

PROTEST IN THE PORT CITY:  
THE STORY OF THE WILMINGTON TEN

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT ..... iii

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS ..... iv

HISTORIOGRAPHY ..... 1

TRANSCRIPTION OF FILM..... 9

## ABSTRACT

*Protest in the Port City* is a documentary film, running approximately one hour and seven minutes, that covers the tumultuous years of 1968-1980 in Wilmington, North Carolina and the Wilmington 10 case. A master's thesis, this film also includes a footnoted transcription to ensure its accuracy and prove its relevance as original research. The film argues that the Wilmington 10, convicted on arson and conspiracy charges in connection with racial violence that exploded in February 1971, were prosecuted and convicted in an inequitable trial. Furthermore, Wilmington 10 leader and militant Rev. Benjamin Chavis did not introduce violence to Wilmington, as the city experienced racial violence on a large scale in 1898 and riots throughout the late 1960s and early 1970s. The film also highlights the roots of the social environment that led to the Wilmington 10 case, including the closing of Williston Senior High School, a distinguished African-American school, in 1968. The film concludes by illustrating that the wounds of racial violence in the city remain open, leaving Wilmington vulnerable to future unrest.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I am extremely grateful to the University of North Carolina at Wilmington's history department and graduate program. They have fully supported this unique project and my desire to make accurate and scholarly documentary film. Dr. David La Vere and Dr. Susan McCaffray offered unconditional support, solutions and financial assistance to make the production of this film possible.

I would also like to thank the Graduate Student Association, whose grant support was instrumental to finishing this thesis. Because of the enormous financial responsibilities to produce this film, GSA's grant ensured that I could complete the film and purchase quality equipment.

My thanks go to Dr. Robert Brent Toplin, my mentor for two years in the program and my thesis chair. He has consistently pushed me to produce documentary film that is both scholarly and emotional and was instrumental in gaining the support of the history department for film projects. I would also like to thank my two other committee members Dr. Laura Wittern-Keller and Dr. Tammy Stone-Gordon, both of whom offered encouragement and constructive criticism for this project.

Also, this film would not be possible without the help of several graduate students in the history program who aided in the production and served as extras. Thank you Mike Pulido and Patrick Prendergast for participating in this film and doing so with a smile. I would like to thank the Local History department of the New Hanover County Public Library, the North Carolina Collection and Southern Historical Collection at the

University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, the North Carolina State Archives in Raleigh, and Special Collections at the University of North Carolina at Wilmington. Their guidance and assistance was essential to gaining film footage and researching primary sources.

Finally, I would like to thank my husband Robert Taylor, who provided unconditional support and love during this process and was solely responsible for keeping me sane. I have truly enjoyed my experience at the University of North Carolina at Wilmington, and I am so pleased to be able to give back to the community of Wilmington, a city that has offered me so many opportunities.

The documentary film *Protest in the Port City: the Story of the Wilmington Ten* offers a non-traditional medium of historical scholarship that significantly contributes to the existing traditional historiography of the Civil Rights movement. Journalists, activists and non-academic writers in the early to mid-1960s, quickly joined by sociologists and historians, initiated the historical discussion of Civil Rights, which has emphasized traditional and social history for forty years.<sup>1</sup> The importance of this documentary film, utilizing new oral history interviews from prominent figures in Wilmington, North Carolina during the period including librarian Bertha Todd, Superintendent Heyward Bellamy, Rev. Benjamin Chavis Muhammad, and Koyo Nantambu, rests in its contribution to local studies, women's history and traditional historiography.

Historians and journalists launched the first and most enduring trend in Civil Rights literature with traditional narratives focused on political, institutional, biographical and national events. One of the most noted is Clayborne Carson's 1981 book *In Struggle: SNCC and the Black Awakening of the 1960s*, which advanced similar themes as August Meier and Elliot Rudwick's 1973 study of the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE). Carson similarly contended that the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), despite its origins in American pacifism, socialism and religious radicalism, evolved into a militant, Black Nationalist organization that declined after

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<sup>1</sup>Activists Bayard Rustin, Howard Zinn, Pat Watters, William Bradford Huie published numerous writings. Also see Stokely Carmichael and Charles V. Hamilton, *Black Power: the Politics of Liberation in America* (New York: Random House, 1967); Howard Zinn, *SNCC: The New Abolitionists* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1964). Journalists also dominated the literature in the 1960s. See Louis E. Lomax, *The Negro Revolt* (New York: New American Library, 1962); Anthony Lewis and the *New York Times*, *Portrait of a Decade: the Second American Revolution* (New York: Random House, 1964); Sally Belfrage, *Freedom Summer* (New York: Viking Pres, 1965).

supporting white separation and being plagued by internal conflicts.<sup>2</sup> Just two years after Martin Luther King, Jr.'s assassination, David Levering Lewis initiated the perpetual scholarly debate on King in the 1970 work *King: a Critical Biography*.<sup>3</sup> Lewis' revisionist work highlights King's inefficient organization and support that was both limited and reversible from both the white community and the black bourgeoisie. As King's intellectual philosophy evolved into concern for the poor and an anti-Vietnam position, he was overwhelmed in white backlash and black power. This notion of Black Nationalism replacing the non-violent movement present in much of the historiography is substantiated by *Protest in the Port City*. More importantly, the film illuminates the shift to Black Nationalism following King's assassination as it occurred in Wilmington, where King was scheduled to speak the day of his death.

The film's most important contribution is to the Brown debate. In the late 1970s, the significance of Brown received more attention from historians after journalist Richard Kluger's 1976 book *Simple Justice: The History of Brown v. Board of Education and Black America's Struggle for Equality*. Influenced by the problems of integration in the late 1970s and marking the transition to *Brown* revisionism, J. Harvie Wilkinson III criticized the limitations of *Brown* and the Court's abandonment of integration after 1968, experimentation with unfounded solutions, and failure to address residential segregation in the North in *From Brown to Bakke: The Supreme Court and School Integration: 1954-1978*. Five years later, in his 1984 book *The Burden of Brown: Thirty Years of School Desegregation*, Raymond Wolters, incorporating social history through

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<sup>2</sup> August Meier and Elliot Rudwick, *CORE: A Study in the Civil Rights Movement, 1942-1968* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973). Meier and Rudwick also published *Black Protest in the Sixties* (Chicago, Quadrangle Books, 1970).

<sup>3</sup>David Levering Lewis, *King: A Biography*, 2d ed. (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1978).

his analysis of the original five districts ordered to desegregate, posited that *Brown* and the Court's insistence on quota integration failed because it caused white flight and resegregation. *Brown* revisionism reached its most controversial point a decade later when law professor Michael J. Klarman published two articles presenting his backlash thesis, which stated that *Brown* was only significant to the Civil Rights movement in that it prompted violent resistance from Southerners. James T. Patterson approached the subject again in 2001's *Brown v. Board of Education: a Civil Rights Milestone and Its Troubled Legacy* after the Supreme Court overturned *Swann v. Charlotte-Mecklenburg Board of Education*.<sup>4</sup> Addressing the new questions by the public and historians over resegregation, the validity of the decision to target schools, and the Court's effectiveness in integration, Patterson argued that the Court did not understand the class conflict or the concept of wealthier districts equaling wealthier schools. Furthermore, the movement's existence did not depend on the *Brown* decision. Because a large majority of schools remained segregated, the decision was neither revolutionary nor influential.<sup>5</sup> *Protest in the Port City* corroborates the claims of Klarman and Patterson, as *Brown* did not trigger school desegregation in Wilmington and New Hanover County. What's more, once

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<sup>4</sup> J. Harvie Wilkinson, III., *From Brown to Bakke: The Supreme Court and School Integration, 1965-1978* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979). Raymond Wolters, *The Burden of Brown: Thirty Years of School Desegregation* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1984). Michael J. Klarman, "Brown, Racial Change, and the Civil Rights Movement," *Virginia Law Review* LXXX (February 1994): 7-150. Michael J. Klarman, "How Brown Changed Race Relations: The Backlash Thesis," *Journal of American History* LXXXI (June 1994): 81-118. James T. Patterson, *Brown v. Board of Education: A Civil Rights Milestone and Its Troubled Legacy*. (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2001). Also recently published Robert J. Cottrol, Raymond T. Diamond, and Leland Ware, *Brown v. Board of Education: Caste, Culture, and the Constitution*, Landmark Law Cases & American Society (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2003).

<sup>5</sup> Historians Harvard Stikoff in *A New Deal for Blacks*, David Goldfield's *Black, White and Southern: Race Relations and Southern Culture, 1940 to Present* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1990) and Doug McAdam's *Political Process and the Development of Black Insurgency, 1930-1970* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982) established that the catalyst for the movement was the bus boycott, not the *Brown* decision..



significant strides to desegregate the county schools began, white backlash engulfed the city.

Despite the tremendous success of traditional histories about the Civil Rights Movement, social and women's history began to gain influence in the early 1980s. While traditional works began incorporating social history into its larger studies, women's history inspired little attention. In 1979, Sara Evans' *Personal Politics: the Roots of Women's Liberation in the Civil Rights Movement and the New Left* launched the debate on women in Civil Rights, the origins of post-Civil Rights social movements and the charges of sexist behavior by male activists toward women. Three years later, Mary Aicken Rothschild embraced Evans' argument by introducing black and white women's experience with male volunteers' chauvinism in the Freedom Summer campaign into the literature. Building on the momentum gender history in the Civil Rights movement created in the 1980s, Vicki L. Crawford, Jacqueline Anne Rouse, and Barbara Woods completed *Women in the Civil Rights Movement: Trailblazers and Torchbearers* in 1990. Although women receive noticeably less attention than larger traditional and social history studies, new biographies of women and women's studies continue to flourish, such as Barbara Ransby's book *Ella Baker and the Black Freedom Movement: a Radical Democratic Vision*, Brenda Gayle Plummer's *Window on Freedom: Race, Civil Rights, and Foreign Affairs, 1945-1988*, both published in 2003, and *Going South: Jewish Women in the Civil Rights Movement* written by Debra Schultz the following year. Gail Schmunk Murray recently analyzed the role of women activists from the South in *Throwing Off the Cloak of Privilege: White Southern Women Activists in the Civil Rights Era*, which hopefully marks a divergence from scholarship only portraying the white

backlash to the Civil Rights movement in the South.<sup>6</sup> The oral history provided by Bertha Todd for *Protest in the Port City* compliments this new trend and highlights the role local, middle-class African-American women from the South played in the desegregation process and Civil Rights.

William H. Chafe published the first landmark grassroots study in 1980's *Civilities and Civil Rights: Greensboro, North Carolina and the Black Struggle for Equality*.<sup>7</sup> He traced the roots of the movement to black institutions in the 1940s, which created a method of expression and agenda for the black community. Chafe claimed North Carolina and Greensboro suffered from a "progressive mystique" that falsely depicted the region as moderate despite its paternalistic control by the industrialists and business class in order to prevent an environment conducive to social change before the sit-ins. *Protest in the Port City* supports Chafe's assessment by illustrating the significance of Williston Senior High School, which provided an outstanding education and voice to the African-American community in Wilmington. The film also recognizes that paternalism and the myth of a progressive North Carolina was just as present in

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<sup>6</sup> Sara Evans, *Personal Politics: The Roots of Women's Liberation in the Civil Rights Movement and the New Left* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1979). Mary Aickin Rothschild, *A Case of Black and White: Northern Volunteers and the Southern Freedom Summers, 1964-1965* (Westport, Conn: Greenwood Press, 1982). Vicki L. Crawford, Jacqueline Anne Rouse, and Barbara Woods, *Women in the Civil Rights Movement: Trailblazers and Torchbearers, 1941-1965* (Brooklyn, N.Y.: Carlson Pub., 1990). Women's roles in the Civil Rights movement written by female historians have flourished since the turn of the century. See Kathryn L. Nasstrom, *Everybody's Grandmother and Nobody's Fool: Frances Freeborn Pauley and the Struggle for Social Justice* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2000); Bettye Collier-Thomas and V.P. Franklin, *Sisters in Struggle: African-American Women in the Civil Rights-Black Power Movement* (New York: New York University Press, 2001); Barbara Ransby, *Ella Baker and the Black Freedom Movement: a Radical Democratic Vision*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003). Women continue to publish on facets of the movement outside of women's history also. See Brenda Gayle Plummer, *Window on Freedom: Race, Civil Rights, and Foreign Affairs, 1945-1988* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003); Martha Biondi, *To Stand and Fight: the Struggle for Civil Rights in Postwar New York City* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003). Debra Schultz, *Going South: Jewish Women in the Civil Rights Movement* (New York: New York University Press, 2001). Gail Schmunk Murray, *Throwing Off the Cloak of Privilege: White Southern Women Activists in the Civil Rights Era* (Gainesville : University Press of Florida, 2004).

<sup>7</sup> William H. Chafe, *Civilities and Civil Rights: Greensboro, North Carolina and the Black Struggle for Equality* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980).

southeastern North Carolina as it was in Greensboro, a notion thoroughly investigated by John Godwin's 2000 book *Black Wilmington and the North Carolina Way: Portrait of a Community in the Era of Civil Rights Protest*.<sup>8</sup> Scholarship on the opponents of black progress has widened its net also to include studies on the Ku Klux Klan, but white-supremacy groups such as those seen in Wilmington continue to be overlooked. Thus, Godwin's research and *Protest in the Port City* provide valuable scholarship on lesser known groups, such as the Rights of White People, which operated in southeastern North Carolina.<sup>9</sup>

In addition to Chafe and Godwin's North Carolina studies, Adam Fairclough produced his own state study in 1995 with *Race and Democracy: the Civil Rights Struggle in Louisiana, 1915-1972*. Similar state studies include two new publications in 2004, Kenneth T. Andrews' *Freedom Is a Constant Struggle: the Mississippi Civil Rights Movement and Its Legacy* and Frye Gaillard's *Cradle of Freedom: Alabama and the Movement That Changed America*. More recent localized studies include Diane McWhorter's *Carry Me Home: Birmingham, Alabama, the Climatic Battle of the Civil Rights Revolution*, John Kirk's *Redefining the Color Line: Black Activism in Little Rock, Arkansas, 1940-1970* and J. Mills Thornton *Dividing Lines: Municipal Politics and the Struggle for Civil Rights in Montgomery, Birmingham, and Selma*.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> John Godwin, *Black Wilmington and the North Carolina Way: Portrait of a Community in the Era of Civil Rights Protest* (Lanham, Maryland: University Press of America, 2000).

