

OP/ED



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The late Larry Leon Hamlin, NBTf and Black Rep founder.

Plays First; Parties Later

Theatre has always been considered highbrow. For many, its mere mention still conjures images of women in white gloves and men in top hats dropping in for a matinee.

One of Larry Leon Hamlin's goals was to change that image by creating theatre that all could relate to and productions that reflect all. Few of us in these parts had seen real, professional theatre (church plays not included, sorry) before Hamlin started his N.C. Black Repertory Company in the late 1970s.

And few folks outside of New York City have the opportunity to see the caliber of theatre that is presented during the National Black Theatre Festival, which Hamlin founded in 1989. The level of talent and artistry that will be in this city next week, July 29-Aug. 3, is simply mind-blowing.

Tony Award winning divas Lillas White and Tonya Pinkins will be in action. The velvet-voiced White will play blues legend Mabel Smith in the bio-musical "Big Maybelle," while Pinkins, recently named one of "Broadway's 25 Greatest Divas of All-Time," will present the cabaret-style "Tonya Pinkins Unplugged." Familiar faces from television and film will appear in many of the productions - Kim Coles ("Oh, But Wait ... There's More"), Debbi Morgan ("The Monkey on My Back!") and Ralph Harris ("MANish Boy") among them - but the rising stars, performers who are generating buzz around the nation and beyond, may be the ones to watch. They include Timothy Simonson, who plays Adam Clayton Powell Jr. in "Adam;" Joseph "Joe P" Palmore, who plays the lead role in the riveting "The Ballard of Emmett Till;" Chapel Hill resident Anita Woodley, whose breast cancer-themed "Mama Juggs" is dedicated to her late mother; and the cast of Canadian men who star in Darren Anthony's "Secrets of a Black Boy."

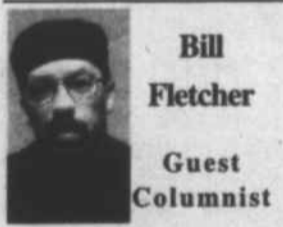
In short, if you spend Festival week merely walking through downtown or hanging out in the lobby of the Marriott, you are truly not opening the amazing gift that Hamlin gave us. Festival week makes our city electric, and we all love the positive energy it brings every two years, but let's not lose our focus. The NBTf is about the celebration of black culture through the timeless art form of theatre. The best way to celebrate that is by sitting in a venue and watching the magic on stage once the lights go down.

So next week, go to a play or musical, some of which cost as little as \$15, before you head downtown to hang-out. That way, you will truly have something to talk about to the old and new friends that you will surely run in to.

The performers coming to the Festival are far too talented to play to have empty-venues, and, most importantly, Mr. Hamlin worked far too hard to bring professional theatre to our backyard for us to sleep on this.

Tickets will be available during festival week at the Benton Convention Center and at performance venues before shows, if they are still available. Learn more about this year's offerings at NBTf.org or in special insert in this week's *Chronicle*.

Blacks are 'the Others'



Bill Fletcher
 Guest Columnist

I was told a story the other night. Apparently on the evening of the Zimmerman acquittal, in a bar in South Carolina, a group of White patrons were talking. Some of them, upon hearing the news, shouted "Free at Last!" in celebration of the decision. One person, however, a White labor union activist, decided that this was not his gathering, and left in disgust.

The responses to the acquittal have told us a great deal about the USA. The bottom line is that many people who knew or know nothing about who Trayvon Martin was have concluded that he was a demon and deserved death. I realize that this is a very blunt comment but I believe that it is important to cut to the chase. These individuals have decided that aggression against a Black youth who looks "suspicious" (whatever that means) can be raised to the level of death and actually justified.

But here is the other piece. There have been Whites and some Blacks

who have argued that we should not be so upset about the Zimmerman verdict when there are so many examples of Blacks killing Blacks that go without comment. In other words, we are hypocritical for protesting the Zimmerman acquittal. This notion actually misses a larger point.

