennan. The story that led to that award broke in *The Daily News* in 1993 and appeared soon after in *The New York Times*.

When the Texas Commission on Human Rights sought membership rolls of the Ku Klux Klan, Griffin recognized the effort for what it was: a violation of First Amendment rights. If the government can get the membership rolls of a disreputable organization, it can get the membership rolls of the organizations that you belong to. In an earlier day, the government had gone after the membership rolls of the NAACP. So Griffin, an African American, defended Michael Lowe, the grand dragon of the Texas Knights of the Ku Klux Klan. That came as unpleasant news to the Texas NAACP, which Griffin had served as general counsel. In a tense meeting at a motel in La Marque, the board of the Texas NAACP voted to fire Griffin.

After that meeting, good people from Galveston County wondered what Griffin was thinking. At a national level, people recognized the case for what it was: one man fighting for principle, regardless of personal cost. Griffin is the same principled man he was then. It just turns out he can cook and write.

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