<sup>9</sup> David Mark Chalmers, *Back Fire: How the Ku Klux Klan Helped the Civil Rights Movement* (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman and Littlefield, 2003).

<sup>10</sup> Adam Fairclough, *Race and Democracy: the Civil Rights Struggle in Louisiana, 1915-1972* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1995). Kenneth T. Andrews, *Freedom Is a Constant Struggle: the Mississippi Civil Rights Movement and Its Legacy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004). Frye Gaillard, *Cradle of Freedom: Alabama and the Movement That Changed America* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2004). Diane McWhorter, *Carry Me Home: Birmingham, Alabama, the Climatic Battle of the Civil Rights Revolution* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2001). John Kirk, *Redefining the Color Line: Black Activism in Little Rock, Arkansas, 1940-1970* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2002).

A recent trend in the literature has been the role of the media, although historians have long argued the strategic importance of the media in mobilizing federal and white support yet ignored the role of Southern media. In 2004, journalist Kay Mills published *Changing Channels: the Civil Rights Case that Transformed Television* tracing the legal history of the court battle over Jackson, Mississippi television station WLBT's segregation policy on and off air.<sup>11</sup> While Mills argued that media segregation led to both black and white confusion in the South as the Civil Rights movement developed, historian Brian Ward claimed in *Radio and the Struggle for Civil Rights in the South* that the roots of the movement could be traced to radio in the 1920s and that radio proved indispensable to the black population who used it to create a community and later to receive critical, but coded, information on movement activities.<sup>12</sup> *Protest in the Port City* also provides a unique look at the role of the media in garnering support for political prisoners, as in the case of the Wilmington 10. The Ten not only received support across the globe and from Amnesty International, but they also became a symbol to American-branded human right violators like Russia of the U.S.'s own violations.

Some directions the secondary literature needs to follow are evident from the trends in recent works. In traditional history, for example, many individuals lack appropriate biographies and church scholarship has not been fully exploited. *Protest in the Port City* illuminates the need for a study on the United Church of Christ and their

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J. Mills Thorton, *Dividing Lines: Municipal Politics and the Struggle for Civil Rights in Montgomery, Birmingham, and Selma* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2002).

<sup>11</sup> Kay Mills, *Changing Channels: the Civil Rights Case that Transformed Television* (Jackson: Miss.: University Press of Mississippi, 2004). For other women's history written by Mills, see Kay Mills, *This Little Light of Mine: the Life of Fannie Lou Hamer* (New York, N.Y: Dutton, 1993) and *From Pocahontas to Power Suits: Everything You Need to Know about Women's History in America* (New York : Plume, 1995).

<sup>12</sup> Brian Ward, *Radio and the Struggle for Civil Rights in the South* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2004).

role. Heyward Bellamy, the Wilmington Ten, especially the controversial figure of Benjamin Chavis Muhammad, and Bertha Todd would make excellent subjects for biographical studies. Although Larry Reni Thomas has written a small study on the Wilmington 10 as well as a historical fiction novel about the group, his bias and relationship with key figures suggests that works like *Protest in the Port City* are needed to balance the interpretation.<sup>13</sup> The influence of journalists and sociologists in shaping the questions and trends of the movement will likely decline as a new generation of historians approach the subject with greater distance than previous historians and writers. Nonetheless, the secondary literature remains rooted in traditional and social histories with a growing emphasis on gender and media history.

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<sup>13</sup> Larry Reni Thomas, *The True Story of the Wilmington Ten* (Hampton, Virginia: U.B. & U.S. Communications Systems, 1993).

**Benjamin Chavis:** This city and this county has a history that needs to be unlocked.

**Pam Greenough:** Somebody came in here and said, “Right. We’re gonna turn this place upside down, and we’re going to do it through the young people.”

**Narrator:** In the late 1960s and 1970s, the port city of Wilmington, North Carolina, threatened to self-destruct. For three years, sporadic violence and protests erupted in this Southern town, causing extensive damage to property and debilitating curfews. At the height of the violence, two men lay dead in the streets, white-owned businesses were burned to ruins, and a dangerous armed standoff imperiled a local black church. Ten people, who would come to be known as the Wilmington Ten, led by Benjamin Chavis, were arrested, prosecuted, imprisoned in connection with these events and were eventually released after proving the trial’s legality was questionable.<sup>14</sup>

**Larry Reni Thomas:** Viva la Wilmington Ten!

**Crowd:** Viva la Wilmington Ten!

**Thomas:** I can’t hear you! Viva Wilmington Ten!

**Crowd:** Viva la Wilmington Ten!

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<sup>14</sup>“North Carolina Last in Freedom,” newspaper clipping, Education and Corrections Section: Wilmington Case File, State Records, North Carolina State Archives, Raleigh, herein after cited as Education and Corrections. Speech of Benjamin Chavis Muhammad, *35<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Wilmington Ten Event*, 2 February 2006, Warwick Center, University of North Carolina at Wilmington, herein after cited as Warwick. Robert Fales, Downtown Wilmington 0821, picture, Fales Collection, New Hanover County Public Library, herein cited as NHCPL. Former Hoggard student Pam Bandolas Greenough, interview by author, 3 March 2006, video recording, Hoggard High School, Wilmington. Nation Guard Getting out of Truck at Gregory Congregational Church, *Wilmington Star News*, newspaper clipping, Heyward Bellamy Papers, Special Collections, University of North Carolina at Wilmington, herein cited as Bellamy Papers. “Dawson St. Barricade,” *Wilmington Star News*, 3 October 1971, newspaper clipping, Wilmington Movement, Randall Library, University of North Carolina at Wilmington. “Harvey Cumber Picture,” *Wilmington Star News*, 14 February 1971, Bellamy Papers, 1-D. “Picture of Fire and Fire Hoses,” *Wilmington Star News* 18 February 1996, newspaper clipping, Wilmington 10 File, NHCPL. “Picture of National Guard on Sidewalk at Gregory Congregational Church,” *Wilmington Star News*, 18 February 1996, newspaper clipping, Wilmington 10 File, NHCPL. Larry Reni Thomas, *35<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Wilmington Ten Event*, 1 February 2006, Gregory Congregation Church, Wilmington, herein after cited as Gregory. *Wilmington Ten Press Conference* following Gov. Hunt’s Decision on the case, prod. University of North Carolina, 55 min., 1978, beta cassette, Education and Corrections Section: Wilmington Ten Correspondence and Miscellaneous Records File, North Carolina State Archives, Raleigh, herein after cited as Press Conference.

**Thomas:** Viva la Wilmington Ten!

**Crowd:** Viva la Wilmington Ten!

**Thomas:** Ladies and gentlemen, Dr. Benjamin Chavis Muhammad (*applause*).

**Narrator:** Set in an Atlantic coastal town located along the banks of the Cape Fear River, the story of the Wilmington Ten is not about their guilt or innocence but rather it is a window into a city's struggle to live in racial harmony and desegregate; thus the roots of this struggle can be traced back to the creation of black educational institutions in Wilmington after the Civil War and the myth of a progressive North Carolina. North Carolina was thought to be the most progressive southern state in race relations, but the launch of the 1960 lunch counter sit-in campaigns in Greensboro, North Carolina shattered this illusion. While the myth dates back to the post-reconstruction era, black Wilmingtonians no doubt questioned the progressive myth after the riot and coup d'état orchestrated by members of the white community in Wilmington following the November elections of 1898.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>15</sup>The first landmark grassroots study in the Civil Rights historiography, William H. Chafe's *Civilities and Civil Rights: Greensboro, North Carolina and the Black Struggle for Equality*, asked new questions about paternalism, local institutional influences, and interracial communication. Chafe traced the roots of launch of the sit-in campaigns to black institutions in the 1940s, which created a method of expression and agenda for the black community. Claiming North Carolina and Greensboro suffered from a "progressive mystique" that falsely depicted the region as moderate despite its paternalistic control, Chafe argued the industrialists and business class used the civility of paternalism to prevent an environment conducive to social change before the sit-ins. William H. Chafe, *Civilities and Civil Rights: Greensboro, North Carolina and the Black Struggle for Equality* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980). Protestors in Rain, "North Carolina Denies the Right to Organize: Wilmington Ten Face 282 Years," picture, North Carolina Collection, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, herein cited as NCC; "Three Teachers," *Hoggard High School Yearbook* (1970), picture, NHCPL, 21. "Class at Gregory Normal School," Cape Fear Museum, Wilmington. *Railroad Map of North Carolina*, 1900, examined and authorized by the North Carolina Corporation Commission, Library of Congress Geography and Map Division Washington, D.C., 3901p rr002740 [http://hdl.loc.gov/loc/gmd/g3901p\\_rr002740](http://hdl.loc.gov/loc/gmd/g3901p_rr002740). Ronald Martin, *Robert Patterson, and Mark Martin Stage Sit-down Strike after Being Refused Service at a F.W. Woolworth Luncheon Counter*, Greensboro, N.C. (1960), United Press International, New York World-Telegram and the Sun Newspaper Photograph Collection, Library of Congress. Thalian Hall 0026, picture, Fales Collection, NHCPL. Insert historiography here. *Collier's Weekly* cover, 26 November 1898, Cape Fear Museum. Daily Record Burning, newspaper clipping, Cape Fear Museum. "A Democratic Plurality of 25,000 Wipes out the Fusionists," newspaper clipping, Cape Fear Museum.

Several months before the riot, Daily Record editor Alex Manly roused white anger after he published his editorial criticizing the lynching of black men. The son of a white politician, Manly also addressed the hypocrisy of white anger towards interracial sexual relationships. As election day approached, groups such as the Red Shirts used intimidation to keep African-Americans from the polls. In the following days, Alfred Waddell and Hugh McCrae encouraged hundreds of whites to gather at the armory and burn the Daily Record, local ousted politicians were forced to resign their position early in the only coup in U.S. history, and middle class and prominent blacks as well as sympathetic whites were exiled or fled the city. An unknown number of blacks, estimated anywhere between nine and over a hundred, were killed during the riot.<sup>16</sup>

With the middle class and elite black population eliminated, African-Americans in Wilmington sought to advance themselves with one of their few remaining institutions, the education system. Over time, Williston became a premier black institution and was source of pride and fellowship in the black community.<sup>17</sup>

**Bertha Todd:** Williston Senior High School was the epitome of the African-American center for socialization, which was good for the academic aspect of the students at school,

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<sup>16</sup>Alex Manly at East Carolina University, picture, Cape Fear Museum. .Alex Manly, picture, Cape Fear Museum. “Red Shirts Supreme, newspaper clipping, Cape Fear Museum. “A Few Hints,” newspaper clipping, Cape Fear Museum. Alfred Waddell, *Collier’s Weekly*, 26 November 1898, picture, Cape Fear Museum, 4. Armory, *Collier’s Weekly*, 26 November 1898, picture, Cape Fear Museum, 5. Men outside Daily Record, *Collier’s Weekly*, 26 November 1898, picture, Cape Fear Museum, 4. Exiled African-Americans, *Collier’s Weekly*, 26 November 1898, Cape Fear Museum, 5. The Saturday Blade, “Race War Grows,” Chicago, Ill. 19 November 1898, 1. Men Gathered on 4<sup>th</sup> and Harnett Streets in Wilmington, *Collier’s Weekly*, 26 November 1898, Cape Fear Museum, 4. Class of Gregory Normal School, Cape Fear Museum. For further information on 1898, see Jennifer Whitmer, *American Coup: The Election, Riot and Coup of 1898*, documentary, Randall Library, University of North Carolina at Wilmington; David S. Cecelski and Timothy B. Tyson, eds., *Democracy Betrayed: The Wilmington Race Riot of 1898* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998). Leon Prather, *We Have Taken a City: Wilmington Racial Massacre and Coup of 1898* (Wilmington: NU World Enterprise, 1984).

<sup>17</sup>Mary Washington Howe, picture, Cape Fear Museum. Gregory Normal School, picture, Cape Fear Museum. Williston High School 1180, picture, Fales Collection, NHCPL. For additional accounts on the importance of Williston, see *Williston High School*, Southeast North Carolina, Oral History Collection, Randall Library, University of North Carolina at Wilmington.



because usually that teacher either attended the same church as the parents did or that teacher had the opportunity to socialize or communicate with the parents on an informal basis.

**Kojo Nantambu (formerly Roderick Kirby):** My mother graduated from Williston, my sister, my brother. It was like the family tradition. It was the foundation of this community. All of us wanted to go to Williston. All of us wanted to graduate from Williston. It was the number one, the greatest school under the sun. That's all we looked forward to growing up. Williston, it was the heart of our life. It was the heart of our community. Listen, not only, every teacher knew because they knew your momma, they knew your daddy, they knew your cousins. The teachers, most of the teachers, had graduated had graduate from there or come from somewhere, it was just a tradition of continuity in education. It was so important. It was more important to me than going to any school in the world.

**Heyward Bellamy:** Williston was a good school because they had good teachers.

**Todd:** Once the students graduated from Williston Senior High School, they were given many scholarships to the Ivy League colleges and universities. They were very good students, those who attended, and they worked hard.

