

Enfield torn by race and class struggles

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In June, Hardaway, Whitaker and Sledge presented a list of 14 items that have come to be known as "Hardaway's Demands." Besides a call for a 5.1 percent pay raise for town employees, the black lawmakers want to lift a ban on double-wide manufactured homes within the city limits. And they want the town to make good on a promise to extend sewer service to homes lacking indoor plumbing.

A snappy dresser, Hardaway walks the streets of Enfield with a swagger that attests to his brashness. The owner of a funeral home, Hardaway, 41, drives his shiny black Lincoln Town Car down some of the town's poorest streets. On Plant Street, a dusty dirt road where none of the homes have indoor plumbing, Hardaway is welcomed by Mae Lee Jones, a 35-year-old mother of two who has a crudely built wooden outhouse that spills human waste into her back yard. Foul odors from more than a dozen outhouses are carried throughout the neighborhood by drifts of hot summer air. White five-gallon buckets that serve as portable toilets when it's too cold to come outside are strewn about the yard. The only water source is a single garden spigot that Jones, an Enfield native, says freezes in the winter.

"It busts all the time," she said. Jones heats with wood. Her rent for the rundown woodframe two-bedroom house is \$165 that she pays from her \$222 AFDC check. Circumstances are the same for Parnee Whitaker, who lives with her teenage daughter one house over from Jones. Parnee Whitaker, who is not related to Commissioner Whitaker, receives an AFDC check of \$236 that covers her \$155 rent.

Like a 'plantation'

"By the time you get it in your hand, it's gone," Parnee Whitaker says of her monthly check.

"In 1989 the commission voted to extend sewer service to Plant Street homes by Dec. 1, 1991, a promise never kept. White Commissioner Maurice Barnhill, the mayor pro tem, said the sewer line has been held up by technical problems and lack of funds. Hardaway says only a lack of will on the part of the white commissioners, who usually vote as a bloc, has kept the residents of Plant Street without indoor plumbing. The ban on manufactured homes also prevents people from moving out of places like Plant Street to more affordable homes, Hardaway said.



PHOTO/PATRICK O'NEILL

Enfield Mayor E. Kai Hardaway has presented "Hardaway's Demands" to the town's white commissioners. Black members of the board want pay raises for town employees and sewer service to poor neighborhoods. Enfield, a town of 3,100, is 75 percent black.

"This is as close as you can get to being back on the plantation," Mayor Hardaway said. "People are scared for us to be taking this kind of stand."

The stand of the three officials is not welcomed by most whites asked to comment about the current standoff.

"I hope you get the other side of the story," town librarian Phyllis Holliday said after seeing the mayor a few doors down on Railroad Avenue, the main downtown street, "not just his side."

Like Holliday, librarian Linda Bunch can't contain her antipathy for the controversy that is bringing national media attention to Enfield.

"Where is justice?" Bunch says. "We just hate that our little town is being ruined and it's for no good reason and we just hate it."

Seconds later, Hardaway slips into the library through a rear door. The mayor's unexpected entrance while the library is closed for lunch, surprises the women, who immediately fall silent.

"Hello Linda," Hardaway says in an exaggerated loud voice. When she acknowledges his greeting, Hardaway says, "That's better."

In a town of 3,100 residents - 75 percent of whom are black - whites rule the roost. Although 29 of the town's 49 employees are black, five of the top administrative positions - the higher paid department heads - are white. Only the head of recreation is black, the lowest paid post of the six department heads, said deputy town clerk.

Gloria Hunter, who is black. Asked why so few blacks are

hired for top jobs, Hunter says, "I wish I knew."

Unusual action

In July at the request of town attorney William F. Dickens, Jr., the Local Government Commission, a division of the state treasurer's office, stepped in to prepare an interim budget to assure that payroll will be met for Enfield employees. David Lawrence, assistant director of the Institute of Government at UNC Chapel Hill, said the Local Government Commission's action is likely unprecedented. The agency has acted only once before in the case of a town that appeared to be insolvent, Lawrence said.

"Best I can tell they're breaking new ground up in Enfield," said Lawrence, who has been at the Institute for 29 years.

Dickens also asked a state Superior Court judge to order the mayor and two commissioners to attend commission meetings. After the three officials failed to attend a commission meeting by July 25 as ordered by Judge Richard Parker, the judge issued an order to show cause that could have resulted in the three being jailed for contempt of court. That's when Durham attorney Paul Green came on to represent the three black lawmakers.

