

# OPINION

## THE CHRONICLE

ERNEST H. PITT  
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Celebrating  
41  
Years  
of Community Journalism

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## Our Mission

*The Chronicle is dedicated to serving the residents of Winston-Salem and Forsyth County by giving voice to the voiceless, speaking truth to power, standing for integrity and encouraging open communication and lively debate throughout the community.*

## Darryl Hunt's death reveals need for targeted help

The Winston-Salem community is mourning the death of Darryl Hunt, the hometown black man who was accused of murder but was eventually released and cleared after spending 19 years in prison. His murder conviction was vacated in February 2004.

In fact, Hunt touched the hearts of people in North Carolina and across the nation. He formed an organization that helped other people fight for their freedom in the courts, including in Atlanta, and helped those who were released from prison find jobs.

The state of North Carolina awarded him \$300,000 and the city of Winston-Salem awarded him \$1.6 million in settlements after he was released.

Early on, *The Chronicle* led the way in questioning Hunt's guilt. Others followed. Right-minded government officials did the right thing, and Hunt was freed.

However, as people celebrated Hunt's victories, it appears there wasn't a strong system in place to help him mentally. It appears no one realized what the deep effect of 19 years in prison for a crime he did not commit had on Hunt. People close to Hunt said he was depressed. This man, who appeared to be quiet and unassuming, did not scream out for help. He might not have realized himself that he needed help. Many people took from Hunt, a man who concentrated on giving, but it appears not many gave back in return.

Black people have been through hundreds of years of turmoil since we came to the United States, mostly by force. We were separated from our natural families and forced to adopt the families of white people. Kunta Kinte, whose story is told in the TV series "Roots," seems to be one of the few black people in America who knows just where he came from. Generations after generations of black people can only trace their roots back to their slave masters.

So black people have had to survive the atrocities the American justice system has used to keep the children of former slaves in place without those children having a real sense of who they are. This can affect people's minds.

In Darryl Hunt we had a black man who, before he was arrested, was adrift in his life. After gaining freedom, did he somehow gain the footing to anchor himself for the future he faced? It appears that was a struggle if there were efforts to help him gain that footing.

There are other stories of black men who emerged from prison and helped people. One such person is Shaka Senghor, a black man who has written a new book titled "Writing My Wrongs: Life, Death, and Redemption in an American Prison." He went to prison in 1991 for second-degree murder at age 19. While in prison, he says, "I spent my time reading and writing, using books to free my mind and expand my thinking." He says that he did not allow his past or what others thought about him to define him or deter him. He was released at age 38.

Did Darryl Hunt have a background like this, reading and writing while he was in prison, freeing his mind and expanding his thinking for 19 years?

There should be targeted help for black men in prison and when they come out. Senghor says it will always be a struggle for him out of prison. There is a battle for his mind. As people who are not been in prison, we know how hard it is to keep focused. Imagine the struggles for those who have spent years in prison for crimes they committed, let alone for those they did not commit.

Kalvin Michael Smith - the 44-year-old black man from Winston-Salem who has been in prison for 19 years of a 29-year sentence after being convicted of a December 1995 brutal beating - has gained support from people in the community for a new trial. Supporters have shown that there is evidence he was not at the scene of the crime.

There also should be targeted help for Smith while in prison and when he gets out. The community should find ways to help Kalvin Michael Smith and others like him free their minds and expand their thinking so that they can become focused citizens in the community when they return to the community.

Black lives matter in prison and out.

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Donna Rogers



## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### Thank you for covering event about Islamic faith in W-S

To the Editor:

Thank you Chronicle, especially T. Ramsey, for covering the "Contributions to Islamic Faith" community held at the Delta Fine Arts Center on February 20, 2016. The Triad Chapter of ACGG appreciated the extensive and comprehensive article.

The nominees who have actively been establishing the foundation of the Islamic Community in Winston-Salem for over 60 years glowed in their spirits for your attention given to their life's work.

Only the Chronicle highlighted this historical event and its ongoing positive contributions to the city and the African-American community in particular.

Fleming A. El-Amin  
Mid-Atlantic Regional  
Coordinator  
American Coalition for Good  
Government

### In love and sadness on the passing of Darryl Hunt

To the Editor:

This weekend [Sunday, March 13], North Carolina lost one of her foremost freedom fighters in the passing of Dr. Darryl Hunt. I along with the North Carolina NAACP family lost not only a freedom fighter, but also a former colleague, brother and friend.

The state robbed Darryl of 19 years of his life by imprisoning him for a rape and murder he did not commit. The case goes down in infamy as one of the most thoroughly corrupt episodes in the saga of the deeply racist criminal justice system in our state. However, in his twelve short years out of prison, Darryl accomplished more good in the world than most can hope to in a lifetime.