**Nantambu:** To this day, we have generals, CEOs that graduated from Williston, so you understand. It was not like Williston was a retarded school. I'm telling you they expected a lot out of us.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>18</sup>Williston and Hoggard High School Librarian Bertha Todd, interview by author, 2 March 2006, Williston Middle School, video recording, Wilmington. Glee Club, picture, *Williston Senior High School Yearbook* (1968). Football Team, picture, *Williston Senior High School Yearbook* (1968), 70. Mr. Corbin, Mrs. Sutton, and Mr. Fisher, picture, *Williston Senior High School Yearbook* (1968). Library, picture, *Williston Senior High School Yearbook* (1968), 4. Band, picture, *Williston Senior High School Yearbook* (1968), 55. Physics Class, picture, *Williston Senior High School Yearbook* (1968), 34. Drafting Student, picture, *Williston Senior High School Yearbook* (1967). Kojo Nantambu (formerly Roderick Kirby), interview by

**Narrator:** Despite the success of Williston, 1898 and its legacy were never forgotten. A climate prevailed in Wilmington which was far less progressive than other North Carolina cities with sizable minority populations.

**Todd:** And of course when I came here, I sort of went back into time. Wilmington was not as progressive as the western part of the state.

**Greenough:** There's this myth that Wilmington was this wonderful town where blacks and whites got along great and that we didn't need the race riots to shake anything up. And in actuality, what it was was there was culture within a culture. And it was, as long as the blacks knew their place, that the inner workings of the town, the inner workings of the society were calm waters.

**Todd:** When I came to Wilmington from Durham in 1952, there were several teachers who would pull me aside to tell me about the violence that occurred in 1898. When I came here in '52, it was simply 54 years after that had occurred, and they had it on their minds then. The teachers sort of talked among themselves, and I really found something that I found very strange. Whites, except for blacks that worked in the homes of many whites, did not communicate.

**Narrator:** This lack of communication affected the school system as well.

**Nantambu:** You know you had a black school; you're going to have a mediocre education. We're going to give you mediocre equipment, mediocre resources and

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author, 2 February 2006, Warwick Center, video recording, Wilmington. Superintendent Heyward Bellamy, interview by author, 3 March 2006, Heyward Bellamy residence, video recording, Wilmington. Althea Gibson, picture, *Every Man Should Try* by Herbert Eaton (Wilmington: Bonaparte Press, 1984) Local History, NHCPL. For more information on the importance of Williston to the black community, please see Special Collections, Oral History, Williston Oral Histories, University of North Carolina at Wilmington, Wilmington, N.C.

supplies. And that's the way . . . it was really pathetic.<sup>19</sup>

**Bellamy:** We attended separate meetings. We had separate staffs, completely, about the only contacts between the schools, we'd share music concerts, the band, the glee club, and so forth, and that was about it.<sup>20</sup>

**Narrator:** Inequality was not only found in the classroom but also in the expectations of some white administrators, including then Superintendent Roland, whom failed to recognize the tremendous students Williston produced.

**Todd:** He did not believe that the seniors made the scores they did on the SAT. So what did he do? He instructed the principal and the counselor, who had administered the test, to retake it.

**Narrator:** Even after Brown, the segregated school system continued and no viable plan was implemented to carry out desegregation.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>19</sup>East Wilmington Elementary School, Wrightsboro Elementary School, Peabody Elementary School cafeteria, and Chestnut Street Elementary School cafeteria, pictures ca. 1950, *Every Man Should Try*, NHCPL.

<sup>20</sup>Choir, picture, *Williston Senior High School Yearbook* (1967), NHCPL. Girls Chorus, picture, *Hoggard High School Yearbook* (1970), NHCPL.

<sup>21</sup>*George E. C. Hayes, Thurgood Marshall, and James Nabrit, Congratulating Each Other, Following Supreme Court Decision Declaring Segregation Unconstitutional, 1954*, courtesy of AP/Wide World Photos, New York World-Telegram and Sun Photograph Collection, Prints and Photographs Division, Library of Congress. Marion S. Trikosko, *James Meredith, Oxford, Mississippi, 1962*, New York World-Telegram and Sun Photograph Collection, Prints and Photographs Division, Library of Congress. For more information on the *Brown v. the Board of Education* and Desegregation, see: J. Harvie Wilkinson, III., *From Brown to Bakke: The Supreme Court and School Integration, 1965-1978* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979); Raymond Wolters, *The Burden of Brown: Thirty Years of School Desegregation* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1984). Michael J. Klarman, "Brown, Racial Change, and the Civil Rights Movement," *Virginia Law Review* LXXX (February 1994): 7-150; Michael J. Klarman, "How Brown Changed Race Relations: The Backlash Thesis," *Journal of American History* LXXXI (June 1994): 81-118; James T. Patterson, *Brown v. Board of Education: A Civil Rights Milestone and Its Troubled Legacy*. (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2001). Influenced by the problems of integration in the late 1970s, Revisionist J. Harvie Wilkinson III criticized the limitations of *Brown* and the Court's abandonment of integration after 1968, experimentation with unfounded solutions, and failure to address residential segregation in the North. Five years later, Raymond Wolters, utilizing community studies of the original five districts ordered to desegregate, argued that *Brown* and the Court's insistence on quota integration failed because it caused white flight and resegregation. *Brown* revisionism reached its most controversial point a decade later when law professor Michael J. Klarman published his backlash thesis, which stated that *Brown* was only significant to the Civil Rights movement in that it prompted violent resistance from Southerners. After the Supreme Court overturned *Swann v. Charlotte-*

**Bellamy:** It didn't amount to a lot of desegregation. We had our first student in this county assigned to a previously all white school, which was in Chestnut Street School, Aaron McCrae, in 1962. We sent Aaron over to Chestnut Street School, and the next morning the sun came up.

**Todd:** There was sort of an oppression there that I didn't like, and I can assure you that I always reacted.

**Narrator:** Despite the order to desegregate, Bertha Todd continued to face discriminatory behavior from Superintendent Roland.<sup>22</sup>

**Todd:** I ordered quite a few books on desegregation and integration. And I waited for my book order to be delivered at Williston Senior High School. I waited and waited, the months passed. Finally, I asked the supervisor what had happened to my book order. H.M. Roland, I don't mind telling you who it was. I came here under him. He was certainly a segregationist. And he told the supervisor to tell me that I had too many books on there about integration and desegregation of schools, so my book order was not placed. Well I was very perturbed, and I didn't bite my tongue and said what I wanted to say. So, I told the supervisor to tell Mr. Roland, as a librarian with a master's degree, I had learned to use the catalogues that were recommended by the American Library Association, and I received quite a few of those, and those titles were listed in those catalogues that I received. Now if he could find any other catalogue form which I could order that did not carry those titles, I would be happy to redo my book order. I was very

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*Mecklenburg Board of Education*, James T. Patterson argued that the Court did not understand the class conflict or the concept of wealthier districts equaling wealthier schools. Furthermore, because a large majority of schools remained segregated, the decision was neither revolutionary nor influential.

<sup>22</sup>Bertha Todd, picture, *Williston Senior High School Yearbook* (1968), 43.

perturbed. I did not mind telling him what I thought. And of course, I never got the book order. I think I lost the money that year.

**Bellamy:** This was something that never had been done, and I think there was just a, some frustration over that among the black and white citizens.

**Narrator:** As the desegregation crisis continued to grow in Wilmington, news spread across the globe of Martin Luther King's assassination on April 4, 1968 in Memphis, TN. The tragic part for Wilmingtonians was that he was scheduled to speak in Wilmington the day that he died, but had cancelled to remain in Memphis after a march there turned violent.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> On the desegregation process: Dr. Hubert Eaton, who had worked extensively on desegregating the hospital system, filed a suit on behalf of black parents in March of 1964 known as Carolyn Eaton versus New Hanover County Board of Education, named after Eaton's daughter Carolyn. It charged the board with refusing to admit students to the school of their choice or presenting a plan for complete desegregation. In August, the courts also ordered the school system to desegregate, and the school system responded with the Freedom of Choice plan, adopted on October 1, 1963 by the Board of Education and implemented in the 1965-1966 school year. As a result of the order to desegregate, Eaton's lawyer Julius LeVonne Chambers and the board's lawyer William H. Hill remained in frequent contact from 1964 to 1968. Chambers continued to press the school board on their failure to comply with desegregation orders, while the NAACP launched their own campaign. The case would continue through 1983 under Judge Franklin Dupree. Heyward Bellamy Affidavit, Mamie Thomas, president of the Wilmington branch NAACP, Wilmington, to James M. Quigley, Assistant Secretary of Health, Education and Welfare, Washington, D.C., 22 May 1965, Bellamy Papers. A.E. Laney, Wilmington, to Mamie Thomas, Wilmington, 27 May 1965, Bellamy Papers. Heyward Bellamy Affidavit, *Carolyn Eaton, et. al., plaintiffs v. the New Hanover County Board of Education*, Bellamy Papers. "Defendants Statement of the History of Desegregation in the New Hanover County School System, *Carolyn Eaton, et. al., plaintiffs v. the New Hanover County Board of Education*, Bellamy Papers. Julius LeVonne Chambers, Charlotte, to William Hill, Wilmington, 29 August 1966, Bellamy Papers. William Hill, Wilmington, to E.A. Laney, Wilmington, 30 August 1966, Bellamy Papers. William Hill, Wilmington, to Julius LeVonne Chambers, Charlotte, 12 September 1966, Bellamy Papers. Julius LeVonne Chambers, Charlotte, to William Hill, Wilmington, 15 September 1966, Bellamy Papers. William Hill, Wilmington, to Judge Algernon Butler, Clinton, North Carolina, 16 September 1966, Bellamy Papers. Julius LeVonne Chambers, Charlotte, to William Hill, Wilmington, 5 October 1966, Bellamy Papers. *Carolyn Eaton et al., Appellees, v. New Hanover County Board of Education, Appellant*, no. 71-1890, 459 F.2d 684; (U.S. 4<sup>th</sup> Cir. 1972), January 3, 1972 Argued, April 26, 1972 Decided. Carolyn Eaton et al., Plaintiffs, v. New Hanover County Board of Education, Defendant, Civ. No. 1022, 330 F. Supp. 78; 1971 (U.S. Dist. for the Eastern District of North Carolina, Wilmington Division), 23 July 1971; both accessed from LexisNexis, <http://0-web.lexis-nexis.com.uncccl.coast.uncwil.edu/universe> 7 September 2005. Franklin Dupree Papers, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Pictures of Martin Luther King, Jr.: Pictures of Martin Luther King, Jr.: Martin Luther King, Jr., picture, [www.nobelprize.org/peace/laureates/1964/king-bio.html](http://www.nobelprize.org/peace/laureates/1964/king-bio.html). Martin Luther King, Jr., picture, [www.images.google.com](http://www.images.google.com). Martin Luther King articles: "King Cancels Stop in Wilmington Thursday,"

**Nantambu:** When Martin Luther King was going to come here, of course, there was always mixed emotions. The reason why . . . we were very excited. I mean this was one of the greatest leaders, of the greatest known personalities in the country at that time. And there was a lot of problems here in Wilmington, and we wanted him to come. There was a flip side to that. We were afraid. A lot of people were afraid in Wilmington because everywhere he went, of course, there was violence and stuff. And so, we knew he didn't perpetuate it, motivate it. Well he motivated it, but he didn't perpetuate it. But we wanted him to come because we felt like he would uplift, lift us up, give us some motivation, give up some insight, and things in Wilmington would begin to change. And then when he had to cancel, I mean we were really devastated, but then he cancelled, and then he was killed that night. And we were like, "Wow!" because it makes you think well, "Boy, what if had come here, he would have lived another thirty years maybe." You know, so it makes us think a lot about what happened that night.<sup>24</sup>

**Todd:** That's when I learned my first bit of riot control. The students were upset. They wanted the flag lowered. They felt as if there should be a memorial service at school that morning, and they simply rioted. A few of us took it upon ourselves to try to work with these students and encourage them to return to their classrooms or better still we finally decided to have an assembly. And the two young teachers who were encouraging them to do this were the very ones who I managed to get to have them speak with the students

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*Wilmington Morning Star*, 2 April 1968. Wiley McKellar and Tommy Williams, "Dr. King Had Been Slated to Speak Here," *Wilmington Morning Star*, 5 April 1968, 1-2.

