

# SHE WAS A STAR

Dorothy Dandridge



*She was a beautiful actress and singer whose star shone too briefly. Dorothy Dandridge, a fragile boned beauty with skin often described as "cafe au lait", was sadly a victim of her own circumstances.*

*She rose to the top of her profession with her first starring role and became the first black woman to receive an Academy Award nomination for Best Actress.*

*But, just as fast as her success was achieved, so did it begin to fade.*

*She knew it was hard, close to impossible, for a black actress to maintain a long running career in Hollywood because the roles were simply not there. She once said, "If I were white, I could capture the world".*

*Dorothy had the drive and the talent to make it but the color of her skin held her back and her life soon began a downward spiral which in the end turned tragic.*

Dorothy Jean Dandridge was born in Cleveland Ohio's City Hospital on November 9, 1922. Her mother was an aspiring actress named Ruby Dandridge. Ruby had walked

out on Dorothy's father, Cyrus, five months previous to Dorothy's birth taking her first child, Vivian, with her. Cyrus still lived with his mother and Ruby had come to the conclusion that he would never amount to anything and she resented the fact that they did not have their own home. Ruby was pleased to see that both of her daughters displayed a great talent for memorizing poetry and singing. A friend of Ruby named Geneva Williams soon moved in with them and Geneva became instrumental in teaching the girls singing, dancing and piano. The girls were too young to realize it at the time, but Geneva was also their mother's lover.

As the talents of Dorothy and Vivian improved, Ruby and Geneva began to plan a future for themselves that they hoped would bring them fame and security. The girls would now be called The Wonder Children and they would be their ticket. They moved to Nashville and The Wonder Children were signed with the National Baptist Convention to tour churches throughout the southern states.

With the help of black agent Ben Carter, the girls found work at various theaters in southern California. Their reputation grew and The Dandridge Sisters, as they were known, landed their first big break when they received an uncredited cameo in the film *The Big Broadcast of 1936*. Subsequent small film roles followed until the summer of 1938 when their manager informed them that he had booked them in the prestigious Cotton Club in New York City. Dorothy had aspirations to succeed on her own and in the fall of 1940, her prospects looked promising. She landed a small but significant role in a low budget film called *Four Shall Die*. She then went on to small parts in *Lady From*

*Louisiana and Sundown*. She was teamed with the Nicholas Brothers for a lively rendition of "Chattanooga Choo Choo" in the film *Sun Valley Serenade*. Dorothy wanted desperately to be a film actress but she adamantly refused to portray stereotypical black roles such as maids. On September 6, 1942, she married Harold Nicholas at the home of Harold's mother.

She was offered the role of Melmendi in *Tarzan's Peril* in 1951. Dorothy first balked at playing a jungle queen but after reading the script she didn't think it was that bad. Next up, she played an athlete's girlfriend in the low budget but successful *The Harlem Globetrotters*. MGM planned to make an all black drama called *Bright Road*. Her co-star was another up and coming actor named Harry Belafonte.

Leading roles for black actors in Hollywood were very scarce so when Dorothy heard that an all black production of *Carmen Jones* was being planned, she knew this was the role she had dreamed of.

*Carmen Jones* was an Americanized version of the Bizet opera with new lyrics by Oscar Hammerstein. The lead character, Carmen, is a sultry vixen whose independent inclinations to love her men and then leave them lead to her violent demise. Dorothy next attended the Cannes Film Festival with Preminger and then returned to the U.S. for more nightclub work as she awaited her next film offer. She did not have to wait long. She was wanted for the role of Tuptim in *The King and I*. Another highlight for her was Porgy and Bestin which her co-stars were Harry Belafonte and Sammy Davis Jr. In 1965 she signed a new film contract, but her rebounding luck was short-lived — she was found dead from an overdose of anti-depressants.







## The Pimp and the Preacher

by Gerald Gibbs

After spending more than twenty years behind bars. Clyde Robinson, otherwise known as Pretty Boy, is being released from prison. When asked what he is going to do when he gets out, Clyde informs his fellow inmates that his plan is to go back to the only game he knows, running women a.k.a. "pimping". After much laughter, several inmates tell Clyde to update his game and get with the latest hustle. Clyde questions what that is and is told by another inmate that it is those five magical words that no one can contest, "I've been called to preach."

