

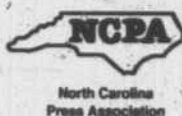
OPINION

THE CHRONICLE

WINSTON-SALEM GREENSBORO WICHITA POINT

The Choice for African-American News and Information

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Arson hurts more than congregation

In the wee hours Sunday, fire gutted a small church off Old Greensboro Road.

The flames that roared through the church left little untouched. Hymnals were destroyed as were Bibles. The pulpit was left a smoldering mass of charred wood and metal. And Sunday morning, the church's two dozen members were left to ponder an uncertain future.

But that fire, which investigators believe may have been intentionally set, did more damage tiny Saints Delight Church. It's a blatant reminder of a rash of fires that devastated black churches throughout the South over the past six years.

The fires began in rural Mississippi in the early '90s and wound their way through the heart of Dixie, destroying sanctuaries that housed the dreams of the black community.

Though the arsonists succeeded in causing millions of dollars of damage to buildings, they failed in their main mission to break the spirits of the members of the churches they burned.

The more fires they set, the more people — both black and white — rallied to offer support to those in need.

The fires also served as wake-up call for black America. It reminded us that we need to protect what is ours. According to the Congress of National Black Churches, many of our churches still lack adequate security systems and insurance coverage. Over the next few weeks, we will print several articles aimed at helping black churches arm themselves against arson.

Consider it yet another wake-up call. It doesn't matter how the fire began Saints Delight. What matters is that the congregation is in need and the community has to respond to that need the same way it did three years ago at the height of the church burnings.

Better late than never for Lyons

For the past 19 months, no member of the clergy has been in the news more than the Rev. Henry Lyons.

Lyons' brush with infamy began two summers ago when his wife set fire to a plush home owned by Lyons, president of the National Baptist Convention USA, Inc. and a woman — also an employee of the convention — alleged to be his mistress.

Black America watched in horror as reports of "dime-sized" diamond rings, expensive cars and sexual liaisons that rivaled any found on day-time TV were played out in the media. Question were raised about the conventions finances and its long-time boast of more than 8 million members.

Throughout the brouhaha, Lyons held fast to his claims of innocence. He was the black community's "Teflon Henry," managing to thwart every effort to remove him from NBC's top post.

Monday, a scant week after he denied wrong-doing during a speech in Winston-Salem, Lyons admitted he had done wrong during a gripping television interview. He tearfully admitted to reporter Connie Chung that he had, at least one more mistress and finally said he was willing to resign.

Tuesday, facing a tribunal of his peers who vowed to ask him to "politely step down," Lyons finally did the right thing. He tendered his resignation and finally asked the convention to forgive him his transgressions.

For the first time in two years, Lyons made a decision that was beneficial to the convention and black America.

By stepping down, Lyons is allowing the convention to move forward and put the horror of the past year behind.

The black church is our strongest entity and any scandal threatens to shake it to its very core — particularly when that scandal involves the one of the nation's largest and strongest conventions.

The convention's road back to credibility began Tuesday when Lyons stepped down.

It will end when the convention's member churches once again teach their children the old mantra "Baptist born, Baptist bred, when I die I'll be Baptist dead."

Letters to the Editor:



Editor's note: The writer of the following letter is a 1965 graduate of Winston-Salem State University.

To the Editor:

I was reading my copy of The Chronicle dated February 18, 1999 in which Benjamin Ruffin, who was recently elected the Chairman of the Board of Governors for the University of North Carolina, stated that "he does not expect

HBCU to look to him for preferential treatment." He does not want to separate the universities.

These kind of statements concern me because Supreme Court Judge Clarence Thomas thinks the same way. I have never heard a White person make a statement like that about predominately White schools.

The Chronicle also stated that the predominately African American schools are losing white stu-

dents and African Americans with high S.A.T. scores. I wish he had said that he would fight to upgrade all of the schools that needed facilities, equipment, and instructors in order to assist the poorer schools.

During my tenure at WSSU only one small dormitory was built, and the one men's dormitory had to be repaired almost every year.

Yes, WSSU has come a long way, but we still don't have a

R.O.T.C. building, a graduate school, poor recreational facilities, very poor parking spaces and it appears that the current and future programs and buildings for the school are being kept a secret as much as possible.