<sup>24</sup>The community concerns discussed by Nantambu were echoed by Dr. Hubert Eaton, who as a local representative of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference helped orchestrate King's visit. He said, "There were white as well as Negro citizens here in Wilmington who for some reason did not want Dr. King to come to Wilmington and over the past several weeks I have received several calls from local white citizens who called anonymously to say that if Dr. King came to Wilmington, he would be killed." McKellar, "Dr. King Had Been Slated to Speak Here." "King Cancels Trip," E. Edwin Kirton Scrapbook #18, Special Collections, Randall Library, University of North Carolina at Wilmington.

in the gymnasium that particular day. And of course that had a calming effect on the students, and we were given permission to, those who wanted to attend, we were given permission to go down to the courthouse, and I remember being in that group, with some teachers, singing “We Shall Overcome.” Well by the time we walked back to the school, I believe the superintendent permitted the students to return home for that particular day.<sup>25</sup>

**Narrator:** Soon more young African-Americans took to the streets with non-violence the day after King’s death, but the following evening, Mayor O.O. Allsbrook summoned around 150 National Guardsmen after a group of 100 people took to the streets. Looting, fires, and rock and brick throwing followed. Police Chief H. E. Williamson’s men and the guard secured the riot areas two hours after Mayor Allsbrook’s curfew took effect. Williamson used so much tear gas that extra supplies were trucked in. The National Guard remained as the rioting continued for three more days. Local black leaders like Rev. E. Edwin Kirton denounced the rioting but stressed that the roots could be traced to a lack of jobs, inadequate housing and the black youth’s concerns being ignored. Schools were closed for an extended Easter break and parents were encouraged to enforce the curfew. The chaos finally diminished after heavy rain moved in on Tuesday evening, five days after King’s assassination. Chief Williamson announced that police arrested nearly 200 people, most for curfew violations, and the fire department answered 38 arson

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<sup>25</sup>Police Chief H.E. Williamson posted an alert in Wilmington and had every available officer manning the streets. Initially, the only occurrences were isolated cases of stone throwing at cars and small groups of African-Americans being dispersed without incident. Williamson praised Wilmingtonians for their conduct as no arrests had been made in the first twenty four hours following King’s death. He expressed his sympathy but asked that the city maintain their composure throughout the weekend. This restraint was illustrated by the march to the courthouse described by Bertha Todd, which was also covered in the newspaper article. “City Quiet,” *Wilmington Morning Star*, 5 April 1968, 1. Wiley McKellar, “Williamson Lauds Citizens’ Restraint,” *Wilmington Morning Star*, 6 April 1968, 1. “I’m an American,” music, Library of Congress; Martin Luther King Student March, picture, *Williston Senior High School Yearbook* (1968).

calls during the riots.<sup>26</sup>

**Greenough:** I mean after Martin Luther got killed, everything changed. You know, and it was suddenly like, “We tried to do it his way peacefully. Now it’s time to give these people a little bit of their own medicine.

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<sup>26</sup>A large group of approximately one-hundred citizens, unofficially led by Willie Edward Ballard, Jr., gathered for peaceful march on Friday, April 5<sup>th</sup>. Police followed the group through the streets until midnight, when rain forced the group to disperse without incident. Wilmington’s relatively calm initial response to King’s assassination exploded on Saturday night into a full-scale riot. Mayor O.O. Allsbrook summoned the National Guard to aid police against one-hundred rock-throwing rioters centered on Third and Swann Streets. Looting and fires spread across Ninth, Harnett and Nixon streets, leaving most of the damaged stores completely burned. Around 10:30 p.m., two platoons commanded by Col. William Eason arrived, and Williamson dispersed the tear gas. Mayor Allsbrook announced a city curfew for 11:20 p.m. and to arrest anyone on the streets after midnight. By 1:30 a.m., the National Guard secured the riot areas and stationed themselves at all the entrances into the downtown area. Allsbrook ordered a 3 p.m. curfew as rioting, looting, burning and sporadic sniper fire continued into its second day. Guardsman, carrying M-R rifles and under the command of Brigadier General C.B. Shimer, reinforced the police armed with riot gear. Shimer announced that armored personal carriers fitted with 30 caliber machine guns were to be deployed into riot areas. The Good Neighbor Council and the mayor called an emergency meeting at City Hall and met with “leaders” of MLK riot, Williston High graduates Frank Hans, Raymond King and Willie Ballard. The council told the three young men to talk to the crowds, calm them down, make a list of troubles and problems, and return afterwards for another council meeting. Chief Williamson announced Mayor Allsbrook’s curfew was lifted Wednesday night, after the return of weekday business, the elimination of alcohol supplies and heavy rains helped end the violence. Chief Williamson marked the peak of the riot on Sunday, when incidents becoming hazardous on Saturday night. The heaviest damages were the three grocery stores burned Sunday night and a structure on Princess Place Drive that burned to the ground on Tuesday. Bill Stover, “Police Tactics Blunt March,” *Wilmington Morning Star*, 6 April 1968, 2. “Rioting Hits City; Curfew Is Ordered,” *Wilmington Morning Star*, 7 April 1968, 1-2). Bill Stover, “Damage Began Saturday Night in City,” *Wilmington Morning Star*, 8 April 1968, 14. “Rioting Hits City; Curfew Is Ordered,” *Wilmington Morning Star*, Sunday 7 April 1968, 1-2. Bill Stover, “Damage Began Saturday Night in City,” *Wilmington Morning Star*, Monday 8 April 1968, 14. Wiley McKellar, “City under Guard; Violence Worsens,” *Wilmington Morning Star*, Monday 8 April 1968, 2. Leslie Gruber, “City Seeks Help from Negroes,” *Wilmington Morning Star*, Monday 8 April 1968, 2. Tommy Williams, “Six Fires Set over Weekend,” *Wilmington Morning Star*, 9 April 1968, 18. “School Damage Said Slight,” *Wilmington Morning Star*, Tuesday 9 April 1968, 18. Wiley McKellar, “Port City Rioting in Forth Day,” *Wilmington Morning Star*, 9 April 1968, 1. Carolyn Zimmerman, “Negro Leaders Deplore Rioting,” *Wilmington Morning Star*, 9 April 1968, 18. “Board Closes County Schools,” *Wilmington Morning Star*, 9 April 1968, 18. “Request Discipline,” *Wilmington Morning Star*, 10 April 1968, 1. “The Parents Can Help,” *Wilmington Morning Star*, 10 April 1968, 4. Wiley McKellar, “Disorder Dwindles in Port City,” *Wilmington Morning Star*, 10 April 1968, 1-2. Wiley McKellar, “Curfew Is Ended in Wilmington,” *Wilmington Morning Star*, 11 April 1968, 1-2. “Port City Back to Normal,” *Wilmington Morning Star*, 12 April 1968, 13. Martin Luther King Student March. Mayor O.O. Allsbrook, picture, *Wilmington Star News*, 31 May 1965,” E. Edwin Kirton Scrapbook. National Guard Getting Out of Truck. Police Guarding Fireman, picture, *Wilmington Star News*, 7 February 1971. H.E. Williamson, picture from newspaper clipping, *Wilmington Star News* 21 March 1971, Wilmington Movement, 1A-2A. Guardsman in Front of Gregory Congregational Church, picture from newspaper clipping, *Wilmington Star News*, 19 March 1982, NHCPL, 4C. Reverend E. Edwin Kirton, picture, E. Edwin Kirton Scrapbook, Special Collections, Randall Library, University of North Carolina at Wilmington. Students in Front of City Hall, picture from newspaper clipping, *Wilmington Star News*, 18 February 1996, Bellamy Papers.



**Narrator:** Everything changed in New Hanover's school system as well. By summer of 1968, the board failed to produce an effective method of desegregation and were found by the courts to be a racially dual system. In an effort to desegregate a large portion of the student body quickly, the board began to consider closing Williston High School. At the same time, Heyward Bellamy replaced Wagoner as Superintendent.<sup>27</sup>

**Bellamy:** My happiest days were in that classroom. I could have spent the rest of my life in room 314 at New Hanover High School.

**Todd:** Dr. Wagoner was apparently more interested in becoming chancellor of UNCW. I don't think Dr. Wagoner was able to pursue the goal of desegregation in the public school system as well as Dr. Bellamy. He was a good man. He was just what we needed.

**Bellamy:** The board had a meeting. You have to do that in North Carolina. You can't just close a school, a high school. You've got to have a public hearing and make a finding that in the plans for that school system it's in the best interest of the school system to close that building. And of course, they didn't close it. They changed the grade level. And the changing of the grade level at that level of the desegregation process would have increased desegregation by something like fourteen percent. We had the hearing at New Hanover, and the state board, the next day, approved it.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>27</sup>Combined with the Freedom of Choice Plan, consolidation of the high schools desegregated thirty percent of the school system. Heyward Bellamy Affidavit. "Defendants Statement of the History of Desegregation." Eloise Severinson, Regional Civil Rights Director, Charlottesville, Va., to Superintendent William H. Wagoner, Wilmington, 28 May 1968. W. Kenneth Haddock, Regional Civil Rights Director, Charlottesville, Va., to Superintendent Heyward Bellamy, Wilmington, 12 June 1968, Bellamy Papers. Baseball Team, picture, *Williston Senior High School Yearbook* (1967). "Judge Orders County to End Dual System," *The Hanover Sun*, 24 July 1969, Bellamy collection. "Nearly 56,000 Negro Children Attend Predominately White Schools in North Carolina," *News and Observer*, 28 May 1968, Bellamy Papers.

<sup>28</sup>Superintendent William Wagoner Announcement of Public Hearing, clipping, Bellamy Papers. "State Board Approves Closing of Williston," clipping, Bellamy Papers.

**Nantambu:** I don't think they cared, but I'm quite sure they knew what they were doing. But they just didn't care because they were more hell bent on . . . see when you're thinking about yourself, when you're selfish, it doesn't matter whether I know what's wrong with you. I'm only concerned with what's going to happen with me. There concern was we don't want our children to go to no black school. They're not going. We're not going to send them. We'll close this school down. They didn't care about the historical impact that Williston had on our life or the historical presence it had on the community.

**Chavis:** I don't know what happened in the mindset forty years go when they decided to change Williston High School. Williston High School should have been integrated. White students should have been able to go to Williston High School.<sup>29</sup>

**Todd:** Williston could not have been integrated because they could not find, they had no black principal who was willing to take Williston Senior High School. I heard this from a board member who was on the board at the time. And there was no white principal who was willing to assume the helm at Williston Senior High School. And if you compared Hoggard High School and New Hanover High School to Williston, there were many facilities at Williston Senior High School that needed upgrading. I don't think they had another choice. So they wrestled with it I'm sure and did as well as they could do, except I think they failed to realize the impact of what desegregation of Williston Senior High School was going to have on the community. Before the mandate came with all deliberate speed, and that's just before that was in April and schools were desegregated in '68-69, following the assassination of Martin Luther King on that April. And

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<sup>29</sup>Benjamin Chavis, Gregory. For more oral histories on the closing of Williston, see *Williston High School*, Southeast North Carolina, Oral History Collection.

commencement that particular night was very tense.<sup>30</sup>

**Narrator:** Concerned about certain teachers as well, school officials began monitoring classes. Although under surveillance, Bertha Todd was promoted to an administrative position, and she proved instrumental as student grievances became a major issue.<sup>31</sup>

**Todd:** I was appointed by the board to go into administration. I wasn't given a choice to much. I didn't apply for that position. I didn't really want that position. I recommended about four other individuals to the board, to the principal for him to give to the board. And of course, simply because I was sort of in the middle of things, the students and desegregation, and working with the students, black and white, they sent word back that they wanted me to take that position. Well, I had to pray over that. I really had to pray over it. It was called one of these high sounding names, Administrative Assistant in Human Relations. And of course, it wasn't an assistant principal. It was one of those funded by federal grants.

**Bellamy:** The closest thing to their job description would be human relations assistant principals. We sort of invented the position as it went along. They listened to everybody, and they had my ear. I told the secretary when any of these ladies needed to talk to me to stop everything else and let me talk to them.

**Narrator:** Both high schools exploded on May 7, 1970 after cheerleader tryouts failed to produce a black cheerleader.

**Todd:** The cheerleader advisors weren't willing to give and compromise, and the students themselves who were appointed as cheerleaders at Williston and maybe went to New Hanover High or Hoggard High School wanted their place in the sun. I saw all of

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<sup>30</sup>Williston 1968 Graduating Senior Class, picture, *Williston Senior High School Yearbook* (1968).

<sup>31</sup>Mr. Elise Bridger, picture, *Williston Senior High School Yearbook* (1968). Bertha Todd, picture, E. Edwin Kirton Scrapbook.

these students coming down the hall. And I said, “Oh my stars, what are we going to do.” Well when the teachers would hear them on the first or second floors, they would simply lock their doors. And I said to somebody, “Hey, where are you going,” and they made some funny statement back to me and kept on. And I said, “Uh-hmm, you’ll be back.” Meanwhile, I had told the coach, I said, “Listen, you have about three classes in that gym this morning. I simply want you to move all of them out or be prepared to do something with them at the spur of the moment.” And I said, “And pull one side of the bleachers out in the gym.” So I stood there in the hall in front of the library and waited, and here comes this big group of students again, over a hundred or more. And I yelled as loud as I could, they had no direction. They didn’t know where they were going. They had passed there before, but the group was larger this time. So I yelled to the top of my voice, “Where are you going.” And, I said, “Let’s go the gym.” Well that was all I needed to do. They said, “Mrs. Todd said let’s go to the gym.” And they bounded out the door, went to the gym, up those bleachers I had told the coaches to pull out. And finally I said, “Oh Lord I have them all here,” and they went up on the steps, on the bleachers. And I said, “Now I have them here. What am I going to do with them? So I started yelling as I picked up topic after topic. “What are your grievances? We want someone to write them down, and we want two representatives.” Oh everything I could pull out of the hat, I did it. Riots would occur quite often at Hoggard. You’d hear the glasses break and the students with the fights, and the students wouldn’t go to class.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>32</sup>Both New Hanover and Hoggard High Schools saw protest and minimal violence on Thursday May 7, 1970, ending in the arrest of seven people for disorderly conduct and affray. The tension began on Thursday morning around 9 a.m. at Hoggard when the group comprising five-hundred students as described by Bertha Todd gathered at the gym. After they dispersed, a fight occurred between black and white students in the school cafeteria, and school was cancelled early, although groups continued to roam the campus. New Hanover began experiencing problems after a black group of students gathered to protest

**Narrator:** That same semester Pam, who had returned to Wilmington from California for the 1968-1969 school year, had a devastating run in with her friend Connie Tindall, future member of the Wilmington 10.

