

The power of the Black Press: Governor pardons the 'Wilmington 10'

by Nisa Islam Muhammad
Staff Writer

When Mary Alice Thatch, publisher of *The Wilmington Journal*, decided it was time to advocate for the pardons of innocence for the Wilmington 10 in February 2011, she knew it was the right thing to do.

"But I didn't know how we were going to get it done. I just knew it was going to get done. So I called Dorothy Leavell, publisher of the *Chicago Crusader* and she said we'll take it to NNPA," Mrs. Thatch told *The Final Call*.

The National Newspaper Publishers Association (NNPA) for over 50 years has championed the causes of the Black community through their more than 100 newspapers and magazines.

"The Wilmington 10 Innocence Project started under then chair Danny Bakerwell. He had Rev. Ben Chavis (one of the Wilmington 10) speak at our newsmaker luncheon in March during Black Press Week. We talked about how we could help," Clover Campbell, NNPA Chair told *The Final Call*.

"NNPA put in resources to help. This was our most successful campaign. We did this to correct the wrong of the Wilmington 10 and to educate young Blacks that things are not as good as they seem."

The year is 1971 and a young Rev. Benjamin Chavis is sent by the United Church of Christ, in Wilmington, N.C. to help the students who were boycotting the school system for racial discrimination.

"We were there fighting for school children to have the right to a decent education," he told *The Final Call*.

That didn't sit too well with the Whites in that community who did everything they could to force a confrontation. The Wilmington 10 were convicted the next year of firebombing a store. Incarceration followed but the real crime was the injustice of their trumped up arrest.

"Our denomination (United Church of Christ) put up the initial bail of \$500,000 for the Wilmington 10,"

explained Dr. Jeremiah Wright, pastor emeritus of Trinity United Church of Christ to *The Final Call*. "That money was tied up for four years. When the Supreme Court declined to hear their appeal, the church considered taking their money back but their attorney James Ferguson felt we could win on the federal level."

"So he brought 10 of us to Raleigh, N.C. for an intense 10-day training on how to represent this case to the 39 conferences of the United Church of Christ. We had to convince them not to take the money back. We read the entire transcript and interviewed their family and friends."

He added, "We had to convince them to judge the case on the facts. This is a White denomination and many didn't like Rev. Chavis. One day he had on a burnt and leather jacket with his girlfriend Angela Davis. The next day he had on a mink coat and was driving a Cadillac. We need them to vote on the facts of the case."

The money stayed with the case and was won on appeal to the 4th Circuit Court in Mississippi 1980, which overturned all of their convictions due to "gross prosecutorial misconduct."

Their convictions were overturned but no pardon.

The Wilmington 10 Pardon of Innocence Project started in 2011 and Cash Michaels, reporter for *The Wilmington Journal*, was assigned as the coordinator.

"The project languished for about a year because we didn't have \$500,000 for doing this. Things really got started in January 2012," he told *The Final Call*.

That's when something of a miracle happened.

"Dr. Timothy Tyson received a box from the courthouse in Burgess, N.C. marked Wilmington 10. He started going through the box and was amazed at what he found, handwritten notes by the prosecutor Jay Stroud and evidence that had never been seen before," Rev. William Barber, president of the N.C. NAACP told *The Final Call*.

"This prosecutor was so racist he wrote down his scheme to get a mistrial and faked an illness. This was explosive new evidence. It was stuff you dream about but never get. We showed the charts to the world."

From that point the project pushed

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Warren Muhammad, center, pictured with Montecella Flaniken (Adjudication hearing Officer) and Tammy Simon Adams (Associate Judge) following the swearing-in ceremony. Photo: Dura Muhammad

Muslim attorney sworn in as a city judge 'Through justice we can live a better life'

by Jesse Muhammad

HOUSTON—Attorney Warren Muhammad was recently sworn in to serve as a judge in the municipal courts of the city of Houston.

"I am honored and humbled. I see it as an opportunity to serve and participate in the just administration of the law," said Mr. Muhammad.

Over a 33 year career, he has handled many cases in the area of civil litigation, criminal defense and entertainment law. Those cases include even getting a not guilty verdict for a man charged with attempted capital murder of a police officer arising out of a shootout with police.

"After I received the appointment, I reflected on the importance of the position, realizing that many people's first contact with the legal system takes place in the municipal courts. Also the proper implementation

and adherence to the traffic codes are critical in that many lives are lost, people injured and damages incurred on the roads of our city and state," says Mr. Muhammad.

Mr. Muhammad has been a registered member of the Nation of Islam since 1989 and attends Muhammad Mosque No. 45. He is an active member of the Ministry of Justice and a student in the ministry class.

"Minister Farrakhan has said that the mis-administration of Law produces, not life, but death. My desire is to help in the proper administration of the law so that through justice we can live a better life," he says.

His extensive career qualified him for this new position that was approved by the Mayor of Houston. After a period of training, he was expected to assume the bench at various municipal courts throughout the city.

"I do hope to bring a wealth of life and legal experience to the position, integrity and balance," he said.



Reverend Benjamin F. Chavis speaks as Attorney Irving Joiner of the Wilmington Ten Pardons of Innocence Project looks on.

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the evidence and garnered public support. When Mr. Michaels realized how explosive the records were, he spent the spring and summer authenticating them.

"We still had challenges. This was an election year and we didn't want this issue to get caught up in the politics. Governor Perdue (NC) had been good on issues affecting the Black community like getting money for the victims of forced sterilization as well as vetoing voter suppression and voter ID

"When she announced that she wasn't running for reelection, we knew we had a chance but it would still be difficult. We kept the NNPA papers updated with stories but we knew that wasn't enough. We needed to leverage celebrity media to also exert pressure. The National NAACP got involved and voted to support a resolution, with a petition. Change.org also did a petition. Mainstream media picked it up in November and everything exploded," Mr. Michaels said.

Mrs. Thatch explained that this is the work of the Black press. "We must plead our own cause. My daddy fought the Klan and his paper was firebombed in 1973. We have

to do more of this. We have to remember that the Black Press is out there to plead our own cause. No longer do we need others. We have to get up and do this for ourselves."

"I've been talking to the NAACP about taking on other cases to right the wrongs of yesterday. If *The Final Call* knows of any case that we need to take on, just let us know. We're going to make big changes in this country for justice, peace and truth."

On December 11, North Carolina Governor Beverly Perdue signed 10 pardons of innocence calling their prosecution "naked racism."