



◀ Minister still heeds call at age  
African art real deal at gallery/9A



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up for  
Monarchs,  
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# The Charlotte Post

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## Still keeping the faith



PHOTOS/CALVIN FERGSUON

Oxford, N.C., native Benjamin Muhammad was in Charlotte Monday to publicize Oct. 16 as a day of atonement for African Americans. Muhammad, formerly Benjamin Chavis, helped organize the Million Man March in 1995. The Day of Atonement is on the anniversary of the historic rally in Washington, D.C., one of the largest gatherings of Americans in the nation's history.

## Former NAACP director organizing for Oct. 16 Day of Atonement

By John Minter  
THE CHARLOTTE POST

Minister Benjamin Muhammad, in Charlotte to talk about the 1997 Day of Atonement, said he hoped his conversion to Islam would serve as a bridge between Christians and Muslims.

In his first interview with The Post since he converted to the Nation of Islam, the former Benjamin Chavis said he was disappointed when the United

Church of Christ stripped him of ministerial privileges.

"When I speak from both books (the Muslim Qu'ran and the Christian Bible)," said Muhammad, who led a revival service at Muhammad's Mosque Monday.

"I am trying to talk about one God that can be found in both books. I did not renounce Jesus. Jesus is found in the Bible and the Qu'ran. If black people can understand the oneness of God, I think we can better under-

stand the oneness of humanity."

He said he hopes this year's Day of Atonement will feature interfaith and ecumenical prayer services bringing Christian, Muslims and other faiths together in reviving the spirit of the Million Man March Oct. 16, 1995.

Muhammad is on a nationwide speaking tour as a special assistant to Nation of Islam leader Lewis Farrakhan. His mission is to organize the dozens of Day of Atonement events that will be held Oct. 16, the second anniversary of the Million Man March.

Charlotte will be one of the cities with planned Day of Atonement/Day of Absence events, which could include marches, teach-ins and meet-  
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Benjamin Muhammad makes a point at a rally while holding the Bible in one hand. The Qu'ran is in the other hand.

## Panel: Equalize busing for desegregation

By John Minter  
THE CHARLOTTE POST

Racial diversity can be achieved in Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools along with shorter and more equitable busing if the system follows a comprehensive policy of pupil assignments.

So says a 33-member citizens group which studied the system's racial integration practice, which is based on achieving racial balance by making periodic changes in the schools to which students are assigned.

Bertha Maxwell-Roddy co-chaired the committee. Other African Americans on the panel included Bob Davis, chair of the Black Political Caucus, architect Anthony Hunt and neighborhood activist Barbara Atwater.

The committee reached consensus on what is one of the most emotional debates within Charlotte-Mecklenburg — balancing busing for racial integration with a growing desire for neighborhood schools.

In a report to the school board Tuesday night, the group recommended practices such as building schools in zones that would limit bus rides for all students to about 30 minutes.

Other recommendations include equalizing school resources and facilities, establish neighborhood schools in integrated communities, fair distribution of busing and limits on student reassignments. The school board should use whatever incentives and powers of eminent domain necessary to help encourage development of economically and racially integrated neighborhoods.

On the issue of diversity, the committee said, "We recommend that CMS enhance the degree to which students are assigned to schools in a desegregated and integrated manner to create diverse school populations representing racial, socioeconomic and cultural diversity.

"We recommend that immediate priority be given to addressing socioeconomic as well as racial diversity in those schools which contain a disproportionately large number of students who receive free or reduced lunches.

See DIVERSITY on page 3A

## U.S. welfare rolls shrink in first year of federal reform law

By John F. Harris and  
Judith Havemann  
THE WASHINGTON POST

One year after a far-reaching welfare reform law ended 60 years of guaranteed support for the poor, the Clinton administration released figures Tuesday showing public assistance rolls continuing to decline sharply with the percentage of people on welfare at its lowest level since 1970.

Nationwide, there are 10.7 million welfare recipients, a number that has dropped by 3.4 million, nearly 25 percent, since President Clinton took office, and by 1.45 million in the past year alone.

The decline, at a rate of 200,000 a month, is the deepest and most sustained in U.S. history.

Although welfare caseloads are plunging across the country — 29 percent in Tennessee, 49 percent in Wyoming in the past year — no one knows for certain what is causing the decline or where the people are going. How many are

taking jobs and destitution?