**Greenough:** He has this very gentle, soft face. He had this very gentle, soft voice. Even though he played football, he was not, you know, the kind of guy that you'd go he's going to go off and play football at college because he's mean and tough and he's got it in him. You know, it's like this guy doesn't even belong on the football field because he doesn't have it. Connie was really one of the sweetest, sweetest young men I'd ever known. And the day that school fell apart, I was walking out of this classroom, and Connie Tindall had had Mr. Harmon by the shoulders, literally had lifted him up off the ground. And Mr. Harmon was probably about six foot tall. He was a big man. And I looked at him, and you know, having four brothers and sisters, I had that whole mommy thing going at sixteen. And I said, "Connie, what do you think you're doing. Put him down." I said, "Have you lost your mind," and he said, "I'll show you what I've lost." And he turned around, and he picked me up, and he threw me through the plate glass

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the all white cheerleading team. The group was told five black cheerleaders would be added to the squad. Five had initially tried out but only one was selected, as an alternate. After the group finally dispersed into smaller groups, fights broke out between black and white students. Police wearing riot helmets arrived and attempted to control the groups. By 3 p.m. most white students had disappeared while hundreds of blacks roamed the campus. The black students presented to New Hanover Principle John Scott a list of grievances requesting revisions to the student constitution, changes in student government, the addition of a black social club, black cheerleaders within proportion, black majorettes, more black representation on committees and the National Honor Society, and equal justice. After two-hundred students gathered to discuss their list, the group, some of which raised their fists in a black power salute, refused to allow Scott to speak. The Board of Education announced that school would be closed the next day, reopening on Monday. Eleven students were injured, ten of which were treated for injuries ranging from cuts and contusions to stab wounds and then released. "Violence Keeps Campuses Closed," *Wilmington Morning Star*, 8 May 1970, 1. Wiley McKellar, "Violence Flames at High Schools," *Wilmington Morning Star*, 8 May 1970, 1-2. Bill Newton, "Lack of Trust Caused Uproar," *Wilmington Morning Star*, Friday 8 May 1970, 2. "Coddington Issues Strong Statement," *Wilmington Morning Star*, 8 May 1970, 2. "Ten Injured Treated at Hospital," *Wilmington Morning Star*, 8 May 1970, 2. Cheerleaders, picture, *Williston Senior High School Yearbook* (1967). Cheerleaders, picture, *Williston Senior High School Yearbook* (1968). Cheerleaders, picture, *Hoggard High School Yearbook* (1970). Cheerleaders, picture, *Hoggard High School Yearbook* (1971). Cheerleaders, picture, *New Hanover High School Yearbook* (1971).

doors that are on the outside of this building. My friend Jimmy Waldo brought me back into this classroom, took me through a midway door between the two classrooms at Hoggard, into my art teacher's room Keith Lambert. At that time, C. Gurganus came over the intercom and said that nobody could leave their classrooms under any condition whatsoever, that if teachers left their classroom they would lose their jobs. It was just sort of this ranting, not making any sense. The kids were scared. The tension was heightening now. And I'm sitting there thinking, "One of my dearest, sweetest friends has just thrown me through a plate glass window, and I'm looking down at my leg is bleeding, and I just couldn't figure out what had happened. That's why the change was so dramatic. It was like one day, you know, you have this big bear, shy guy, and the next day it was almost like he was on something. He was high on anger. I mean you could see it in his eyes. He wasn't even, he wasn't even there. You know, his were just . . . they were just like these black pools of anger. Somebody outside the school was nurturing that soul but they were nurturing it for the wrong thing."<sup>33</sup>

**Narrator:** Bertha Todd noticed that anger among students was escalating, perhaps due to influential local militants. In February of 1971, students began boycotting the schools and took refuge in the local black church, Gregory Congregational, after gaining permission from the church's minister Eugene Templeton.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>33</sup>Connie Tindall, picture, *Hoggard High School Yearbook* (1970). C. Gurganus, picture, *Hoggard High School Yearbook* (1968).

<sup>34</sup>Templeton said the boycott began late January after eight black high school students were suspended for staging a peaceful sit-in in response to the Board of Education's failure to address a request for a program on Martin Luther King's birthday. Gurganus believed Connie Tindall and Joe Wright were organizing boycotting students. H.E. Williamson was keeping tabs on the leaders of the boycott. He had confidential information that Chavis was coming to Wilmington and had a list of known leaders, which included Chavis, Dr. James Earl Grant, Rev. Leon White, Templeton, Anne Sheppard, Allen Hall, Connie Tindall, George Kirby, and Joe Wright. Jon Nordheimer, "Guard Seizes Church Abandoned by Blacks in Wilmington, N.C.," *New York Times* 9 February 1971, 14. C.D. Gurganus Affidavit, 6 April 1971, Bellamy Papers. H.E. Williamson Affidavit, Bellamy Papers. Bertha Todd, picture, *Hoggard High School*

**Bellamy:** I sent Bertha Todd over to the Congregationalist church, where the folks were . . . had taken over part of the church. I said, “Go over there and find out what is bothering these students.

**Todd:** So he gave me permission to go, and then I called several African-American ministers. I called several community citizens. I even called some individuals in the school system who had flexible schedules, and not a single one would volunteer to go with me to Gregory Congregational Church. So I called Heyward back and told him, I said, “No one will go so I’m going alone.”

**Chavis:** When I arrived in Wilmington, I saw hundreds of young brothers and sisters out in the street. I wanted to know where are your parents. Where are the adults? The young people shouldn’t be out here fighting this kind of battle by themselves. Where are the church leaders? And I’m thankful for what Rev. Templeton did, but I wondered where were the black preachers?

**Todd:** When I entered Gregory Congregational Church, I found a group of men speaking, but they were not speaking about the concerns of the students who were there. And the church was very crowded with African-American students from New Hanover High and Hoggard High. Not all of them but quite a few. And much to my chagrin, I found that once they finished settling their issues concerning them apparently, they left. So I raised my hand, I was sitting in the back of the church and told the students I wanted to say something. Well Gene Templeton didn’t know anything else to say to them. He simply opened his church for them to have somewhere to go. So I walked to the front of the church, and I said, “If you think I’m here taking roll to find out who’s boycotting

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*Yearbook* (1969). Two Students at Gregory Congregation Church, *Wilmington Star News*, 18 February 1996, Wilmington 10 File, NHCPL. Eugene Templeton, picture, *Wilmington Star News*, 11 February 1971, Wilmington Movement.

school today, I'm not. If you think I'm going back to tell the principals if I can tell who's here or give him names of students who are here, I'm not here for that purpose. I am here to try to find out from students who are here from Hoggard High School and students who are here from New Hanover High, what is so important to you that you have left your school and the teaching and the learning process to come here to this church today and remain here, what is it that's bugging you? I want to know. I said, "Now this is what I'm going to do." I want someone to take notes. I simply took over. I want someone to take notes, and I want you, if something is bugging you that much, to raise your hand, and I will recognize you. And we will write it down. If you've heard your grievance expressed one time or two times before, you simply express again to me. It will let me know just how important your concerns are. And low and behold, I said, "Oh my stars. Here I am an employee, and here I am now the leader of the boycotting group, but I knew something had to be done. So they were so proud of themselves, they wanted someone to go and get the news media. I said, "Now you better get a spokesman because I'm not your spokesman. You get someone to talk for you." I said, I said, "Gene, why did you let them do that?" Gene said, "Bertha, they did it before I could say anything." So they had gotten the news, so here comes the news media.

**Bellamy:** So Bertha brought me the list of things. So many of them, you read them and say, "We want more black coaches. So do I. We want . . . we don't want police coming on campus. Neither do I. But when there is disorderly conduct beyond the scope of the behavior in the classroom, the teacher has to have the help of law enforcement."<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>35</sup>Additional grievances included a black history class and equality in discipline. John Nordheimer, "Guard Is Ordered to Wilmington, N.C.," *New York Times* 8 February 1971, 16. Football Coaches, picture, *Hoggard High School Yearbook* (1969).



**Todd:** And I thought I had them ready to return to school until Ben Chavis came late that evening, and that was the end of my effectiveness as to try to get them back into school.

**Narrator:** Ben Chavis graduated from the University of North Carolina at Charlotte with a degree in chemistry but returned to school to study the ministry and philosophy. He was working as an activist in Virginia and North Carolina for the United Church of Christ when Rev. Templeton called the church for assistance with the boycotting students.

**Chavis:** I got by greatest training in the streets and byways of North Carolina, Virginia and South Carolina. When I first arrived, Brother Hudson, the man who was in your chair was the Rev. Eugene Templeton. This was a white pastor of a black church who called for help and the United Church of Christ and Rev. Leon White sent me.<sup>36</sup>

**Narrator:** When speaking about Templeton, Mayor Allsbrook said quote, “He looks like a hippie, but I don’t let that influence my thinking.”<sup>37</sup>

**Chavis:** The first day I was here, that Monday February the 1<sup>st</sup>, Rev. Templeton was receiving telephone threats, and he was taking these threats very seriously, so we went down to meet with the police chief. I believe the name of the police chief back then, it was Chief Williamson. And we went to the police department and informed Chief Williamson of these threats that Rev. Templeton had been receiving, and we asked for police protection. We are in our own church in the community trying to address the issue

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<sup>36</sup> Chavis was an organizer for the North Carolina-Virginia Commission for Racial Justice funded by the United Church of Christ. Rev. Eugene Templeton took over as minister two years prior, becoming a spokesman for the young, black community. “Convicted Black Shown Two Images,” *New York Times* 23 October 1972, 64. John Nordheimer, “Guard Is Ordered to Wilmington, N.C.,” *New York Times* 8 February 1971, 16. Eugene Templeton, picture, Wilmington Movement. Benjamin Chavis Muhammad, interview by author, 2 February 2006, Warwick Center, University of North Carolina at Wilmington. Ben Chavis Muhammad, Gregory.

<sup>37</sup> Mayor L.M. Cromartie stated that Wilmington did not have the manpower to enforce a curfew when it was requested. Mayor L.M. Cromartie Affidavit, 6 April 1971, Bellamy Papers. Eugene Templeton, picture, Wilmington Movement. Quote, John Nordheimer, “Guard Is Ordered to Wilmington.”

of school desegregation. Could we please have some police protection because Rev. Templeton's life was being threatened? And I recall on that day, Chief Williamson sort of chuckled, he says, "Oh, You don't need police protection. You should stop having those meetings. Chief Williamson refused to give us police protection. In fact, he scolded Rev. Templeton. He said, "Rev. Templeton, you're a white man. Why are you over there with those niggers?" This is the chief of police. And he said, "Chavis, you're an outside agitator. You should, you should, may be you should leave Wilmington. You're not from Wilmington. We don't need outside agitators stirring up the people of Wilmington. And I said, "Chief, with all due respect, Wilmington's already stirred up. It's been stirred up since 1898."»<sup>38</sup>

**Todd:** Everything was not great before Ben Chavis came. And of course, he was working for the church, but he did not have the experience to help a group in an environment as it was. He didn't. He let them lead him. He didn't lead those students. I know that for a fact. He couldn't lead them.

**Narrator:** Benjamin Chavis believed the curfew was not taken seriously because Sheriff Marion Millis and his men had been members of the Ku Klux Klan, supposedly to infiltrate the organization although the sheriff had no official records of his investigation when questioned just six years prior by the House Committee on Un-American

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<sup>38</sup>Other community leaders, including Mayor Luther M. Cromartie, blamed the violence on black "agitators" from outside Wilmington who came to help high school students. Councilman B.D. Schwartz agreed, "It had nothing to do with politics. It's a bunch of youngsters who have been stirred up by outsiders—we've had a wonderful relationship between blacks and white here before this." John Nordheimer, "Guard Is Ordered to Wilmington, N.C.," *New York Times* 8 February 1971, 16. H.E. Williamson, picture from newspaper clipping, Wilmington Movement. "Chavis Leads Protest in Henderson, N.C.," picture, *Psalms from Prison* by Ben Chavis, North Carolina Collection.

<sup>38</sup>Sheriff Marion Millis, picture from newspaper clipping, *Wilmington Star News* 21 March 1971, Wilmington Movement. "Sheriff Millis Not Man to Face Klan's Threat," *Wilmington Star News*, 31 May 1965," E. Edwin Kirton Scrapbook.

Activities. Chavis began working with student grievances, but his account of the role he played conflicts with those of Bertha Todd and Heyward Bellamy.<sup>39</sup>

**Chavis:** What I provided was organization. Before I arrived, there was no list of ten grievances. I got the students to sit down and list their grievances on paper. That had never happened before. We set up meetings with the school board so that the grievances could be presented. That had not happened before. So my role was to not end the anger of the students but to channel their anger into a constructive *modus operandi* so that their grievances could get an airing, a hearing, and to try to facilitate the young people's anger into something positive.

**Narrator:** Chavis paid a visit to Bellamy at the school system's administrative office in the Hemmingway building, which was destroyed by arson in 1971 although publically declared a firetrap.

