

# N.C. NAACP: Expedite the release of Smith and Sharpe

BY TIMOTHY RAMSEY  
THE CHRONICLE

The case of Calvin Michael Smith has been on the minds of concerned citizens for nearly two decades. Smith was convicted of the assault of Jill Marker at the Silk Plant Forest store. Smith has maintained his innocence throughout and there is overwhelming evidence to support his claims.

On Sunday, July 31, there was a Pilgrimage for Justice for Smith and Dontae Sharpe held at Union Baptist Church. The event was held to bring more awareness to the cases along with putting more pressure on Gov. Pat McCrory and N.C. Attorney General Roy Cooper.

The N.C. NAACP presented a letter that will be sent to McCrory to renew its "call on your office to do justice in the cases of Dontae Sharpe and Calvin Michael Smith, two men who have spent over half their lives imprisoned unjustly."

Kalvin Smith is serving up to 29 years in prison, charged with the December 1995 brutal assault in Winston-Salem of an assistant store manager, even though there was no physical evidence connecting him with the crime. Witnesses placed Smith on the other side of town at the time, and subsequent investigations, including by a retired FBI agent, note

that the Winston-Salem Police Dept.'s original investigation was shoddy at best.

Cooper, however, has refused to join with Smith's attorneys to ask for a new trial. Cooper and McCrory are running for governor of North Carolina this year; Cooper as a Democrat and McCrory as a Republican.

Dontae Sharpe has been serving a life sentence since 1994 for a murder during a drug buy in Greenville. Sharpe was reportedly offered a plea deal by the Pitt County district attorney for time served, but turned it down, saying that he could not accept it for a crime that he did not commit.

The Duke University Wrongful Convictions Clinic is working on Sharpe's case.

Rev. Dr. William J. Barber II, N.C. NAACP Conference president, called for action from the state leaders to expedite the release of Smith and Sharpe. He stated they will not allow these cases to be used in anyone's campaign for re-election because in reality people should "stop campaigning and just do the right thing."

Barber laid out the defense claims for Smith in four points:

\*There was no physical evidence at the scene linking Smith to the crime.

\*Smith passed a police

administered polygraph.

"There was an alternative prime suspect who lied about knowing the victim that was never pursued by police. This suspect also failed a police administered polygraph and left town after being questioned by police.

"There was also an independent review of the case by former FBI assistant director Chris Swecker, who concluded "no credible evidence" exists showing Smith was even at the scene.

Smith's father, Augustus E. Dark was in attendance and was grateful for the support of the community and others toward the release of his son.

"Any time you see people stand up for what's right it's always encouraging," said Dark. "A lot of these people I have been working with for years and every time we have a program it's emotional and uplifting. My son would give anything in the world to be here and cannot wait to get out of prison to carry on the same legacy Darryl Hunt put forward. I want him to get out so we can get busy helping others so this won't happen to any one else ever again."

Bishop Todd L. Fulton and Pastor Alvin Carlisle of the Ministers Conference of Winston-Salem were also in attendance to show their support for Smith. Fulton stated, "If there is no evidence to prove he is guilty, then he



Photos by Timothy Ramsey

The audience on Sunday, July 31, at Union Baptist Church listens as the facts of the case are laid out as to why Calvin Michael Smith should be freed.

must be innocent."

Carlisle added, "We at the conference feel the case of Calvin Michael Smith has proven to be a very faulty case. It exposes some impropriety by local law enforcement. We believe his case is one of the worst and more egregious travesties of justice we have ever seen. We will continue to stand and fight with him until we see him home."

There was a similar meeting for Sharpe held in Greenville on July 30. The two cases mirror one another with the lack of evidence and shaky witness testimony.

Terrance Hawkins, associate pastor of Winston-Salem First Church, said, "Hopefully this meeting raised the public consciousness. I think unfortunately people are not aware of this type of issue happening in their own backyard so I hope this press conference and social media campaign will help folks know this is happening. Hopefully it will galvanize the community to try and lift their voice and see justice done."

According to Caitlin Swain, attorney with the Duke innocence project, the N.C. NAACP delivered



N.C. Students Against Wrongful Conviction members are shown, from left to right: Bailey Stinson, Hayden Abene and Alexa King.

two letters the week of Easter to the governor and attorney general and have yet to receive a response publicly. She went on to say that the attorney general's office did state there was a problem with our criminal justice system and they are listening to the N.C. NAACP.

"I think these events call to the public's attention and to all elected political officials attention, the urgency of these causes and that politics should not get in the way of doing what is right," Swain added.

There also were volunteers from the college community as well. Students and former students from Winston-Salem State

University and Wake Forest University came out to give their support. Hayden Abene, with N.C. Students Against Wrongful Convictions, said they want the elected officials to know they are watching their actions involving these cases and they will be held accountable. Alexa King added that it's the vote that matters and that is what will change these politics.

As Gregory Hunter of Winston-Salem put it, "This could be one of my family members. We have to understand that even though it's not happening directly to us, we have to stand for injustice everywhere."

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