Roots of the case of the

Wilmington Ten

Date:
Thursday, Feb 24

Time:
11:30 AM – 1:30 PM

Location:
Cohen Lounge, Dickson Hall

Montclair State University
The Wilmington Ten
40th Anniversary Commemoration

Part of the month-long African American Heritage Celebration
“Pathways to Greatness: Leadership & Service”

The Wilmington Ten were identified by Amnesty International as the first political prisoners held by the United States. The incidents began in Wilmington NC, 1971, due to a school boycott. The circumstances that provoked the boycott were: The Supreme Court order to integrate the white and black high schools; The closing of the Black high schools and the introduction of those students into the white schools (without any orientation or preparation for either group of students); The uneven administration of discipline with black and white students; and the school board’s failure to provide for any celebration of Dr King’s death. The students were looking for a place in the community where they could congregate after walking out of the high school. They approached several black churches who refused them. They finally approached Eugene Templeton who was pastor of the local black congregational church. The church had a strong history of being involved in the issues of the community. When Templeton agreed, the church became the center of the student protest. Several hundred students and their parents met at the church as an alternative to going to school.

The local Rights of White People organization attacked the protesting students and several days of armed conflict centering around the Gregory Congregational Church ensued. A legal case in which the state prosecuted ten of the protesting students later developed. This case was eventually resolved by an appeal to the Federal courts, who declared that the witnesses who had brought testimony had been bribed by the prosecutor.

The MSU event will begin with a 30-minute documentary film about two of the students discussing the events surrounding the boycott and their own subsequent imprisonment. Next, Dr. Benjamin F. Chavis, Jr., who was the community organizer sent by the United Church of Christ to assist Eugene Templeton, the minister of the Gregory church, Eugene Templeton (who is currently on the MSU faculty), Wayne Moore and Karen Beatty, who were two of the protesting students and members of the Wilmington Ten, and Donna Templeton will take part in a panel discussion of the Wilmington Ten events and the lessons they offer for the history of the civil rights struggle as well as for the present.

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