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<sup>39</sup>Sheriff Marion W. Millis told the House Committee on Un-American Activities that about one-fourth of his officers were either members or sympathizers with the Ku Klux Klan. During the three hours of questioning, members showed skepticism that Millis and six of his deputies joined the Klan in 1963 to keep tabs on the organization, considering Millis failed to compile written intelligence reports or inform the North Carolina Bureau of Investigation of his infiltration. Millis revealed that some deputies "did kind of get enthused" after joining and that Deputy Frank Walters used a police safe to store dues collected in a little grey box at the counter located in police facilities. The sheriff learned some months later that Deputy Charles B. Goodwin had been elected grand klaliff of the North Carolina Klan realm in January 1964. Goodwin remained a deputy although it was not known if he remained in the Klan. The committee also questioned him as to why no one at the courthouse could identify the men who a few months prior destroyed the sidewalk in order to burn a cross and how imperial wizard Robert Shelton came to possess a copy of a personal check of white civil rights worker Rev. David W. Jones of the National Council of Churches. Jones was arrested during a demonstration and held in New Hanover police custody. Shelton waved Jones' paycheck that read "grant for participating in student interracial ministry program" at a Klan rally near Wilmington on July 2, 1964. New Hanover County had been a center for Klan activity for two years, with four klaverns, or chapters, which included a ladies auxiliary in both Wilmington and Wrightsville Beach. Millis said after North Carolina Grand Dragon James R. Jones came to Wilmington explaining the Klan was "new, legal and tolerated no violence," he and nineteen deputies went to a meeting were they were sworn into the New Haven Improvement Association klavern. Millis attended several meetings to "observe and see if anything happened as far as disorder was concerned." After rumors began of the sheriff office's connection with Klan, Millis told his deputies to resign, and he submitted his resignation at the next meeting. John Herbers, "Sheriff Says He and 6 Deputies Joined Klan to Keep an Eye on It," *New York Times* 27 October 1965, 1. Sheriff Marion Millis, picture from newspaper clipping, Wilmington Movement. "Sheriff Millis Not Man to Face Klan's Threat," *Wilmington Star News*, 31 May 1965," E. Edwin Kirton Scrapbook. Benjamin Chavis and Roderick Kirby (Kojo Nantambu), picture from clipping "'I'm the Baddest Man in Wilmington,' Kirby" *Wilmington Star News*, 3 October 1971, Wilmington Movement, 2.

**Bellamy:** Ben Chavis came to the front, the nearest thing I ever had with a conversation with him. He came to Hemmingway, the Fifth Street yard of Hemmingway, which was our headquarters then. It burned in '71. And he had some young folks with him, and they set up a chant, "We want Bellamy." So I told Dale Spencer to go tell him that I'd be glad to talk to him and any, I forgotten, six people I think that he picked that he'd like to have come in with him and be glad to sit and talk to him. He didn't do it. They went on downtown to the court house.<sup>40</sup> I remember particularly in one board meeting at Hemmingway, when it must have been at least several of the faces of the group that they came to call the 10 were pretty threatening. One had a chain around his fist, all dressed in black. That threat was made. I moved the board meeting because one them, I don't know who, and I don't even know if that was one of the group that came to be called the 10, said, "We're going to get what we want or we're going to burn this town down. And that night, twenty-seven places burned down."<sup>41</sup>

**Narrator:** One of the businesses completely destroyed that night was Lum's restaurant, a college hangout where Pam Greenough was working for her father. She remembers the night Chavis came in with three other men.<sup>42</sup>

**Greenough:** Sat down, and I told my father, I said, "There's going to be trouble." I said, "This man is a bad man, and there's going to be trouble." And he said, "What do you mean." And I said, "This is the man that was up on campus when the rioting started and when the Black Panthers were marching on capital hill of Richmond. And so, that night

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<sup>40</sup>Chavis and the group actually protested at City Hall, not the courthouse. Chavis and Protestors at City Hall, pictures, Bellamy Papers.

<sup>41</sup>E.A. Laney also witnessed the incident at the school board meeting, E.A. Laney Affidavit, 6 April 1971, Bellamy Papers. Hemmingway Fire, picture from clipping, Bellamy Papers. Wilmington 10, picture, Wilmington 10 File, NHCPL.

<sup>42</sup> The fire occurred on Feb. 5, 1971, approximately 1:30 a.m. Lum's Burning, picture from clipping, *Wilmington Star News*, 14 February 1971, Bellamy Papers, 1-D.

dad and I . . . they had their dinner and they were very pleasant and polite and they left. They were the last one's to leave. They stayed until we locked up and left. We went home. We lived probably maybe a mile and a half, two miles from the restaurant, and got in bed. We were not even asleep. We got a call from the phone, the fire department saying we needed to come back, that the restaurant was in flames. And by the time we got back to the restaurant, it had literally burnt down to the ground. It was so hot and so intense that they said whatever was put as an incinerator, incendiary, was put in the bathroom. That whenever it went off, it literally just flew across the floors of the restaurant and explodes upward, and the heat was so intense that the doors that were this thick were warped out. This was not Molotov cocktails. This was not . . . this was, this was high-tech, educated bomb making. You know when Lum's went up, it was, it was a real wake-up call for everybody in Wilmington, that there was something in Wilmington that was more than just our local children, you know, having an attitude.<sup>43</sup>

**Narrator:** Firebombings and violence continued until it reached its boiling point on Saturday February 6th. At 10:30 p.m., Mike's Grocery was ablaze and a young black youth named Steven Mitchell was reported dead on arrival at the local hospital.<sup>44</sup>

**Chavis:** I grieve to this day for the loss of life of Steve Mitchell, the young person who was murdered. And in my view, there still has not been a proper investigation of his killing. The chief, the same Chief Williamson who denied us police protection, immediately afterward said it was justifiable homicide.

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<sup>43</sup> Benjamin Chavis and Roderick Kirby (Kojo Nantambu), picture from clipping "'I'm the Baddest Man in Wilmington,' Kirby."

<sup>44</sup> John Nordheimer, "Guard Is Ordered to Wilmington, N.C.," *New York Times* 8 February 1971, 16. List of Damage and Reports, Bellamy Papers. Steve Mitchell, picture, *Wilmington Star News*, 1 January 1972, Bellamy Papers. Mike Poulos, picture from clipping, "Grocery Owner Wary of '10' Case," *Wilmington Star News*, 24 January 1978, Bellamy Papers, 1-B.

**Narrator:** Police found a misfired shotgun near Mitchell, although black witnesses claimed he was shot by the police officer while moving furniture from a home next to Mike's Grocery that caught on fire. Police and firefighters claimed they had been receiving gunfire from Gregory Congregational while trying to put out the blaze. Those in the church told a different story.<sup>45</sup>

**Chavis:** And because we protested, because we marched, sure enough the church began receiving gunfire.

**Nantambu:** As a matter of fact, the night that Steve Mitchell was killed, I counted personally, because I was on the corner, I counted thirty-four car loads of white people with machine guns and guns that came up there to run us out. As a matter of fact, the night before, two nights before, a white man was in front of me when I was coming to the church. He broke through a brick wall, pulled up in front of the church. And I remember I jumped out of the car to run and tell everybody, "There's a white man in that car! There's a white man in that car!" because all the lights were out and you couldn't see him. And he got out of his car and shot at everybody standing on the steps of the church. He hit Chili, Marvin Patrick.

**Narrator:** Rev. Templeton claimed that, while some individuals were armed, the only shots that came from the church were strictly defensive. In fact his wife, who was

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<sup>45</sup>The policeman claimed he shot the minor in a dark alley after the crouched youth pointed his shotgun at the officer and pulled the trigger. The youth died of three pellet wounds in the neck. The police and National Guard, ordered by Gov. Robert W. Scott to support local law enforcement, blocked off the area around Gregory. The mayor reported approximately seventy-five black youths, some armed, occupied the church. Detective H.G. Grohman confirmed that shots were fired from the church. John Nordheimer, "Guard Is Ordered to Wilmington, N.C." Jon Nordheimer, "Guard Seizes Church Abandoned by Blacks in Wilmington, N.C.," *New York Times* 9 February 1971, 14. H.G. Grohman Affidavit, 6 April 1971, Bellamy Papers. H.E. Williamson Affidavit, Bellamy Papers. Police Protecting Firemen, *Wilmington Star News*, 14 February 1971, Bellamy Papers, 1-D. Chairs by Gregory Congregational Window, trial picture, NHCPL.

employed as a nurse, set up a make-shift hospital in their home to attend to the wounded.<sup>46</sup>

The following Saturday Harvey Cumber, a fifty-seven year old white man armed with a .38 caliber, was killed near the church. His wife owned a substantial amount of property in the neighborhood. Five-hundred National Guardsmen arrived in Wilmington Sunday night. When they ascended on Gregory church, a dozen guardsmen flanked along the concrete retaining wall, aiming rifles at the church's stain glass windows, and told the occupants to come out. Officials were unaware that the church was evacuated the night before.<sup>47</sup>

**Chavis:** I come out of the Motown sound. You know what I mean. That's why when the National Guard came over here on February 6<sup>th</sup> or 7<sup>th</sup> 1971, the only thing they found in this church was a record player playing James Brown. They came back later and found some dynamite. I don't know how you come and don't find the dynamite, but anyway they found dynamite.<sup>48</sup>

**Nantambu:** The success of the boycott is what made them come after us, because after

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<sup>46</sup>Templeton agreed the violence could have been avoided if the city had answered the curfew request. He revealed, "Two members of the state Good Neighbor Council told me the church was to be bombed on Thursday night. And we were getting anonymous telephone calls saying things like, 'There's gonna be some dead niggers tonight.'" Approximately twenty students made a "conscious decision to defend the church" with seven shotguns and a rifle, which they used to return fire after groups of white men raced down the street on Friday the 6<sup>th</sup> and Saturday the 7<sup>th</sup> firing at the church. Gene Templeton, "Five Questions about Gregory's Involvement in the New Hanover School Crisis-1971," Bellamy Papers. Jon Nordheimer, "Guard Seizes Church Abandoned by Blacks in Wilmington, N.C." . H.E. Williamson Affidavit, Bellamy Papers. List of Items from Eugene Templeton's home, Bellamy Papers. Eugene Templeton, picture. Shotgun shells and Liquor Bottles, trial picture, NHCPL. Eugene Templeton Table with Medical Supplies, trial picture, NHCPL.

<sup>47</sup> John Nordheimer, "Guard Is Ordered to Wilmington, N.C.," *New York Times* 8 February 1971, 16. Jon Nordheimer, "Guard Seizes Church Abandoned by Blacks in Wilmington, N.C." "Report of Disturbances at Williston Junior High School 1970-1971 School Year," Bellamy Papers. Harvey Cumber Funeral, pictures, *Wilmington Star News*, 13 February 1971, Wilmington 10 File, NHCPL. Nation Guard Getting Out of Truck at Gregory Congregational Church. Guardsman Back Entrance of Gregory Congregation with Peace Sign, trial picture, NHCPL.

<sup>48</sup> Dynamite, trial picture, NHCPL. Benjamin Chavis Muhammad, Gregory.

only three days, eighty percent of all the students in New Hanover County decided not to go to school. The white students said, “Well the black kids ain’t going, we ain’t going either.” So nobody went, and that’s when they said, “Well, oh no, okay ya’ll niggers got too much power. Ya’ll having too much effect. We’re not going to let ya’ll do this.”

**Narrator:** Once relative calm returned to the city, it was estimated the damage ran over half a million dollars. White backlash grew even greater as a recently organized white supremacist group calling itself the Rights of White People gained a larger following, especially after violent outbreaks again in March and October. Even Chief Williamson was worried about the group saying, “I don’t approve of anything the Klan stands for, but they have not posed a problem for us like the ROWP has.”

**Nantambu:** I just think about my wife and baby. White folks came to my house at night, threatened my wife and told her if we didn’t get out of town they would kill us. And we got letters from the ROWP. I was chased home. We had an organization at that time. The ROWP was the Rights of White People, was led by a man named Leroy Gibson, a former marine from Jacksonville, North Carolina. They had all their meetings at Hugh MacCrae Park and out here in the woods out here behind the school. But they used to ride up and down the street shooting at us, threatening us. Then, when we had the Temple of the Black Messiah on Castle Street, the Rights of White People bought a building about 60 yards away. They came up on Castle Street, got in the middle of the street with machine guns and all kinds of rifles and stuff, and nobody did anything to them. They broke in our church, tore our church apart, and arrested us because we were standing outside of our church guarding our church. There were two men guarding our church with guns.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>49</sup>Leroy Gibson also criticized the local police for their “coddling” of blacks during the February incident.



**Bellamy:** Roy Gibson apparently was just harbored a whole lot of hate. You know he tried to blow up the synagogue. He moved one of those columns over about like so. Tried to blow up Tileston. But one day the Klan head, Tex Gross, called me and said, “I thought I’d better tell you, Leroy Gibson’s on the way to town to shoot up your house.” And I said, “Well thank you very much. Tell him he better be very watchful though when he rounds the bend.” I lived out on Lynnwood Drive then. Because it’s amusing now, but it wasn’t then, people brought me guns. My brother, who was a highway patrolman in South Carolina, brought me a World War II carbine, armor piercing bullets or something. I said, “Tell those folks they better be very careful how they approach my house. He said, “Well I’m going out to try to stop him at the county line.” And I never heard anymore about that.<sup>50</sup>

**Narrator:** One year after the February events, Benjamin Chavis, Willie Vereen, Wayne Moore, Reginald Epps, Marvin Patrick, Joe Wright, Jerry Jacobs, Connie Tindall, James McKoy and Anne Sheppard Turner were arrested for arson and conspiracy charges.<sup>51</sup>

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He vowed, “We’ll destroy all of them if necessary . . . If the black people won’t abide with law and order we’ll have to take matters into our own hands. We have as many as 2,000 white men in Wilmington who are ready to settle this trouble right now. . . If necessary we’ll eliminate the black race. What are we supposed to do while these animals run loose in the streets? They’ll either abide by the law, or we’ll wipe them out.” Members engaged in paramilitary training and had a stockpile of weapons, while ninety percent of the group’s leadership cadre was made up of former combat experienced soldiers. Quote in narration and quote in footnote as well as the details provided by Nantambu substantiated in, Jon Nordheimer, “Anti-Negro Group Vexing Police in Wilmington, N.C.,” *New York Times* 7 October 1971, 25. . . H.E. Williamson Affidavit, Bellamy Papers. Wiley McKellar, “Disturbance Toll Runs Half Million,” *Wilmington Star News*, 11 February 1971; John Hendrix and Wiley McKellar, “Uneasy Quiet Settles Over Wilmington,” *Wilmington Star News*, 11 February 1971; Damaged Classroom, picture, “Williston Students Riot, Cause Widespread Damage,” *Wilmington Star News*, 17 March 1971, Wilmington Movement. “ROWP Following Growing,” *Hanover Sun*, 11 August 1971, Bellamy Papers. Rights of White People Charter, Bellamy papers. “Says ROWP Gibson ‘We Serve Notice,’” *Hanover Sun*, 11 October 1971, Bellamy Papers; “Militant Whites Arrested for Defying Emergency Rule,” 15 November 1971, Bellamy Papers.

