

The Carolina Times

THE TRUTH UNBRIDLED

VOLUME 94 - NUMBER 36 DURHAM, NORTH CAROLINA - SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 12, 2015 TELEPHONE (919) 682-2913 PRICE: 50 CENTS

Black Lives Matter movement experiencing growing pains

By Jesse J. Holland
WASHINGTON (AP) - Hundreds of Black Lives Matter activists, black and white, marched at the Minnesota State Fair weekend, hoping to bring attention to the deaths of African-

Americans at the hands of police. Inside the fair, a booth had T-shirts bearing the slogans "Black Lives Matter" and "All Lives Matter" for sale. Todd Gramenz, who reserved the booth, chatted

with fairgoers while the other protesters were kept outside.

The competing activities in Minnesota underscore the challenge that Black Lives Matter faces as it evolves from social media hashtag to full-blown movement. Its fluid, organic nature generates confusion about exactly who is in charge, who can legitimately speak for the group, and even whether it can be blamed for violence that some say may have been inspired by its rhetoric.

Tracing its roots to the fatal 2012 shooting of 17-year-old Trayvon Martin in Florida, the Black Lives Matter movement gained national ground after 18-year-old Michael Brown was shot and killed by a white police officer in Ferguson, Missouri.

Since then, deaths of other unarmed black males at the hands of law enforcement officers have inspired protests under the "Black Lives Matter" moniker.

Some are affiliated with the original Black Lives Matter network founded by Opal Tometi, Patrisse Cullors and Alicia Garza and their allies. But some are not, although they use the slogan.

Garza said in an email interview that her organization - which has 26 chapters, including Ghana and Canada - doesn't try to control who uses the name.

"Anytime someone identifies with a movement to make black lives matter in this country and around the world, that's a good thing," she said.

Some similarly loosely organized social movements, like Occupy Wall Street and the tea party, evolved beyond their grassroots beginnings, while some died.

Others followed the lead of the 1960s civil rights movement, which birthed groups like the Southern Christian Leadership Conference and the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee.

Having small nebulous groups linked through social media and a shared cause may be enough for now, but odds are against such groups surviving for the long haul, said Deana A. Rohlinger, a Florida State University sociology professor who studies social movements and collective behavior.

"Activists do really good work locally," she said. "But if you want to affect politics and politicians, then you really do have to move up your organization to a more structured format that can engage politicians and lobbyists on their turf."

Activists claiming to represent the group interrupted a speech about to be delivered by Bernie Sanders, a Democratic presidential candidate, and met with Democratic presidential candidate Hillary Rodham Clinton and Republican presidential hopeful Jeb Bush.

And a Texas sheriff criticized the movement after one of his white deputies was shot and killed Friday at a Houston gas station; a black man has been charged with murder. Harris County Sheriff Ron Hickman questioned whether it was spurred by anger over the killings of black men by police.

But Garza called any attempt to link the Black Lives Matter with the killing "racist and ridiculous."

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Rev. William Barber II, the president of the North Carolina State Conference of the NAACP speaks during the America's Journey for Justice at the Lincoln Memorial in Washington, D.C. (Freddie Allen/NNPA News Wire)

N.C. Court to Decide The Fate of Voting Rights for Blacks

By Freddie Allen
NNPA Senior Washington Correspondent

WASHINGTON (NNPA) - Two pivotal court cases in North Carolina will determine the balance of political power in the state for years to come, and may signal the future of voting rights nationwide, according to civil rights and voting rights advocates working in the state.

In the wake of the United States Supreme Court decision in Shelby County vs. Holder that gutted Section 5 of the Voting Rights Act, North Carolina state legislators passed H.B. 589, which shortened early voting by a week, eliminated same day registration during the early voting period, prohibited voters from casting out-of-precinct provisional ballots, expanded the ability to challenge voters at the polls, removed the pre-registration program for 16 and 17 years-olds and implemented a strict photo ID requirement. Lawmakers eased the photo ID requirement leading up to the N.C. NAACP vs. McCrory court case.

In that case, lawyers for the plaintiffs argued that H.B. 589 discriminates against black and other minority voters.

Denise Lieberman, a senior attorney with the Advancement Project, a multiracial civil rights group, called the N.C. voting law "the most onerous voting law in the country" and said that it combines nearly every conceivable voter suppression tactic to attack voting at every step of the process.

"[H.B. 589] makes it harder to register to vote, harder to cast a ballot, and harder to have that ballot counted," said Lieberman.

During the trial, lawyers for the state chapter of the NAACP presented clear evidence that each of these provisions was designed with the intent to discriminate and has the impact of disproportionately burdening the right to vote for African American and Latino voters in North Carolina, said Lieberman.