The acquittal of Zimmerman is linked to a steady shift in the racial relations that we have experienced since the late 1970s. The erosion of affirmative action, voting rights and unstoppable police profiling and brutality, are all reflections of this change. The Zimmerman acquittal is a reminder that we have rights that are not worthy of respect, even though those same rights are on the books.

None of this means that Black-on-Black crime is of no or little importance. Black-on-Black crime destabilizes our communities and is a reflection of the continued economic and social ravaging we have experienced over the years. The fact that this crime is frequently ignored or treated as inevitable leads to despair. As a result, our ability or capacity to respond to larger issues is undermined.

Thus, we should not be posing the Trayvon Martin case against Black-on-

Black crime. They both need to be addressed, but the Zimmerman acquittal speaks to a very dangerous trend in the larger U.S. society that we can ignore only at our peril. This trend suggests, once again, that we have remained the "other," that is, a segment of the population that is considered by too many Whites to be unknowable and dangerous; a segment whose lives and experiences are not worthy of any particular investigation and concern. A segment that must be marginalized or, if we appear out of the dark, swatted away, as one would do with an annoying pest.

This is a time for reflection, as President Obama suggested, but a different sort of reflection. One that really takes us into an in depth understanding of the continued operation of race in all features of U.S. society. Yes, that discussion again...

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Election

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bring folks together and to work with them very hard to articulate the concerns of minorities," she said. "I have always been committed and dedicated to serving the people. Maybe some people don't like it, but I've done every step of it with God in front, and all I want to do is just listen and work with people."

The veteran politician dismissed the criticism of some, who say she has allowed her tenure to drag on too long.

"I've always said with any position, it's out there and it's how the people speak," she said. "If they want someone else to have a term, then we will know ... after the polls close."

Burke will face opposition in the Democratic primary from Jemise Bowen and Brenda Diggs, and Republican Michael Owens awaits her in November if she is victorious.

Bowen, a city native and North Carolina A&T State University alumna, said building stronger ties among community members by establishing new neighborhood watches and associations and other initiatives that would encourage community interaction would be among her priorities as a Council member. Property values are determined in part based on societal factors such as test scores and graduation rates at local schools and proximity to amenities such as shopping, Bowen said. If elected, Bowen, a member of the Democratic Women and the Senior Democrats, said she would work to establish a collaborative of residents in the ward who would use their skills and expertise to improve conditions in their communities.

"I just want to literally make a Northeast Ward collaborative in which we would all work together," said Bowen, a shelter monitor for the Salvation Army. "...I think it's going to take the entire ward committing to the ward. I think that the people of the Northeast Ward have to be willing to work - I know I am."

Bowen, 43, said she would also work to help the city diversify its corporate and business offerings, in an effort to attract more residents to the city and retain a larger percentage of college students after graduation.

"We have to find a way to keep the city active and moving and I just think if we had different types of industry, we could bring more people to the city," she said. "I don't dislike what they've done, it's just let's do more, let's try something different, let's think outside the box."

Owens, a former IT professional, believes his leadership would be a breath of fresh air for the ward.

"To be perfectly honest, the incumbent in this race has been on the City Council since 1977," said the 37 year-old. "I don't know how many of her constituents were even alive when she was elected, but for me, that's a problem. I'm a big proponent of term limits at every level of government, including the city. Although I don't know Vivian Burke ... I think 35 years is long enough. I'd like to be the one who makes that change."

If elected, Owens said he would fight for pay increases for the city's fire fighters and police officers, who he says receive 12 and 13 percent less pay, respectively, than their counterparts in comparable North Carolina cities.

"I think those men and women deserve more," stated Owens, who had a failed run for the District 12 U.S. House seat in 2012. "...Public safety, I think, is a priority for everyone, and I think if we're able to pay those

men and women more, they might be willing to stick around."

Democrat Bill Tatum will challenge incumbent James Taylor in the Southeast Ward. Tatum, a former president of the local NAACP chapter and retired member of the city's Housing and Neighborhood Services Division staff, believes his experience as a former civil rights leader and city employee will serve him well on the Council.