In August Judge Parker agreed to a conference call with Dickens and Green, who had filed a motion on behalf of the three officials asking the judge to dismiss the matter. Green argued in his motion that the dispute was political in nature and should not be a matter of concern for the judiciary.

"American democracy has long recognized a legitimate sphere of political contention in the legislative branch, including the filibuster, the refusal to sign a bill ... and the refusal of a committee chairman to schedule a hearing," Green wrote in the motion. Green also contends that Dickens has a conflict of interest because technically he is supposed to represent the interests of all of Enfield's elected officials. Hardaway said Dickens never consulted with any of the black elected officials before taking legal action against them. Dickens has since dropped the case against the three, but he has refused Hardaway's request that he resign.

Allies in NAACP

NAACP president Skip Alston, himself a Guilford County commissioner, said he personally applauds the tactics being used in Enfield by Hardaway, Whitaker and Sledge. Alston said the state NAACP is committed to helping with voter registration efforts as well as a get-out-the-vote effort on election day when Hardaway and Sledge are up for re-election and a former Enfield black policeman Tony Barnette is running for a third seat against white commissioner Harold Sullivan.

Alston said the NAACP is also considering a discrimination lawsuit against Enfield for denying sewer services to taxpaying residents - both white and black.

"I'm hoping that it'll work out, and we can all come together and do what's right for the citizens of Enfield," Whitaker said.

Pratt blames FBI for long prison sentence

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Committee chairman Henry Hyde have refused to comment on the call for hearings.

Since his release from prison in May, Pratt now calls himself Geronimo ji Jaga, which stands for "the people of Jaga," an African tribe that committed suicide to avoid being enslaved.

He was charged in 1970 in the murder of schoolteacher Caroline Olsen, and spent 27 years behind bars. But Pratt, who has claimed he was at a Black Panther meeting in Oakland at the time of the 1968 murder, said he is not bitter.

Behind the movement to clear Pratt's name are FBI documents known as COINTELPRO, which indicate that the FBI tried to create dissension within many radical groups, particularly the Black Panther Party.

"The idea was to covertly change the direction of the move-

ment," Pratt told The Oakland Tribune from his Marin City home. "COINTELPRO was so insidious that they were able to use people and put on this facade of legitimacy."

The FBI allegedly sent infiltrators to disrupt the groups by starting rumors that someone was an agent or promoting confrontations with other radical groups.

Pratt, who remains free on bail while prosecutors decide whether to retry the case, said he is convinced his case was a prime example of more than 200 COINTELPRO initiatives aimed at crippling the Black Panther Party.

Despite a 1975 report and a victory in a civil suit settled in 1984 against the FBI and New Haven, Conn., police for illegal wiretaps, COINTELPRO has largely been ignored, said scholar Donald Freed, who is working on a book

about the Panthers.

Pratt said the time has come to discuss the full extent of the FBI's activities.

"It was an understanding we had as prisoners. Whoever got out first would carry this message," Pratt said.

Last week, Pratt took his case for COINTELPRO hearings to Washington, D.C. He and his longtime attorney, Johnnie Cochran, met with the Congressional Black Caucus to discuss pushing the hearings.

Besides Dellums, others calling for hearings include Congressman Bobby Rush, D-Ill., himself a former Black Panther; Congresswoman Maxine Waters, D-Los Angeles; and state Sen. Barbara Lee, D-Oakland.

The FBI said it could not talk about the case or COINTELPRO.

"The Elmer Pratt case is still pending litigation and we're precluded from discussing it," Angela

Westside fixture sold for \$1.25 million

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since her husband's death.

The once-thriving restaurant attracted diners from throughout the community and of all races and ethnic groups. The facility has declined since McDonald's death in 1995 and the \$1.25 million bid contrasts with debt of nearly \$3 million.

Monday's sale was held by Amresco, a former NationsBank subsidiary, which held mortgages on the property along with the city of Charlotte. The mortgages covered loans used to expand the complex by adding the 100-room hotel and Fun City amusement center.

Amresco representative Brad Pearce could not be reached for

comment on who bid on the complex and what would happen to Fun City, which remains in Amresco hands after it got no bidders Monday.

Several groups have tried to buy the McDonald's complex before and since its founder's death, the latest being the Gantt-led group. Others efforts failed, including competing bids which led to a

physical confrontation between Charlotte city council member Malachi Greene and business consultant Troy Watson.

Sources had said that if Gantt acquired the property, FDY Catering owned by Floyd Young would take over the restaurant's operation.

Any owner would be expected to renovate and upgrade the facility, sources said.

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