<sup>50</sup>“Rights of White People Meeting,” *Hanover Sun*, 29 September 1971, advertisement, Bellamy Papers. “ROWP Gibson to Klan Jones, Put Up or Shut-up,” *Hanover Sun*, 6 October 1971, Bellamy Papers.

<sup>51</sup> Press Conference.

**Todd:** They were out there in the fro. They were out there in the midst of things, but their personalities were not the kind of personalities that would cause them to do any of that. I don't think. They were not . . . now a couple of those individuals, their personalities were different. Jerry Jacobs was a good tennis player at Hoggard, and Joe Wright wanted to be a lawyer. I knew both of those fellows very well. They were not the kind of individuals to just be out there trying to kill or burn something. That was unless they had split personalities.<sup>52</sup>

**Bellamy:** I knew most of those boys. That is those that were students. I saw a lot of Joe. He would come and see me during that period. In fact, Joe called me when he was in the penitentiary when he needed money or he just wanted to bend my ear. He called me one day and said, "I'm going to bust out of here tonight doc." I said, "You're not going to do any such thing. You're going to get yourself ten years in jail. You just behave and let this thing take its course."

**Willie Vereen:** Anne Sheppard was in the struggle, helping poor black and white folk, and she was arrested, I feel, because she was mostly around black folk.

**Narrator:** Chavis was also indicted one month later for other charges in Raleigh, North Carolina. He was later acquitted of the conspiracy charges in connection with two men fleeing the state after illegally possessing dynamite. Two years later, the local press discovered witnesses had received immunity and payment for their testimony.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Jerry Jacobs, picture, *Hoggard High School Yearbook* (1970). Joe Wright, picture, *Hoggard High School Yearbook* (1970).

<sup>53</sup> Chemist Dr. James Earl Grant, of Charlotte, was a former Volunteer in Service to America and field worker for the Southern Conference Education Fund before he was convicted and sentenced to ten years for the same charges for which Chavis was acquitted. Chavis and Grant were indicted in April of 1972 in Federal Court in Raleigh on charges of aiding and abetting the two fugitives. These same fugitives were the main witnesses against Chavis and Grant and already faced eighty years in combined federal and state charges ranging from drug trafficking, firearms violations, armed robbery and murder. Three months later, Dr. Grant, P.J. Reddy, and Charles Parker were tried in connection with the burning of Lazy B Stables in

**Chavis:** We stayed in Wilmington. We were not arrested until March of 1972, and on that night, they went to Willie Earl's family's home and to Tommy's house, the Wright's residence and all the residences. I was at the church that we founded on Castle Street, the Church of the Black Messiah. The only reason why Kojo was not a member of the Wilmington 10, they couldn't find him that night. He was over at Hillcrest. They couldn't find him, because they originally arrested sixteen people. We were originally the Wilmington 16. And of the sixteen, they brought ten to trial.

**Greenough:** Roderick had a way of stepping away just when things got critical. We used to call him mane polete [sic]. You know I have clean hands.

**Nantambu:** I went to jail about twenty times for no reason just they would arrest me every time they saw me really. [laughter from audience]. No, it ain't funny brother. I'm telling you. They would arrest me any time they saw me for whatever reason. It was just sort of like a hassle all the time.

**Narrator:** After the first trial was declared a mistrial, the Wilmington Ten went back to court in September 1972 in Burgaw, North Carolina. Allen Hall and Jerome Mitchell, both eighteen and in jail on other charges, testified against the ten. Jay Stroud, who compared Chavis to Hitler, asked for maximum sentences for the Ten because of the

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September of 1968, which killed 15 horses. The same witnesses in the Raleigh trial testified against the group that became known as the Charlotte Three. Grant, Reddy and Parker received twenty-five, twenty and ten years respectively. Two years later, the Charlotte Observer discovered that the witnesses were granted immunity from federal and state charges and the federal government supported them for a year and relocated them. Judge Sam J. Ervin III refused to order a new trial, declaring that the immunity and the \$4000 paid to each of the two witnesses were given in return for testimony in the Raleigh Two case and that the Charlotte Three trial was fair. "Two Young Felons Plan to Testify in Riot Trial of Black Minister," *New York Times* 25 September 1972, 22. Mark Pinsky, "Justice in North Carolina Is Once More Old South," *New York Times* 9 March 1972, E6. Mark Pinsky, "Justice in North Carolina Is Once More Old South," *New York Times* 9 March 1972, E6. Tom Wicker, "The Wind in the Pines," *New York Times* 26 December 1975, 31. Chavis with Police, picture, *Raleigh News and Observer*, 9 June 1972.

quote “eight day rain of terror that set race relations in Wilmington back to Civil War days.”<sup>54</sup>

**Chavis:** We were ecstatic that in Burgaw, North Carolina at the end of the voir dire, that’s the jury selection process, there were ten blacks and two whites impaneled. Keep in mind what I mean by impaneled, sworn in. The trial was ready to go forward. It was at that point that Mr. Jay Stroud, the assistant DA for New Hanover County, stood and announced to the judge that the state was not prepared to go forward. Obviously, our attorneys objected. We’ve just gone through this two week process choosing the jury, found twelve people who said they could be impartial. But we felt good, because even though you know everybody says they can be impartial, to have ten blacks and two whites on your jury. You have ten black, nine black defendants, one white defendant. We felt that was a jury more of our peers, which is what you’re entitled to. So we were ready to go to trial. Obviously the state was fearful of that kind of jury composition, so the judge asked Mr. Stroud, “Well why are you not ready?” Mr. Stroud said he had a stomach ache. Now keep in mind the judge could have said, “Okay, we’ll postpone the hearing to tomorrow. Go take some Pepto-Bismol. Do something for your stomach ache. We’ll start tomorrow morning.” The judge picks up the gavel, mistrial. And also they changed the jury selection process. This time the state asked the jurors questions

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<sup>54</sup>Allen Hall and Jerome Mitchell implicated the group in a preliminary hearing the previous April. Hall was serving a twelve year sentence after pleading guilty to a riot charge, and Mitchell was serving forty years for robbery and murder unrelated to the previous racial violence. Hall testified that Chavis guided young blacks in the making and use of firebombs, preached hatred toward white businessmen, and supported the “Chicago Plan,” a rioting maneuver of setting a building on fire and using gunfire to prevent police and fireman who answer the alarm. “Two Young Felons Plan to Testify in Riot Trial of Black Minister,” *New York Times* 25 September 1972, 22. “Convicted Black Shown Two Images,” *New York Times* 23 October 1972, 64. High Court Rejects ‘Wilmington 10’ Appeal,” *New York Times* 20 January 1976, 16. Chavis with Ten, picture, “10 Case Nears End,” *Wilmington Star News*, 23 January 1978, Bellamy Papers. Allen Hall, picture from clipping, *Wilmington Star News*, 23 January 1978, Bellamy Papers, 2-A. Jay Stroud, picture from clipping, *Wilmington Star News*, 17 May 1977, Bellamy Papers, 1-A. Jay Stroud, picture from clipping, *Wilmington Star News*, 23 January 1978, Bellamy Papers, 1-A.

and then passed them to the defense. And it was the state that every time a black person sat down, before he even asked their name, dismissed. Dismissed. Dismissed.

Dismissed. And the state used forty preemptory challenges, because by state law, the state can take you off a jury four times per defendant. There were ten defendants, so they got forty preemptory challenges. And they took every black person off of the jury that they could in the pool, and there were only two left. That's why we wound up with a jury of ten whites and two blacks, just the opposite of the first trial.<sup>55</sup>

**Bellamy:** The next time I saw Ben Chavis was outside the courtroom at Burgaw. Joe Wright had asked me to go up as a character witness. And I said, "Well Joe, I'd be glad to go, but you know I'm going to tell the truth." He said, "I still want you to go to be my character witness." So I went, and they were questioning the main witness against the Wilmington 10. And Ferguson, the lawyer, was pressing him pretty hard, and he lost it, just lost it, and just tore the . . . He was a huge man . . . tore the place apart and jumped the rail to try to get at Ferguson. They had to restrain him, and everybody dashed out of the courtroom. Ben Chavis was out in the courthouse yard, and somebody introduced me to him. It was the first time that I, that's after everything was over.<sup>56</sup>

**Chavis:** We came back the next morning. They were all on top of the courthouse with shotguns and weapons. Our parents were there. I remember my own children were there to see this drama in the courtroom. The judge starts handing out the sentences, twenty-four years, twenty-eight years, twenty-six years.<sup>57</sup> I had thirty-four years. We said a

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<sup>55</sup>Jay Stroud, picture. "Chavis Jury Selection Continues," *Wilmington Star News*, 15 September 1972, 8A. "Jury Chosen for Trial of Wilmington Activists," 22 September 1972. Mark Pinsky, "Justice in North Carolina Is Once More Old South," *New York Times* 9 March 1972, E6.

<sup>56</sup>James Ferguson, Press Conference.

<sup>57</sup>Ben Chavis' Children, picture from clipping, Wilmington Ten Correspondence and Miscellaneous Records File, State Archives. Ben Chavis' Mother Weeping, picture, *Newsweek*, 6 February 1978.

little prayer, remember? Said, "Lord you were with us at the church. Now, Lord, be with us as we go to prison." And after we were convicted, they didn't sentence us right away. They put us in . . . they took us to Jacksonville. We spent the night in Jacksonville jail. And on the way, they had highway patrols on both sides. They cleared the highway. We were on a prison bus. And they had automatic weapons. They treated us like we were the most dangerous people in the world, and the problem is because the officials of Wilmington treated us that way, people start feeling, "Oh, those must be some dangerous brothers." They put the ten of us in prison. First, even before we got to prison, they locked us up and sentenced us to a combined total of 282 years in prison. They sent us first to the adult prison, Central Prison in Raleigh. And when we got to Central Prison, they stripped us, took all of our clothes off, and did what I felt was some very undignified things to be treated. They lined us up against a wall, stripped us, pointed guns at us. Now this, we're already sentenced. We're behind bars. What they were trying to do, they were trying to break our spirit.

**Narrator:** But the Ten's spirit remained intact. Financially supported by the United Church of Christ, they began to appeal and in February of 1976, while appealing to the U.S. district court, the 10 were finally ordered to begin serving their sentences.<sup>58</sup>

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"Chavis Defense Wraps Up," *Wilmington Star News*, 14 October 1972, 2. "Chavis Found Guilty," *Wilmington Star News*, 18 October 1972.

<sup>58</sup> All North Carolina courts rejected the Ten's appeal. On January 19<sup>th</sup>, the Supreme Court refused to hear the appeal of the Ten. Chavis was serving as head of the Washington field office of the United Church of Christ's Commission for Racial Justice, when he was ordered to enter prison. This left the action of the North Carolina Supreme Court on May 6, 1975 standing, which dismissed the appeal. Tom Wicker, "The Wind in the Pines," *New York Times* 26 December 1975, 31. "High Court Rejects 'Wilmington 10' Appeal," *New York Times* 20 January 1976, 16. "Prison Terms Are Begun by 10 in Arson Case in North Carolina," *New York Times* 3 February 1976, 62. Ten outside Courthouse, *Raleigh News and Observer*, 3 February 1976, Wilmington 10 File, NHCPL. "Wilmington Ten Enter Prison," *Raleigh News and Observer*, 3 February 1976, Wilmington 10 File, NHCPL, 17.

Seven months later, Allen Hall recanted his testimony and claimed Prosecutor Stroud fabricated it. Shortly thereafter, the other two witnesses recanted, claiming they also received gifts, reduced sentences and favorable treatment. Stroud admitted to giving one young witness a minibike, but said he only gave it to the teen because of quote “real strong personal feelings.”<sup>59</sup>

**Chavis:** Not only are the courts not fair, as I have said before and I know it made some people mad but it’s the truth, the courts in North Carolina are racist to the bone.<sup>60</sup>

**Narrator:** In February 1977, Rev. Templeton and another witness came forward claiming Chavis, Marvin Patrick, Reginald Epps, Connie Tindall and James McKoy were at Templeton’s home when Mike’s Grocery burned. Hall later recanted his recantation.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> Eric Tyrone Junious, only thirteen when he testified, signed a statement that he was given a minibike by Stroud and a job at a service station. Stroud denied the coercion or coaching of any other witnesses, although he admitted purchasing the minibike. Jerome Mitchell offered to provide information as early as 1974 that might free the defendants and confirmed he was sentenced anywhere from one day to thirty-five years as a youthful offender for his role in armed robbery and the slaying of a grocery in exchange for his testimony. Tom Wicker, “So May Quirks and Turns in It,” *New York Times* 18 March 1977, 20.

Allen Hall, picture, “Hall Tries Suicide,” *Hanover Sun*, 19 January 1977, Wilmington 10 File, NHCPL, 1. Jay Stroud, picture from clipping.

<sup>60</sup> Press Conference.

