

# The Carolina Times

THE TRUTH UNBRIDLED

USPS 091-380

VOLUME 71 - NUMBER 47

DURHAM, NORTH CAROLINA — SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 27, 1993

TELEPHONE (919) 682-2913

PRICE: 30 CENTS

## LET US BE... Thankful

### Durham NAACP Honors Benjamin F. Ruffin

By Ray Trent

The massive crowd that descended on the Pearson Cafeteria Thursday night was as diverse as any group can be. The occasion was the 19th annual freedom fund dinner of the Durham Branch NAACP.

The honoree was Benjamin S. Ruffin, a man who has affected Durham and the nation from his early years in the fight to improve housing, employment and neighborhood environments.

The efforts of Ben Ruffin and many others to push Durham toward equality for all with marches, demonstrations and sit-ins in the 1960s bore fruit. Ruffin credits the 21 neighborhood councils that came together for civil rights. He said he was "only a soldier in the army of righteousness."

From humble West End beginnings in Durham, Ben Ruffin earned a bachelor's degree from North Carolina Central University and a master's degree from UNC-Chapel Hill. In the sixties, he directed community self-help groups.

In 1977, he joined the staff of Mayor Jim Hunt as a special assistant. Among his accomplishments during these years were increasing the number of black judges in the state and expanding the number of minority state employees.

Ruffin then moved to the presidency of North Carolina Life Insurance Co. In 1986, he moved to the RJR organization where he serves as vice president of Corporate Affairs. In this position, Ruffin leads the company's minority programs in education, business development and community involvement.



BENJAMIN S. RUFFIN WITH PLAQUE

Ben was honored by community people who touched his life. An African proverb says that it takes a whole village to raise a child and, in Ruffin's case, the "villagers" were successful.

John Edwards of Durham and Joseph Green (president of Metroline Carriers, Inc.) — both friends from childhood — spoke of their youth experiences with

Ruffin.

The well known Coach Russell Blunt of Hillside High School, said that Ben owes him for "taxi" service during his youth. And educator, Mrs. Johnnie B. McLester told of Ben's early education trials. Bert Collins, president of N.C. Mutual, and Mrs. Julia W. Taylor, president of

(Continued On Page 4)



MS. BRENDA SCARBOROUGH, JAMES C. BLACK PRESENT BOOK TO RUFFIN

### Haitian Refugees Live In Miserable Bahamian Limbo

By Richard Cole  
NASSAU, Bahamas (AP) — Selig Baptiste fled into the night, bushes and fences slashing at his arms and legs as Bahamian immigration police raided a squalid Haitian shantytown.

He escaped, but months later he sits on the steps of his shack on the outskirts of Nassau and remembers, fingering his scars. He wears, without a trace of irony, a t-shirt affirming "It's Better in the Bahamas." Like most of his increasingly unwelcome countrymen stuck in their Bahamian limbo, Baptiste has no residence papers, no job, no prospects. He is afraid to go home to the violence of Haiti. And he doesn't have the \$2,500 to reach the Florida in a smuggler's boat.

So he awaits the next Bahamian immigration raid. "They come at 2 a.m. They knock the doors off and come in. We jump over fences, run through the bushes — that's how I got these scars," he says.

"Now we sleep in the bushes — the children too, sometimes," says Baptiste, 31.

The crisis in Haiti and the growing flood of immigrants is taking its toll on the once-sleepy Bahamian islands east of Florida.

A tropical paradise where houses don't have numbers, no two clocks show the same time and everyone picks up their mail at the post office was not ready for a mass Haitian migration.

The Bahamas' Roman Catholic Bishop Lawrence Burke estimates 25,000 Haitians are now marooned in the Bahamas. Haitian consul Joseph Etienne says 35,000 to 40,000.

Attorney General Orville Turnquest says Haitians, most of them illegal, account for a fifth of the archipelago's 260,000 residents.

"There is a genuine feeling our culture is being threatened," says the bishop.

Robert Sweeting, member of parliament from the Bahamian

island of Great Abaco, says the government has decided whatever the number, it's too many. Almost 100 percent of the births in his city's government hospital are Haitian. Haitians, most illegal, now account for 30 to 40 percent of his island's population.

"It just got completely out of hand," he says. "These people were just allowed to come in and squat. We're determined to deal with it." That policy is strongly supported by Gregory Powell, 31, an unemployed Bahamian cruising the streets of Nassau.

"I've got nothing against them. But there aren't enough jobs for everyone, and they're making it much harder," he says. The crackdown is ruthless by U.S. standards, although sporadic. When illegal Haitian aliens are arrested, they languish in Fox Hall prison or other jails until their often penniless families come up with cash.

The father of Elizabeth Antenor's

(Continued On Page 4)

## The Shape-Up Becomes A Shake-Down

By Rick Hampson

violence is a given. Nov. 8, six men from a "minority construction coalition" swarm a New York high school building site in Brooklyn demanding jobs. Told jobs are available, one hurts a cinder block at the contractor's head, opening a gash that needs seven stitches.

