

Wilmington Ten ^[1]

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Wilmington Ten

by Craig M. Stinson, 2006

On 6 Feb. 1971, after weeks of racial tension over integration of the public school system in Wilmington, a white-owned grocery store in a black neighborhood was firebombed. A year later [Ben Chavis](#) ^[2], a representative of the Commission for Racial Justice, eight black students, and one white woman were arrested, brought to trial, and convicted of the crime. Much national media coverage was given to the "Wilmington Ten," as they were subsequently called, whose sentences ranged from 23 to 24 years. CBS's *60 Minutes* ^[3], the *New York Times Magazine* ^[4], the Soviet newspaper *Izvestia*, and Amnesty International all focused on the human rights issues involved in the convictions. Protests from around the country were loud, but the [North Carolina Court of Appeals](#) ^[5] found nothing wrong in the way the trials had been conducted. Governor [James B. Hunt Jr.](#) ^[6] refused to pardon the convicted bombers but did reduce their sentences. Nine of the ten were released in the fall of 1978, and Chavis was given his freedom in December 1979. In December 1980 the U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals overturned the convictions, concluding that the initial trial had been unfair and therefore had denied the accused their constitutional rights.

Update from N.C. Government & Heritage Library staff:

On December 31, 2012, Governor Beverly Perdue issued a full pardon to all of the "Wilmington Ten."

Reference:

Jeffrey J. Crow, Paul D. Escott, and Flora J. Hatley, *A History of African Americans in North Carolina* (2002).

Additional Resources:

"Four decades later, Ben Chavis and the Wilmington Ten seek a declaration of innocence." *News and Observer*.

"Wilmington Ten Member Dies." WECT, Downtown Wilmington: <http://downtownwilmington.wect.com/news/community-spirit/57890-wilmington-ten-member-dies> ^[7]

"The Wilmington Ten" *This Month in North Carolina History* (blog), The North Carolina Collection, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. <http://www.lib.unc.edu/ncc/ref/nchistory/feb2005/index.html> ^[8]

Transcript of the Case, The United States Department of Justice: <http://www.justice.gov/crt/foia/readingroom/wilmington/> ^[9]

Almasy, Steve. "North Carolina governor pardons 'Wilmington 10'" CNN. January 1, 2013. <http://www.cnn.com/2012/12/31/justice/north-carolina-wilmington-10/index.html> ^[10] (accessed January 30, 2013).

Subjects:

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[UNC Press](#) ^[17]

Authors:

[Stinson, Craig M.](#) ^[18]

Origin - location:

[Wilmington](#) ^[19]

From:

[Encyclopedia of North Carolina, University of North Carolina Press.](#) ^[20]

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Links

[1] <https://dev.ncpedia.org/wilmington-ten>

[2] <http://www.drbenjaminchavis.com/pages/inner/biography>

- [3] <http://www.cbsnews.com/sections/60minutes/main3415.shtml>
- [4] <http://www.nytimes.com/pages/magazine/index.html>
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