<sup>61</sup> Social worker Patricia Rhodes corroborated Templeton’s testimony. Defense attorney James E. Ferguson pushed for a new trial when Hall claimed to have been coerced by threats and “seduced into lying” by promises of leniency. Hall recanted his testimony on August 6, 1976, claiming he had been threatened with a long sentence and coached in what to say. Hall only served four years of his twelve year sentence as a youthful offender, making him eligible for early parole. Mitchell testified under oath on May 9, 1977 that his testimony was false and that he and Hall had been extensively coached on what to say at a motel on Wrightsville Beach. The next day, both Junious and Hall recanted their testimony. Mitchell was promised a six or seven month jail term for his robbery case in exchange and claimed Stroud gave him pretrial transcripts of Hall’s testimony and a written version of the testimony he was supposed to give. Hall admitted he was allowed to go fishing, given marijuana, and taught how to make and use firebombs by a U.S. Treasury agent. Hall’s former fiancée Deborah Simpson also testified that at the time of the trial she and her mother were brought from Asheville, N.C. by New Hanover County deputies to a Wrightsville Beach motel, which the women never paid for, to visit Hall and witness an interview with Hall at Stroud’s home. “New Information Offered in Wilmington 10 Case,” *New York Times* 13 February 1977, 26. Wayne King, “Wilmington Ten Gain in Hope for Freedom,” *New York Times* 3 March 1977, 26. Tom Wicker, “So May Quirks and Turns in It.” Wayne King, “Prosecution Witness in Southern Firebomb Case Says He Lied at Trial,” *New York Times* 10 May 1977, 19. “Two More Say They Lied at 1972 Wilmington, N.C., Trial,” *New York Times* 11 May 1977, 19. “Couple Testify Defendant Was with Them on Night Wilmington Store Burned,” *New York Times* 13 May 1977, 19. Tom Wicker, “Catch-22 for the Ten,” *New York Times* 11 December 1977, 21. Eugene Templeton, picture. “Stroud Says Hall Was Paid to Recant

**Chavis:** I must speak out against this attempt to cover up the fact that the Wilmington 10 were framed up and railroaded to prison. No, I will not be silent, even from behind the prison bars. None of the Wilmington 10 will be silent, for I must speak out against this flagrant attempt to cover up the real criminals in the Wilmington 10 case. Prosecutor Jay Stroud has not only committed a hideous crime against ten individuals, he has committed a crime against the entire United States Constitution. Where are our human rights? Where are our constitutional rights?<sup>62</sup>

**Narrator:** As the appeal process continued, the case began to receive international attention, especially from those countries condemned by the U.S. for human rights violations. Amnesty International listed the Ten as prisoners of conscience, forcing human rights advocate and President Jimmy Carter to take notice, although he never acted.<sup>63</sup>

**Chavis:** So I think the international pressure has had a lot to do with the case being alive today. I mean, why are all of you here today? It's because the eyes of the world are on North Carolina. The international pressure is what's going to break North Carolina's back. That's right. The international pressure is what's going to break Jimmy Carter's tongue from talking about human rights all over the world and not dealing with it at home.

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His Early 'Wilmington 10' Testimony," *Wilmington Morning Star*, 26 February 1977, Wilmington Ten Correspondence and Miscellaneous Records File, State Archives.

<sup>62</sup> Press Conference.

<sup>63</sup>On December 9, 1977, just before Amnesty International received the Nobel Peace Prize in Oslo, Norway, the organization listed the Wilmington Ten and Charlotte Three as American "prisoners of conscience," despite its contention that "there is no overt political imprisonment" in the U.S. Tom Wicker, "Catch-22 for the Ten." Carter's involvement and Chavis' communication with him: Tom Wicker, "So May Quirks and Turns in It." "Transcript of the President's News Conference on Foreign and Domestic Matters," *New York Times*, 14 June 1977, 24. "Supreme Court Rejects Bid by Wilmington Ten," NHCPL. *Psalms from Prison*, NCC. "Human Rights Begin at Home. Free the Wilmington Ten," picture from clipping, *Raleigh News and Observer*, 12 February 1978, Wilmington Ten Correspondence and Miscellaneous Records File, State Archives. "Jimmy Carter in Oval Office, photograph, [www.jimmycarterlibrary.org](http://www.jimmycarterlibrary.org).



How can we have a fair post conviction hearing when even the defendants themselves were not allowed to be at their own hearing? How can you conclude that we have a fair appellate court system in North Carolina when they refuse to even review the case? They didn't uphold the convictions. They refused to even review it. They refused to even review the post conviction question.

**Narrator:** After promising to intervene only when the appeals process ended, Governor James Hunt was now forced to make a decision on the fate of the Ten. Supporters launched major campaigns and non-supporters wrote letters to the governor, even Jay Stroud, who was so friendly with the governor and his legal counsel Jack Cozort that he sent them the first two chapters of his book on the case. Finding no fault with courts, Hunt, who delivered his decision on live television, refused to pardon the Ten but reduced their sentences.<sup>64</sup>

**Todd:** When I became a member of the North Carolina Human Relations Council,

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<sup>64</sup>Hunt not only refused to intervene but also criticized the national and international press for not presenting "the full facts" about the Ten. The last round in the legal battle ended when the North Carolina Court of Appeals refused to review the decision on January 5, 1978. Ferguson vowed to take the case to federal court on the grounds that the decision was a denial of due process unless Gov. Hunt pardoned the group. Hunt told his legal counsel to prepare case-by-case memorandums on each defendant, including background information and prison behavior. Hunt revealed on January 10, 1978 that he would make a decision on whether to pardon the Ten in two weeks time. Hunt, who was considered a liberal on racial matters, asked for thirty minutes of evening television time on January 23<sup>rd</sup> to present his decision. Jay Stroud to Jack Cozort, Raleigh, date unknown, Office of General Counsel, Legal Counsel: Files of Jack Cozort, State Archives. Jay Stroud to Gov. James Hunt, Raleigh, 9 February 1977, Files of Jack Cozort. Tom Wicker, "Catch-22 for the Ten." "Carolina High Court Rejects Plea of Wilmington Ten in Firebombing," *New York Times* 6 January 1978, A12. "North Carolina Pardon Weighed," *New York Times* 11 January 1978, A20. Wayne King, "Wilmington Ten Ruling Goes on TV Tomorrow," *New York Times* 22 January 1978, 20. Wayne King, "Carolina Governor Shortens Terms for Wilmington in Firebombing," *New York Times* 24 January 1978, 12. Graveyard Cartoon, Education and Corrections Section: Wilmington Ten Correspondence and Miscellaneous Record s File, State Archives. Letters to the Governor Hunt, Office of General Counsel, Legal Counsel: Files of Jack Cozort, State Archives. Hunt Cartoon, clipping, *Wilmington Journal*, Wilmington 10 File, NHCPL. 3 Protestors, picture, Wilmington Ten Correspondence and Miscellaneous Record s File, State Archives. Free the Wilmington Ten Banner and Congressman Edward Conyers, Wilmington Ten Correspondence and Miscellaneous Records File, State Archives. Free the Wilmington 10 button, NCC. Martin Donsky, "Freedom 4 Months to 2 Years Away," *Raleigh News and Observer*, 24 January 1978, Bellamy Papers. James Hunt, picture from clipping, *Wilmington Morning Star*, 24 January 1978, Bellamy Papers, 2-A. James Hunt, picture from clipping, *Wilmington Star News*, 17 May 1977, Bellamy Papers, 2.

serving at the pleasure of governor, Gov. Hunt's first term, and the council took it up, and because I knew seven of them. We had a white minister and a black minister and yours truly, who went to Gov. Hunt. And I was the spokesperson, and I asked him what was his idea of rehabilitation. I told him that I knew seven of the Wilmington Ten individuals, and I certainly did not think that incarceration at this time was the proper thing they needed. And Dr. Bellamy knew I was going, and he said that we . . . they'd take them back into school system, and we would work with them. It wasn't too long, about two weeks after then, that Gov. Hunt commuted those sentences. And as I, well I did tell him that if he thought he wanted to be reelected again that I didn't think that was a good thing to do, to keep those boys in prison or incarcerated for no reason at all. I'm not saying that they were . . . Nothing could have . . . they could have done . . . I've seen people who have murdered individuals and didn't get as much time as these poor teenagers got. They were teenagers. And it was unfair.

**Chavis:** How can anyone in their right mind conclude that we had a fair trial? How could anyone in their right mind? I invite the governor to explain how it is fair for the state to coerce, to force and to bribe three state witnesses that testified against me and my comrades. The only thing I can find in my heart to really thank Gov. Hunt for is for giving the over one million black people that watched that program last night on T.V. I have to thank him for giving them a classic lesson in North Carolina racism.

See when Gov. Hunt, I don't think he's read all the letters that he's gotten. The majority of the letters that came in in support of the Wilmington Ten, at least from North Carolina and around the country, were from poor people, concerned people, who know what it's like to be treated unfairly because of their skin or because of the nature of their

pocketbook or because of they class that they live in this society. Back in the biblical days, there was another governor named Pontius Pilate. An innocent man named Jesus was brought before him. Pontius Pilate knew that Jesus Christ was going to be crucified, but yet Pontius Pilate washed his hands and let the crucifixion continue. We are the Wilmington 10, and we have been crucified here, right here in North Carolina. We have been nailed to the cross of racism and political repression.<sup>65</sup>

**Narrator:** Four months later, members of the Ten started to be released on parole, although Anne Sheppard Turner was paroled nearly a year prior. Chavis was the last to be paroled in December of 1979, one year before the sentences were finally overturned.<sup>66</sup>

**Chavis:** In America you're suppose to be innocent until proven guilty. They said to the Wilmington 10, "You're guilty until you prove yourself innocent." And it took us ten years to prove our innocence. We did not win our case until December 4, 1980 when the Fourth Circuit Court of Appeals overturned our convictions, cleared our names and cleared our records. The people say, "Well, how did you survive prison?" Prison was easy compared to what we had to experience that week on the streets of Wilmington. It was very difficult to know that somebody would try to shoot you because of the color of your skin.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>65</sup>Letters and Petitions: Education and Corrections Section: Wilmington Ten Case File, State Archives; Office of General Counsel, Legal Counsel: Files of Jack Cozort.

<sup>66</sup>"Parole '10' Defendants Claim Innocence," picture, *Wilmington Star News*, 29 July 1978, Wilmington 10 File, NHCPL. Willie Vereen and James McKoy Paroled from Prison, picture, *Wilmington Star News*, 26 July 1978, Wilmington 10 File, NHCPL. "Free at Last," picture of Connie Tindall upon Parole, *Wilmington Star News*, 12 March 1979, Wilmington 10 File, NHCPL.

<sup>67</sup>Jay Stroud continued to argue that there was no basis for the reversal. The court was conscientious of the fact that most of Allen Hall's contradictory statement, his psychiatric history and inducements to testify were concealed by the prosecution from the defense, as well as Hall's typewritten statement with Stroud's handwritten notations, which showed discrepancies. The state courts previously agreed with Stroud's contention that the handwriting made it a privileged "work product." After the reversal the state announced it would not seek an appeal. Benjamin Chavis, Warwick. "Conviction of the 'Wilmington 10' in 1971 Racial Violence Is Upset," *The New York Times*, 5 December 1980, A20. "At last, Justice for the

**Todd:** They were being made an example of. Those boys didn't kill anybody, and I'm not even sure they were the ones who burned the grocery store. I think they were in the wrong place at the wrong time. They were picked up, if you want to know what I think. But you must remember this was 1898 environment, and as the results of that, they got those sentences as if to say, "We showed you once in 1898, now we're going to show you again that you can't do this."

**Chavis:** Some of us in here may be black. Some of us in here may be white. Some of us in here may be Latinos or Native American. We all come from the same place. We're all apart of the same human family, but racism is a disease that divides people, that causes some people to want to exploit other people, take advantage of others. And it's not an incurable disease. There is a cure for racism. Part of searching for truth is to expose the contradictions of what happened in 1898 and expose the contradictions of what happened in 1971, so that those of us who are still alive, by God's grace in 2006, can make life better. We should all want the generation that comes behind us to live better, not to have to experience it. One of the reasons why history repeats itself is because people don't learn the history. You know, we have to learn. If there's any city in America, it ought to be Wilmington, North Carolina, that has something positive to say about race relations because of what God has permitted to happen in this city.

**Narrator:** 1898, the loss of Martin Luther King and Williston along with the difficulties of desegregating New Hanover County Schools shaped the environment that led to the Wilmington Ten case. Violence was not new to Wilmington in 1971, and Benjamin Chavis was not the mastermind behind the wave of black militancy, despite his militant

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Wilmington 10," *The New York Times*, 12 December 1980, A34. "No Appeal Planned in Race Strife Case," *The New York Times*, 19 December 1980, D19.

roots. Whether he and the members of the ten are guilty of the crimes they were accused of will never be known, but it taught the world that justice was not colorblind.

Wilmington marked the 100th anniversary of 1898 and the 35th anniversary of the Wilmington Ten with commemoration events in 1998 and 2006 respectively, creating a stronger, more unified community. The University of North Carolina at Wilmington has been instrumental in devoting scholarship to 1898 and the Wilmington Ten, which included hosting the events during the 35<sup>th</sup> Anniversary.<sup>68</sup> But Pam worried the progress may not be noticed by everyone.

**Greenough:** When kids don't have a cause, when they don't have something to rally around, history's destined to repeat itself again. And you know, all it would take is somebody to walk in here and go, "You know, there aren't very many kids at UNCW that are black. Not very faculty members on the UNCW faculty are black, are they? Here you go to high school right here in this town, and you are not even represented on your own college campus," and here we go all over again.

Chavis: When I look on this beautiful waterfront, I don't see any black owned businesses. [*applause from crowd*] I know, I know there's an opportunity here. I met with the University of North Carolina at Wilmington. I'm glad to see they got some of us out there now. [*applause from crowd*]

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<sup>68</sup> *Collier's Weekly* cover. Martin Luther King, Jr., picture. Williston Senior High School, picture. Wilmington Ten, *Wilmington Star News*, 12 March 1979, NHCPL, 4D. "North Carolina Last in Freedom," picture. Men outside Daily Record, picture. Wilmington, N.C., panoramic picture, Haines Photo Co., 13 November 1918, Library of Congress.