"Essentially, I feel that I can provide some experience in government in the way of revitalization and economic development of this area where we will be looking at bringing corporations and businesses to the community to allow for more jobs," said Tatum, who moved to Winston-Salem from his native High Point as an infant. "...On the other side of town, businesses are building and we don't see the grand finale in the Southeast Ward."

A father and grandfather who ran for the Forsyth County Board of Education and for county Soil and Water Conservation District Supervisor in the mid 1980s, Tatum said the ward "needs a stronger voice." If elected, Tatum said he would fight to ensure that all city employees who pursue higher education will receive pay increases, push for a stronger emphasis on vocational and technical degrees that could help citizens quickly obtain employment, and implore local employers to exercise leniency in hiring folks with criminal records or bad credit.

In an non presidential election year, Tatum, who has served on the Downtown Health Plaza Advisory Board and Rural Initiative Preservation Inc. Board of Directors, says getting out the vote will be his greatest challenge as a candidate.

"I'm getting a lot of feedback from people that's elated to see me in the race," stated the 63 year-old. "Of course, you've got to do like everybody else - you've got to get out there and get people to the polls."

Republican Mike Hunger will face the Democrat who wins the Southeast Ward primary in the Nov. 5 general election. Hunger, a National Property Inspections employee, could not be reached for comment on Tuesday.

Phillip Carter, a Democrat and longtime community activist, is challenging City Council member and fellow Dem Derwin Montgomery for his East Ward seat, as is Joycelyn Johnson, whom Montgomery upset four years ago. If elected, Carter, who was reared in the now defunct Happy Hill Gardens community, said he would work to help members of the East Ward empower themselves, and to leverage the

collective support of the city as a whole to help boost the progress of the ward.

"I believe that the pathway for economic sustainability and stimulus is in the community still - building job training and education programs within the community - I believe that that will curtail many of the issues that are plaguing the East Ward," he stated. "...It takes our city leaders, it takes our educators, it takes our business and job providers, and most of all, the community members themselves."

Carter touted his extensive community service efforts, which include stints on the Boards of Directors for HARRY Veterans Community Outreach Services, Neighbors for Better Neighborhoods and on the Operation Impact and Forsyth County Nursing Home Community advisory committees, in addition to holding a variety of positions and roles in the local Democratic party.

"I've got 13 years of community activism," said the 54 year-old. "...I've been on the ground for years. I've walked and talked and worked among the people in many different capacities."

Carter, who ran for the North Ward seat in 2009, believes he has what it takes to successfully lead the ward.

"I'm not seeking to talk about personalities, but more so principles and issues and the future," he remarked. "I'm looking towards the year 2017 as it relates to the East Ward. With my vision, it should turn around economically, there should be a turnaround as it relates to crime, and there should be a turnaround as it relates to personal income."

No Republicans registered to run in the ward.

In all, 28 people have filed for City Council seats this time around. Republican James Lee Knox and Democrat Gardenia Henley will run against Mayor Allen Joines, a Democrat. Democrats Jeff MacIntosh, Noah Reynolds and Laura Elliott will face off in the Northwest Ward primary in hopes of winning the chance to face Republican Lida Hayes Calvert in the general election. South Ward incumbent Molly Leight, a Democrat, will face opposition from Democrat Carolyn Highsmith and Republican Nathan Jones. West Ward incumbent Robert Clark will face primary opposition from fellow Republicans Howard Hudson and Andrew Johnson.

Early voting begins Aug. 22 at the Forsyth County Board of Elections. The primary will be held on Tuesday, Sept. 10.



Carter



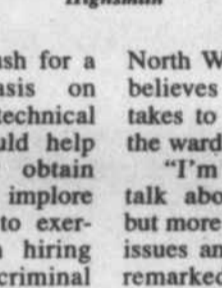
Bowen



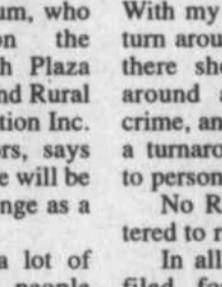
Diggs



Owens



Burke



Hunger

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