I suggest Mr. Ruffin personally visit each school and tell why preferential treatment is not necessary!

*John H. Smith
Columbia, Md.*

Desegregating Winston-Salem

Dr. J. Raymond Oliver

Guest Columnist

The following article is the first of two articles written by Dr. J. Raymond Oliver on the turbulent years of desegregation in Winston-Salem. Oliver was a leader of Congress of Racial Equality and saw first hand the steps city leaders and the black community made toward inclusion.

Racial segregation in Winston-Salem did not go away because national black leaders said it must.

It took two years — of sit-ins, drive-ins and stand-ins on the part of activist organizations and the brilliant efforts of diplomacy on the part of then mayor M.C. Benton to bring about peaceful changes.

During the years 1962 and 1963, there were more than 200

members in the Congress of Racial Equality. Even larger numbers decided to go to the streets to make their concerns known. This activist group was led by Mrs. Louise Wilson, who later became director of Experiment in Self Reliance. The second level of leaders who supported Mrs. Wilson were Father Thomas Smith and the Rev. J.D. Ballard. This group had the responsibility of maintaining nonviolent action to bring about recognition to all that CORE would accept no less than complete desegregation of all movie theaters, restaurants, hotels, motels and all other areas of public accommodations available to residents of the city.

CORE members drove 50 cars to drive-in theaters to block traffic attempting to enter. The group sent 50 members to K&W restaurant to block entrances. CORE organized sit-ins at bowling alleys, drive-in restaurants and any public accommodations that denied their service.

Twelve activists were sent to jail. At first city officials tried to get other black leaders to exercise control over the CORE group. But it was to no avail. The activism was large, intense and showed no signs of weakening or settling for less than the group's demands.

The situation became frightening for all leaders in the city — black, white, business and clergy. The leaders of CORE were in complete agreement with young activists and did all they could to direct activities, counsel them and above all protect them from harm and danger.

The NAACP wanted to negotiate for slower less direct confrontation. This too was rejected by CORE.

Finally Mayor Benton appointed a biracial goodwill committee made up of leaders from the black community, NAACP and white community to try to resolve the conflict. Initially CORE leaders were left out. Mayor Benton realized that this arrangement was going

nowhere fast. He then included leaders of CORE, which made for longer and more heated discussions, but the first signs of progress became visible.

Mayor Benton then brought in Charles Wade, a top official at R.J. Reynolds and members of several prominent families including the Hanes, James and Gordon families, who met with CORE leaders and other activists.

CORE leaders were nervous during the meeting, but held fast to their demands. The group decided that it was indeed time for a change. The list of demands from CORE was presented. White leaders decided that the demands were not unreasonable. Then, it became a matter of how to desegregate public accommodations without bringing in the Ku Klux Klan and other extremist groups. The group also wanted to ensure that no riots ensued when young blacks attempted to enter theaters, restaurants and other formally segregated places.

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VOICES FROM THE COMMUNITY...

Last week a federal judge in Philadelphia ruled that the National Collegiate Athletic Association can not use a minimum SAT test score to exclude student-athletes from playing college sports. Since blacks tend to have lower SAT scores than white students, the judge concluded that the practice was racist. We asked students at Winston-Salem State University if they thought student-athletes should be required to make a minimum score on the SAT.



Erik Warren

"Student-athletes come to college for a certain reason. They are here to learn and to better their lives and to eventually leave. When they come here just like anyone else, they should have the same standards as everyone else."



Keith McCluney

"An SAT can't determine a student's ability to perform in the classroom. The ability of a student to learn should be based on what they do in the classroom."



Latisha Ferguson

"I feel they should because if regular students have to make a certain score on the SAT to be admitted to the college, than the athletes should be held to the same standards."



M'balu Kamara

"Yes, I think that we all should have the same rights. Playing football and basketball doesn't make you better than anyone else. All students should have equal rights and standards."



Maya Johnson

"I don't think they should base whether someone should be able to play on the SAT. The GPA should also be considered. You want your team to represent well in athletics as well as in the classroom."