

# 1940s newspaper recounts Thurmond had black relatives

By James Wright  
THE BALTIMORE AFRO

BALTIMORE — After decades of silence, 78-year-old Essie Mae Washington-Williams has proclaimed to the world that she is the daughter of the late segregationist politician, Strom Thurmond.



Washington-Williams

"I am Essie Mae Washington-Williams, and at last, I feel completely free," she said during a recent press conference in Columbia, S.C.

However, the Baltimore Afro-American newspapers reported in 1948, the same year South Carolina's then-Gov. James Strom

Thurmond was the presidential nominee of the segregationist Dixiecrat Party, that he had several black relatives, including an uncle and two cousins.

The Afro initially reported in the edition dated Aug. 17, 1948, that a man named Robert Thurmond, from



Thurmond

Morristown, N.J., was Strom Thurmond's first cousin.

"I certainly do know Strom, and he knows me, and he knows of our relationship because we were the only Thurmonds in Edgefield [South Carolina]," stated Robert Thurmond.

Edgefield was the home of Strom Thurmond and his father, James E. "Snip"

Thurmond, and, according to AFRO reporter Douglas Hall, Edgefield was the home to several other Thurmonds, many of whom were black.

At the end of August in 1948, Hall traveled to Edgefield to find the rest of Strom Thurmond's colored clan.

In the Aug. 24, 1948, edition of the Afro, he reported the existence of the Rev. James R. Thurmond, a half-cousin of Strom Thurmond; Eva Thurmond Smith, another cousin; and Thomas Thurmond, Strom Thurmond's uncle.

"Why, I remember well when Gov. Thurmond's father used to visit my grandfather. I remember asking my grandfather, why did that white man always visit our home? My grandfather [Thomas Thurmond] told me that they were

brothers," claimed Rev. Thurmond.

Douglas Hall reported further: "It seems like everybody up there [Edgefield, S.C.] are Thurmonds. They are of all colors. Some are so White that you cannot tell them from the original Thurmonds. The only thing that surprises Colored Thurmonds is, why is it so important that they are related to the white Thurmonds? It is an old story and 'everybody in these parts knows it.'"

In 1948, Essie Mae Washington was 23 years old and she allegedly had known about her father for seven years. The question is, did she know about her father's other colored kin?

## Father's decision spared son from wreck that killed four teen-agers

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crash. But some residents questioned whether a police officer may have chased them to their deaths.

Troutman is about 35 miles north of Charlotte.

The officer began chasing a 2001 Dodge Intrepid after he saw it weaving in its lane on U.S. Highway 21. The chase ended just after midnight when the car hit an embankment, flipped and landed in a creek.

The Highway Patrol said none of the victims had driver's licenses or wore seat belts. The car had a spare tire on the right rear and was traveling at between 80 and 100 mph at the time of the accident.

Troutman police Chief Eric Henderson said Monday that Officer Keith Bills followed proper policy during the short chase and will take off a couple of days before returning to duty.

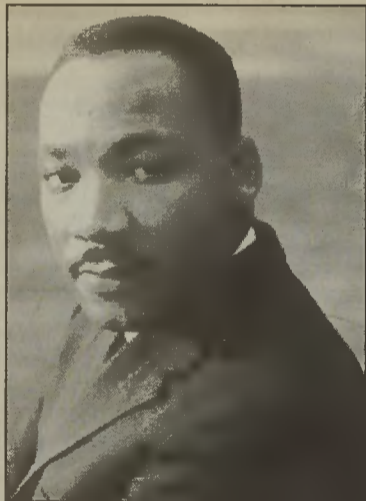
"He's upset. We're all upset. Naturally, it's very upsetting when you lose a life," Henderson said.

Howard Hurtt said his son and his friends had recently been borrowing cars from people they knew. He said he tried to get his son to stop the joyriding, but questioned why the group was pursued.

"I've always been told that the patrolmen should follow them, but don't push them," Hurtt said. "They were just out joyriding and a cop pulls them over and here we have seven deaths. I lost my only son."

The pursuit was captured on a video camera installed in Bills' patrol car, Henderson said. The chief said he had not yet viewed the tape.

North Carolina's transportation department said the crash was the deadliest in the state since 10 Plymouth High School students died in a wreck in 1997.



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