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## Wilmington Ten: Time to Pardon

**NNPA COLUMNIST**

**Dr. Benjamin F. Chavis, Jr.**

Forty years ago in Wilmington, N.C., there was a serious struggle of Black Americans to end racial discrimination and violence over the manner in which public schools were desegregated. The NAACP, national and local, had won a series of important court battles in Wilmington and across America to desegregate public school systems. But, during the Nixon Administration in the early 1970's, African Americans in the south, as well as in other regions of the nation, were being challenged with the systematic racial disparities involved in the details of how federal court-ordered school desegregation was being enforced. We are grateful that at the recent 2011 Black Press Week in Washington, D.C., the National Newspaper Publishers Association (NNPA) committed to lead a national initiative to get a "Pardon of Innocence" for the Wilmington, N.C. Ten. The NNPA is a vital association of our nation's leading newspapers that for 184 years have served the news and journalistic interests of the Black American community in the United States and throughout the Pan African world. While the specifics of case of the Wilmington Ten are unique, this case of political prisoners raised the broad issues and plight of the struggle for African American liberation and empowerment to a

global level during the 1970's. Black students, parents, and community leaders made a decision in Wilmington in February 1971 that they would stand up and fight to protect and secure the "quality" education of African American students by attempting to preserve the high academic integrity and institutional legacy of African

... the African American community became the targets of a violent, paramilitary, anti-Black terror campaign led by the Ku Klux Klan

American public schools such as Williston Senior High School. The United Church of Christ, and its Commission for Racial Justice led by The Reverend Dr. Charles E. Cobb, decided to stand with the student-led coalition in Wilmington to demand fairness and equal justice. As a young civil rights activist, I was dispatched by the Commission for Racial Justice to give organizational assistance to our brothers and sisters in Wilmington.

Because we dared to speak out and to engage in non-violent street protests to the long, unprecedented

history of racial violence and injustice in that port city, the African American community became the targets of a violent, paramilitary, anti-Black terror campaign led by the Ku Klux Klan and the Rights of White People (ROWP) organization. Our movement's headquarters in Wilmington - Gregory Congregational United Church of Christ - and the surrounding African American community was placed in a state of siege by armed White vigilantes, who opposed

the concerted frame-up, unjust conviction, and imprisonment of the Wilmington Ten.

We are the Wilmington Ten: Wayne Moore, William Joe Wright, Connie Tindall, Marvin Patrick, James McKoy, Ann Shepard, Willie Earl Vereen, Jerry Jacobs, Reginald Epps, and Benjamin F. Chavis, Jr. Because of our involvement in the struggle in Wilmington in 1971, we were unjustly charged, arrested, tried, convicted, and sentenced to a combined maximum total of 282 years in prison in North Carolina in 1972. We all were completely innocent of the alleged charges of arson and conspiracy to assault. In 1978, Amnesty International declared that we were "Political Prisoners." We stayed in prison during most of the 1970's while our case was on appeal. On Dec. 4, 1980, the Fourth Circuit U.S. Court of Appeals overturned the unjust convictions because of "prosecutorial misconduct" in the unconstitutional and unfair frame-up. Yet, to date there has not been an official "pardon of innocence" issued by the state of or by the federal government.

NNPA Chair, Danny J. Blakewell, Sr. affirmed, "We are going to tell the story of the Wilmington 10." *Dr. Benjamin F. Chavis, Jr. is Senior Advisor to the Black Alliance for Educational Options and President of Education Online Services Corporation.*

## Gadhafi: America's Love, Hate Relationship

**THE CURRY REPORT**

**George E. Curry**



The United States' relationship with Moammar Gaddafi has vacillated over the years, at one time viewing him as a mad dog leader, then accepting him into the international community as a member in good standing and more recently, depicting him as an outcast while participating in coordinated multinational air strikes on Libya.

In a recent speech to the nation on Monday night, President Obama defended his decision to join France, the United Nations and now NATO in launching air strikes on the African country to protect civilians.

The mass protests that led to the downfall of Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak after 35 years in power and the 23-year tenure of Tunisia President Zine al-Abidine Ben Ali have inspired protests throughout Northern Africa and the Middle East - including in Libya, Bahrain, and Yemen - and have underscored the United States' inconsistent foreign policy.

While professing support for democracy around the world, the U.S. has openly supported dictators who routinely exploited and killed their own people, as was the case in Egypt under Mubarak and is the case in Bahrain under King Hamad bin Isa al-Khalifa. In those and other instances, the U.S. turned a deaf ear to human rights violations because the leaders of those countries were allied with America in the fight against international terrorism.

In the case of Gaddafi, he has been considered both friend and foe.

Libya, a mostly desert country about four times the size of California, was divided into three different provinces, each with deep tribal tension, until a Gaddafi-led revolution ousted its former king in 1969. Even Gaddafi's severest critics concede

that he has used Libya's newly-discovered oil wealth to uplift the poor, improving hospitals, and schools.

The major fear among some African leaders is that having joined in the air strikes against Libya, the Obama administration may now use that as an excuse to support military intervention in other African countries

killed. Reagan retaliated by bombing Libya. In the process, dozens of innocent civilians were killed, including Gaddafi's adopted infant daughter. Two years later, Libya experienced the wrath of the international community after it was suspected of bombing Pan Am Flight 103 over Lockerbie, Scotland that resulted in the deaths of 270 people. In 1992, the United Nations applied sanctions against Libya for failing to turn over two suspects in the bombing.

Beginning in 1998, when it became the first nation to issue an international arrest warrant for Osama bin Laden, Libya took a

series of high-profile actions to repair its tarnished international reputation. In 1999, Gaddafi turned over two suspects in the Pan Am bombing, prompting the U.N. to lift economic sanctions against Libya. Two years later, when the two suspects were found guilty of murder, Gaddafi condemned the Sept. 11 attacks and urged his fellow citizens to donate blood to the victims.

The U.N. made additional con-

cessions in 2003 by lifting travel and weapons bans against Libya after it formally accepted responsibility for the Pan Am bombing. Libya paid more than \$2 billion to settle claims by the victims' families.

In another step toward regaining international respectability, Libya disbanded its nuclear program and provided the CIA with information that helped uncover a nuclear underground market in Europe.

President George W. Bush, eyeing Libya as a potential partner in the war against terrorism, lifted most U.S. trade sanctions in 2004.

Describing the newly-thawed relationship, the Los Angeles Times, which spells the Libyan leader's last name differently from most news outlets, observed: "As it struggles to combat Islamic terrorist networks, the Bush administration has quietly built an intelligence alliance with Libyan leader Moammar Kadafi, a onetime bitter enemy the U.S. had tried for years to isolate, topple or kill."

"Kadafi has helped the U.S. pursue Al Qaeda's network in North Africa by turning radicals over to neighboring pro-Western governments. He has also provided information to the CIA on Libyan nationals with alleged ties to international terrorists." The newspaper continued, "In turn, the U.S. has handed over to Tripoli some anti-Kadafi Libyans captured in its campaign against terrorism. And Kadafi's agents have been allowed into the Guantanamo Bay detention camp in Cuba to interrogate Libyans being held there."