After reading *The Pimp and the Preacher*, one may ask if this is just a scandalous novel or if it is possibly true. The real question is "Who's pimping who?"






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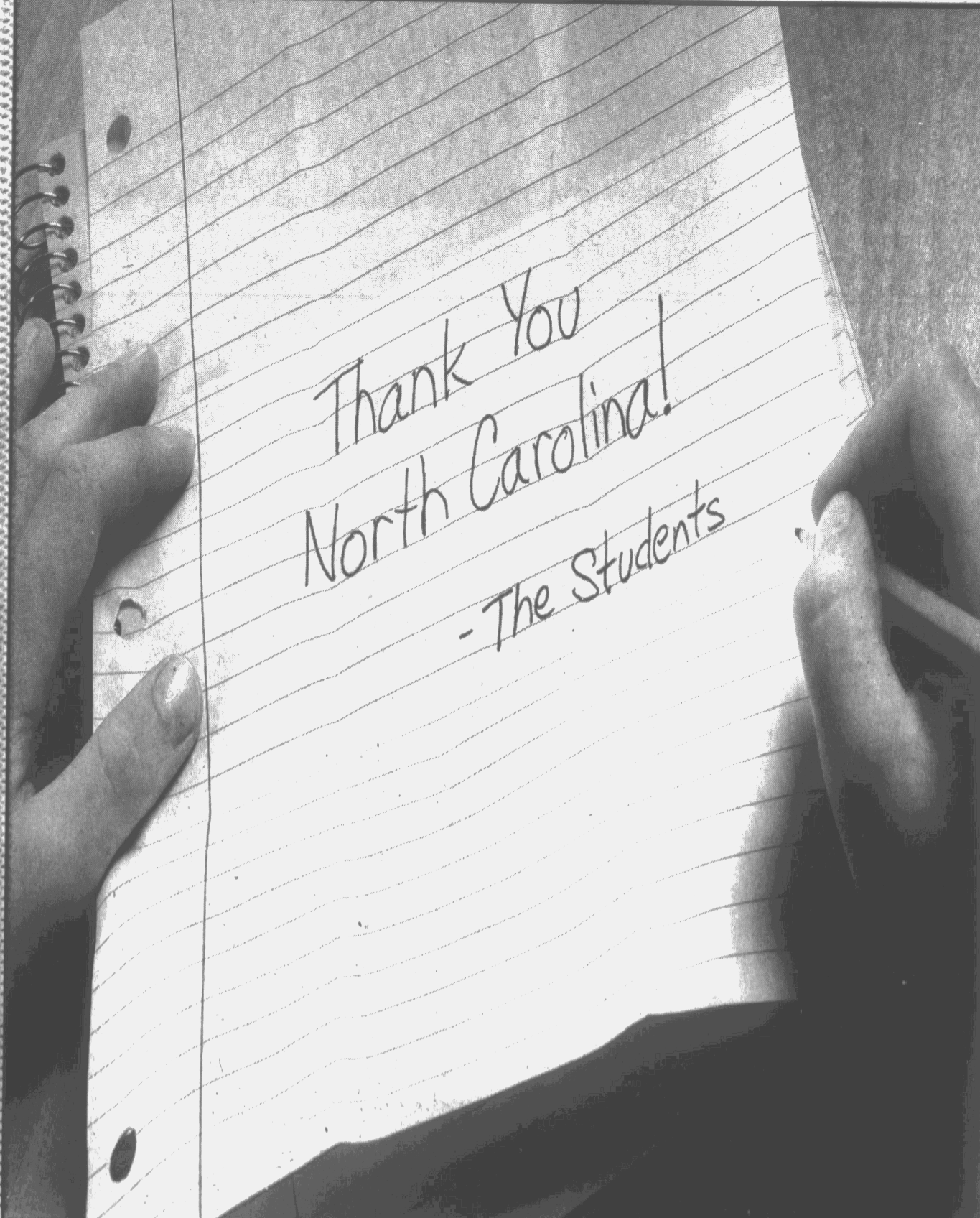
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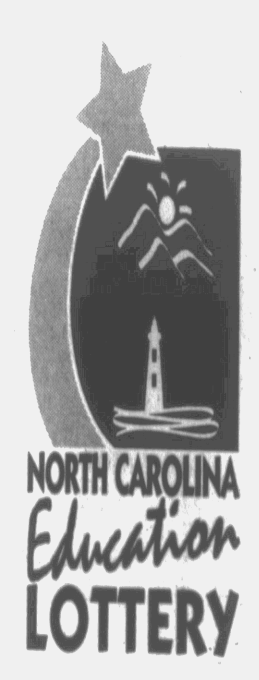
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# CIVIL RIGHTS & ORGANIZATIONS IN PITT COUNTY

There are many worthy efforts that benefit greatly from publicity or any other means by which the maximum number of people are made aware of a project or concern. On the other hand, some things need to be dealt with discreetly and with a measured degree of exposure to public attention. Organization of local civil rights groups is one of those areas.