Those who heard Darryl speak, or worked with him in the grass-roots, know that Darryl made sure his bondage was not in vain. In addition to committing his time and resources to building the Darryl Hunt Project for Freedom and Justice, where he worked with hundreds of formerly incarcerated men and women, and fought for the exoneration of others falsely imprisoned, he also led a life of prophetic witness to the rampant racism in police departments, district attorneys' offices and the courts.

Darryl was there in 2009 to push through the Racial Justice Act, which the North Carolina NAACP

and our HKonJ partners count as one of the greatest legislative victories for criminal justice in recent history. In 2010, he joined the staff of the North Carolina NAACP as the founder and director of the Anti-Death Penalty Project. He helped lead our efforts to defend the RJA as long as possible so that the cases could get into court before the extremists in the General Assembly gutted and repealed the bill.

When the damning report on the practices of intentional perjury emerged out of the SBI labs, Darryl traveled the state on our behalf educating the branches and communities on the "Swecker Report." He led court "jury watches" during capital trials where we know black jurors are struck from the rolls at disproportionate rates. Ever since his first plenary in 2010, we've always reserved a spot for Darryl to speak at our State Convention.

And none of this is to mention his role as a national leader in innocence projects and movements. For his work, Duke University awarded him an honorary doctorate in 2012.

Darryl was a wounded healer in the greatest sense. I can remember him often saying that he has forgiven those who put him in jail when they knew he was innocent, but he has not forgotten.

For Darryl, it was a spiritual matter. He would say that he did not know how to ask others or God for forgiveness if he was not willing to forgive those who imprisoned him. He was not going to let them imprison him again with bitterness. And neither would he let them keep him from fighting for justice.

Darryl traveled the nation and the world with his witness that injustice does not have the last word. For a generation of activists, Darryl was hope incarnate. Justice was his calling. Courage and love was his answer. We pledge to you brother Darryl, that your spirit lives on in each of us. Those you touched will touch others and others as we keep our hands on the freedom plow. Let it be so.

Rev. Dr. William J. Barber II,  
president of N.C. NAACP  
Al McSurely, Former Legal  
Redress chair, N.C. NAACP  
Rob Stephens, Former Associate  
Director, N.C. NAACP Anti-Death  
Penalty Project  
N.C. NAACP Staff, Executive  
Committee,  
Branch Leaders, Members and  
Partners  
in the Forward Together Moral  
Fusion Movement

### Rag Baby, a humorous glimpse into early black life in Winston-Salem

To The Editor:

Back in the 30s, 40s, 50s and 60s, most black people played numbers on the stock market (winning numbers were derived from these numbers) especially "butter and eggs" (a commodity). The money won helped put food on the table. For 2 cents you could win \$8.00, for 5 cents you won \$20.00 and for 25 cents you won \$100.00. My sister Rachel and her next door neighbor, Della, played every day. Every neighborhood had its own number writer. Their writer was a tiny little lady and they didn't know her name. She was always bundled up like she had on too many clothes - two sweaters, extra scarves and jackets - so they called her "Rag Baby."

Rag Baby was a good "numbers writer." She was honest, prompt and if you "hit" the number on her book, the money was as good as already in your pocket. One lucky day both Della and Rachel had a 5-cent hit on Rag

Baby's book. Oh boy! \$20.00 dollars each! They were overjoyed talking about what they were going to do with all that money. "Girl, we won't go to Henry's today. Let's walk up on Liberty Street to the Meat House. I want some pig tails and kraut," Rachel said. "I want some fried pork chops and Spanish rice," Della said. "Lord, Lord I can taste it right now."

After talking a while, Della said, "Wait a minute, Rachel. What's holding Rag Baby? She should have been here by now, it's getting late. I believe I'll run around to her house and pick up my \$20.00 dollars; you want me to bring yours?" Rachel said, "Yes, I'll be dressed by then and we'll walk up to the Meat House."

Rag Baby lived a block away on the corner of 14th street and Cameron Avenue. After about 10 minutes, Della was running and, "Open the door quick, Rachel, Lord have mercy, let me in!!"

"What's wrong? What happened Della?"

"Oh Lord, Rag Baby dead!!!"

What? Let's go up there before anybody comes to see if we can find her pocketbook and get our \$20.00, come on let's go!!"

They ran around the corner, too late!! The police had already come in and nobody could come in and nobody could leave the house until the coroner could come and examine the body. The coroner came and examined the body and said that she had died of natural causes. Nothing was in the newspaper about it. At that time nothing was printed about black people too much.

Her family came up from South Carolina and carried her home for burial. We never knew her name, just Rag Baby.

Adeline Hodge