Critics of last year's welfare overhaul said they suspect much of the decline results from people being forced off welfare or turned away because of tightened state eligibility rules.

But Clinton, who signed the welfare bill amid a fractured Democratic Party, said the new figures offer vindication that his approach emphasizing work and training is paying dividends as it is implemented at the state level.

"A lot of people said that welfare reform would never work because the private economy wouldn't do its part or the government wouldn't do its part or we couldn't figure out how to get people from wel-

See WELFARE on page 2A

## Local Urban League earns national honor

By John Minter  
THE CHARLOTTE POST

Charlotte's Urban League has earned an award from the National Urban League for improving community race relations.

The prestigious Whitney M. Young Jr. Leadership Award on Race Relations was presented at the group's national convention in Washington, D.C.

Charlotte-Mecklenburg Urban

League president Madine Fails accepted the award, which includes a \$10,000 check to help the group's efforts in Charlotte.

National Urban League president Hugh Price cited the local league's persistence in pointing out racial inequities in Charlotte as well as its contribution to positive change by promoting interracial "Race Day" lunches and gatherings.

"We owe a great deal to the courage and vision of Joe Martin,

who first inspired us with the concept of Race Day," said Fails. "That goes not only for the Urban League but for the entire community."

Martin conceived Race Day, weekly interracial or interethnic lunches, when he accepted the local league's Whitney M. Young Award in March.

"We have shared Joe's ideas with other chapters and with concerned citizens from all over the United States," Fails said. "And

people are beginning to understand that societal change can only take place when each one of us changes what's in our hearts. We intend to be the agency of that change in the Charlotte area."

The award's significance shines in light of the recent emphasis on racial reconciliation, including President Clinton's appointment of a race relations committee headed by John Hope Franklin and planned race summits in Charlotte this fall.

## UPS strike disrupts more than work

By Winfred B. Cross  
THE CHARLOTTE POST

Howard Alford's routine has been the same for about 15 years. He gets up, goes to work, jumps in his brown United Parcel Service truck and makes hundreds of deliveries.

That changed 11 days ago. Now Alford is either home or walking a picket line on Cottonwood or the Interstate 85 access road off of Graham Street with other members of Teamsters Local 71.

And it looks like he may be there for a while.

"I don't really agree with having to resort to this kind of thing,

but we had to send a message to Corporate America," Alford, 35, said.

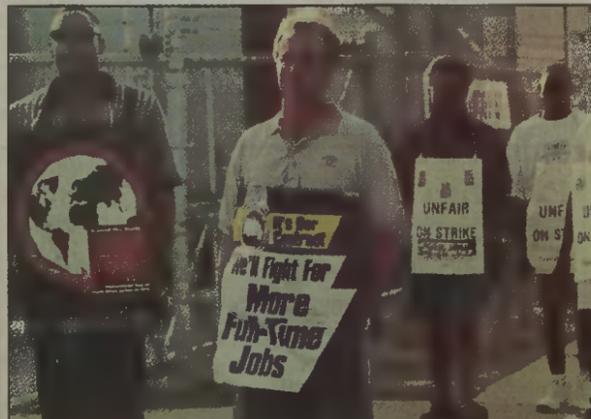
The strike has sent companies which use UPS scrambling for alternative ways to ship product. The U.S. Postal Service has started Sunday package delivery in some areas, while UPS' chief competitor, Federal Express, has been swamped.

Union workers voted to strike because UPS plans to hire more part-time employees to essentially do full-time work. The strikers also want better working conditions and hands off the Teamster-run pension plan.

Alford started at UPS as a part-

time worker while a student at Johnson C. Smith University. He said part-timers don't get the same pay or benefits. "Basically, you have places in the U.S. where part-time workers are pulling full-time hours," he said.

About 60 percent of the unionized jobs at UPS are part-time. The part-timers average \$11 per hour. Full-time workers make \$19.95 per hour. Teamsters want to reduce part-time jobs by combining them into full-time positions. The company has said it would create 1,000 new full-time jobs during the five-year contract and give part-timers first shot at  
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PHOTO/CALVIN FERGSUON

United Parcel Service employees have picketed the package delivery company around the clock since the strike started nine days ago.

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