"Our lawsuit argued that H.B. 589 violates Section 2 of the VRA as well as 14th and 15th amendments of the United States

Constitution," Lieberman added.

Rev. William Barber II, president of the N.C. State Conference of the NAACP and the convener of Moral Monday Movement, called H.B. 589 "the worst and the most cynical voter suppression law in the country" and said that the attempts to roll back opportunities put in place to overcome past and ongoing discrimination are reminiscent of the days of Jim Crow.

"We have never seen since the days of Jim Crow the attempt to roll back opportunities and provision put in our voting policies to overcome past barriers to overcome past discrimination and continuing barriers and continuing discrimination. We know that whole premise of this law was fraudulent, because it was the claim of fraud," said Barber, adding that there has been no evidence of voting fraud in the state.

According to the Brennan Center for Justice at New York University School of Law, a non-partisan public policy and law institute, voter impersonation at the polls is more rare than someone getting struck by lightning.

"We know that African Americans and Latinos were far more likely to use same day registration out-of-precinct voting and the first week of early voting and the other measures that were restricted and eliminated by H.B. 589, what's more is that we know that lawmakers knew that before they passed the H.B. 589, because they implemented those measures precisely to make voting more accessible for the very communities that ended up using them the most," said Lieberman. "That evidence was present, front and center to lawmakers when they introduced H.B. 589."

Lieberman continued: "We also know that they waited, they waited until the Supreme Court issued its ruling in Shelby County vs. Holder that gutted the coverage formula for Section 5 of the Voting Rights Act, waited until that happened until they knew that they were not going to be subject to Section 5 pre-clearance provision before moving forward with the bill."

North Carolina lawmakers

revised the voting maps in 2011 following the 2010 census. Last spring, the United States Supreme Court ordered the state Supreme Court to revisit a December 2014 ruling that found the maps lawful.

The Associated Press reported that Republicans used the North Carolina maps in the 2012 and 2014 elections to gain veto-proof majorities in the state legislature and to win 10 of the 13 seats in the state's congressional delegation.

Anita Earls, the executive director of the Southern Coalition for Social Justice, said that it has always been understood that the Voting Rights Act not only protected the right to cast a ballot, but also the notion that each vote carried the same value. In the court case challenging

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NAACP president urges N. Carolina activists to keep walking

RALEIGH (AP) - The head of the NAACP says protecting the right to vote is worth marching hundreds of miles through North Carolina and other Southern states on the way to Washington, D.C.

National NAACP President Cornell Brooks spoke Sept. 3 at a downtown Raleigh rally attended by hundreds of demonstrators. Some have been walking North Carolina portions of what's called "America's Journey for Justice."

The march began in Selma, Alabama, and ends in mid-September with lobbying on Capitol Hill to get restored portions of the federal Voting Rights Act struck down by the U.S. Supreme Court.

Brooks praised efforts of the North Carolina NAACP and its "Moral Monday" movement to oppose Republican policies at the General Assembly. State chapter president the Rev. William Barber also spoke, criticizing what he called voter suppression efforts.



The Bull Durham Blues Festival two day event is held at Hayti, in the historic Performance Hall, outdoors at Durham Central Park. The Bull Durham Blues Festival preserves the heritage and emulates the experience of blues, a music genre rooted in the African American experience.

On Friday, Sept. 11, in the Hayti Heritage Center Performance Hall, singers Jean Carne, Norman Conner and Kim Waters in a VIP Performance. Tickets are \$40 general admission and \$55 VIP lower level. On Saturday in Durham's Central Park, Grady Chambers, Jason Damico and Pat "Mother Blues" Cohen perform in a free concert. For more information go to www.hayti.org/.

Above is singer Jean Carne and below Norman Conner.



Powell, Wasserman Schultz support Iran nuclear deal

By Matthew Daly
WASHINGTON (AP) - Already a done deal in Congress, an Iran nuclear agreement is gaining more momentum. Former Secretary of State Colin Powell and Rep. Debbie Wasserman Schultz, who heads the Democratic National Committee, are backing it.

Powell - secretary of state under President George W. Bush - said NBC's "Meet the Press" that the agreement is "a pretty good deal" and would reduce the threat of Iran gaining a nuclear weapon.

Wasserman Schultz calls her decision the most difficult she's made in nearly 23 years in elected office.

The Florida lawmaker, who's Jewish, writes in The Miami Herald that the deal "provides the best chance to ensure" security for the U.S., Israel and other allies.

The White House has clinched the necessary Senate votes to pass the deal. Congress will uphold the deal.