Two months previous, dozens from a similar work gang rush an uptown Ralph Lauren clothing emporium in Manhattan. They bash an African with a 2-by-4, then crush an architect's face and push him off a finished stairway.

In Los Angeles, where blacks says they're being excluded from the jobs building boom, similar "jobs councils" show up at work sites, sometimes physically assaulting a foreman, commonly shutting the job

to the threat of violence exists when you deal with my organization," Deacon Alexander, the leader of one such group, the L.A. Employed Council. "I certainly hope it does." Such groups are still few in Los Angeles — from three to half a dozen, say the best guesses. As many as 30 so-called minority construction coalitions roam New York City on city construction sites, looking for a piece of the action.

New York's depressed construction industry, some groups want jobs for their black or Hispanic members; others seek cash payoffs or "donate" security contracts. Those who refuse get trouble, ranging from picketing to vandalism to outright invasion.

Complaints of New York City work site incidents soared from 249 in 1988 to 616 in 1992. In June, 31 leaders from eight coalitions were arrested for extortion and conspiracy. But the scam goes on: As of Sept. 15, police had already logged 607 construction gang incidents for

frequency of the incidents slowed slightly after the indictments. Sgt. Daniel O'Rourke, supervisor of a police task force, predicted the same would recur. "They're just laying low, waiting to see what happens."

"We don't work, NOBODY works! WE don't work, NOBODY works!" Architect Barry McCormick was halfway up the unfinished stairs, talking to a carpenter about banisters, when he heard the

commotion. He turned to see dozens of black men running in the front door, clutching pipes, tire irons, hunks of wood.

McCormick, the carpenter and 20 other workers were finishing the interior of a Ralph Lauren clothing emporium called Polo Sport, designed to evoke the life of the ski lodge, the beach house, the yacht.

Now, it was the life of the street surging in — a rowdy, angry, armed gang.

McCormick, 44, was not surprised. By the time of that Aug. 11 invasion, construction gangs had already paid several visits to Polo Sport. The contractor had hired two members, even though the payroll already included many Hispanics.

Now they were back, in force. Three men bounded up the stairs past McCormick. A fourth bumped into the architect, spinning him around, then slammed a board into McCormick's face.

The blow broke the bone over his eye, fractured his cheek in three places and opened a bloody gash. Everything went white. Then McCormick felt hands on his chest, pushing hard. When his eyes cleared, he was falling off the side of the open staircase. He landed 10 feet below, dazed and bleeding.

His wasn't the only blood. An electrician who yelled, "Nobody tells me when I can work!" got a 2-by-4 in the face.

Minority jobs coalitions have existed in New York since the 1960s. Frozen out by the clamish, mostly white construction trade unions, blacks and Hispanics have found that virtually the only way to get work is to go to sites and demand it.

Coalitions range from a few dozen members to several hundred. Some have helped thousands of blacks and Hispanics to get union jobs. Others, however, are concerned with extortion, not integration; they've turned the shape-up into a shake-down.

One contractor, who spoke on condition of anonymity, said he once pointed out to a black coalition boss that most workers on his site WERE black. To which the leader responded: They aren't MY blacks.

Some say the coalition threat has been overblown, especially in an industry where organized crime rakes off millions.

"If you talk to the coalitions, they're not that bad," said Manny Fernandez, a labor relations expert for Morse-Diesel in New York, one of the nation's largest construction companies. "They're trying to put their

people to work. If they didn't, who would?" In the past, union workers did battle with the gangs. These days, union hard hats usually put down their tools and walk away; the invaders are too well-armed. On June 9, 1992, for example, police responding to a shootout in front of a Brooklyn jobs coalition headquarters found eight guns, including six semiautomatic pistols.

There's another factor in the coalitions' favor: Since many contractors hire too few minority workers to comply with government rules, they're reluctant to call police when someone puts the arm on them.

Rather than risk a few hours' delay, which might cost thousands of dollars, contractors traditionally have hired a few laborers on the spot at \$25 an hour.

Such arrangements are now in jeopardy. With New York's construction industry depressed — about half the 100,000 union members are unemployed — contractors are less willing to hire unnecessary workers, and coalitions are more desperate for income.

Hiring from one group no longer guarantees others will stay away; accordingly, some contractors hire the nastiest coalitions to run off other gangs, thus fueling the coalitions' battle over scarce work sites.

Last year, at least six people were killed in construction gang turf battles.

"One week two gangs might be allies, the next week they're at each other's throats," said O'Rourke. There used to be some respect for turf, he added, "but the economy knocked the hell out of that." The construction drought also is forcing gangs to shake down smaller projects, including brownstone renovations in neighborhoods that need housing.

Earlier this year, one gang even tried to shake down a black man who was personally installing a boiler in his own house in Queens.

And what of Polo Sport? McCormick and the electrician were taken to the hospital. The gang drove off in a battered bus. By the time police stopped it a mile away, only five men were aboard. Five others were picked up, and all 10 were charged with assault and released on bail. The one who attacked McCormick was not among them.

The morning after the incident, several job coalition members were back at Polo Sport, asking for work. By then, designer Lauren had hired armed guards to protect the site — just another cost of building in New York.