For the last 40 years, the civil rights advocacy community in Pitt County has deemed media attention as one of its' top priorities. This tendency has repelled multitudes of would be supporters, some of whom moved here from other areas or who simply don't feel the need to be validated by seeing their names or faces in the media. It is for this reason that it is time for serious "housekeeping" within our local civil rights organizations that are affiliated with national organizations. If for no other reason, this is needed to insure that local affiliates operate in a manner consistent with the by-laws that are usually prescribed by a national or state office. This type of housekeeping is not glamorous nor might it be considered news. Yet, to be totally honest, if a local group lacks a reasonable degree of conformity to a standard methodology, that group is merely using the name of a famous organization. As a result, the credibility and influence of the local and national organization is diminished. At the local level, getting back to the basics of organization would be a tremendous asset. Basic organizational structure that is designed to assure debate, inclusion, fairness and transparency is not always welcomed.

For the most part, standards for by-laws and constitutions of local civil rights organizations were developed over a long period of time by many dedicated and wise leaders who considered every possible

scenario that local affiliates could possibly encounter. These rules were written so that local leaders need not start from scratch or use a trial and error style of leadership. Methods of communication are also part of such plans so that locals need not depend on the media as a main tool for getting information into the public.

In Pitt County, many civil rights related matters are rushed into the press deliberately and immediately only to go unresolved or defeated. It is almost impossible to recall any issue wherein a Pitt County civil rights organization actually prevailed or advanced the quality of life for the people that they exist to help; the poor and minority citizens. Yet there are plenty of news stories. If getting into the media is a goal then, mission accomplished. If results are intended, that's a different story.

Many years ago, civil rights leaders in Durham, North Carolina found its' community in an almost identical situation as we see now in Greenville. Those in control of established organizations disregarded any rules that threatened their control and never allowed a re-organization according to by-laws. The reaction was the creation of The Durham Committee on The Affairs of Black People, which emerged as a very respected and credible civil rights organization to this day. Unlike in that community, in Pitt County, when a quote is rendered to the press, one never knows if it represents the thinking of the membership or of one or two vocal officers; usually it is the latter.

People in the media business know exactly who enjoys being in the news and who will never say "no comment". The media needs to sell advertising and increase exposure for itself, so it is doing what comes naturally and need not apologize for doing so. It is

up to current civil rights organizations to examine why many good people avoid involvement with them. The norm is to dismiss the avoiders as people who don't care or worse while taking on a blacker-than-thou posture. The truly needed response is to privately hold operations up to a mirror while comparing operations to rules. In doing so, deviations from the by-laws will point to major reasons as to why rallies are small and meetings are poorly attended. Turning this corner will be uncomfortable for those whose self esteem is closely connected to civil rights. Yet, if this route is dismissed, there is no need to look further for serious hindrances to progress and self determination in the black community. The hindrances are not always the city, or the schools, the police, social

service programs and the like. Such organizations are not pledged to civil rights advocacy. Those organizations that are need only be true to the guidelines and history of their forerunners in order to begin a new era of progressiveness in the civil rights arena of Greenville and Pitt County.


The true measure of leadership is effectiveness toward change. All else are distractions from the fact that little has changed for the better. Being in the news or selling banquet tickets are not why civil rights groups should exist, nor should their existence revolve around such self serving distractions. Issues are sure to come. The question is whether or not our local organizations are up to making a difference or just up to making it to the press.

Michael Garrett

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# Leaders condemn death sentence ruling

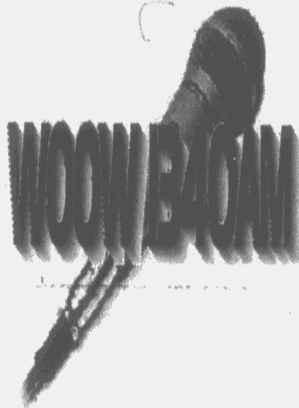
By: Melde Rutledge  
The Carolina  
Peacemaker

The front of the old Guilford County Courthouse on W. Market Street was the scene of a press conference held on Nov. 02, where area black leaders deplored the execution of a mentally ill African American man scheduled on Dec. 01. Demonstrators argue that the mentally ill Guy LeGrande had an unjust trial and they are pleading for North Carolina Gov. Mike Easley to commute LeGrande's sentence to life in prison without parole. "The Kangaroo trial, the conviction and death sentence given to Mr. LeGrande are replete with racial bias and make us nothing less than unwilling parties to a legalized lynching scheduled for Dec. 01," said N. Carnell Robinson, chair of the NC Black Leadership Caucus, a statewide group of community activists, public officials, clergy and others who campaign for the equity of black North Carolinians. Robinson said that only the grand dragon of Klu Klux Klan would refer to LeGrande's sentencing as a show of justice. The NC Black Leadership Caucus has previously called for a moratorium against the death penalty in North Carolina. A formal letter was sent to the governor last week to request for LeGrande's clemency. He is currently held in Central Prison, located in Raleigh. "We besiege Governor Easley to grant clemency because the

LeGrande conviction is reprehensible and marks not only our system of justice, but our humanity and our moral integrity," Carnell added. An all-white jury sentenced LeGrande to death in 1996 in Stanly County, NC., for the shooting death of Ellen Munford, a white female. Her husband, Tommy Munford, hired LeGrande to help murder his wife for insurance benefits. Mr. Munford, who is also white, was allowed to plead to second-degree murder, and received a life sentence after testifying against LeGrande. After LeGrande was sentenced, it was concluded by doctors that he suffered from psychosis. "Whether he did it or not is not the question," Guilford County Commissioner Melvin "Skip" Alston said about LeGrande at the press conference. "The question is whether or not he got a proper and fair trial." Alston also serves as the piedmont regional vice chair for the NC Black Leadership Caucus. Others on had at the press conference in a show of support included County Commissioner Carolyn Coleman, former Greensboro NAACP president Gladys Shipman, State Representative Pricey Harrison and members of the Faith Against the Death Penalty. There is documentation that LeGrande was out of touch with reality and lacked comprehension of the law during his trial. Amid LaGrande's trial, he fired his court appointed attorneys and

was permitted to represent himself — even after standby counsel filed a motion suggesting that LeGrande was "severely" mentally ill and not competent to represent himself. In addition, Robinson noted that LeGrande's standby counsel were not allowed to tell the court that LeGrande, among other ailments, believed that he was receiving signals from Oprah Winfrey and former CBS News Anchor Dan Rather. LeGrande also wore a Superman t-shirt to one of his court proceedings. "This is clearly not a man who should have been allowed to represent himself," Alston said. After filing countless frivolous documents in court on his own, a federal judge ultimately appointed two lawyers to represent him for his appeal. However, the lawyers had to present with in federal court, and LeGrande's case was denied certification by the US Supreme Court. Those against LeGrande's death sentence point out the the prosecutor in the case, District Attorney Ken Honeycutt, is currently under investigation for hiding key evidence in two previous death penalty cases. Both of which have been overturned. All-white juries have sentenced at least three other men of color, prosecuted by Honeycutt's office in the 1990's, to death. Honeycutt also gained an unsavory reputation with some people by wearing a gold lapel pin shaped liked a hangman's

noose, and awarded those pins to assistant DA's for winning death penalty cases and to boost their moral. Robinson said that LeGrande was chosed by the prosecution because of his race, and was exploited because of his mental illness. "The prosecutor in this case lacked the integrity and the ethics that North Carolinians expect in our court system today," Alston said. Robinson pointed out that Easley overturned a similar case in 2001, when Easley granted clemency to Robert Bacon based on the issue of racial bias and the unequal treatment of Bacon and two co-defendants. Bacon, who was "duped" into killing his white girlfriend's husband, was sentenced to death by an all-white jury. The victim's wife, who was reported to have the mastermind, was sentenced to life. "We cannot be content with a law that has one set of justice for the wealthy and the white, and another set for poor and the minorities," Alston said. "We hope that the governor will do the right thing on this."



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