



# THIS WEEK'S SPEAKER

March 16, 2021

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## Panel Discussion: Black Media and its role in Charlotte

### Featured Panelists:



**Glenn Burkins**  
Editor / Publisher  
*QCityMetro*



**Dee Dixon**  
Publisher of  
*Pride Magazine*



**Gerald Johnson**  
Publisher of  
*The Charlotte Post*

By Henry Bostic

Publishers of Charlotte's three major publications targeted primarily at the Black community offered some provocative insights in to race relations in Charlotte and the nation in a discussion on Black media and its role in the Queen City at Charlotte Rotary on March 23, 2021.

Gerald Johnson of The Charlotte Post, Dee Dixon of Pride Communications, Inc. and Glenn Burkins, founder and publisher of QCity Metro, talked about the pivotal informational role their publications perform not only for African Americans but the community at large.

"Success is relative in the marketplace," Johnson said. "We're still here. It's working. We're having an impact on the community. Our perspective is to inform the African American community about those issues important to them, that they are not going to hear any place else, a perspective, we think is important to be heard."

Johnson noted that reaching the Black community is more difficult than ever because African Americans today live all over the community whereas in years past, they tended to be confined in one general area.

Burkins emphasized that Black media is important. Mainstream media, he said, “has a short attention span. It rushes in, stays a little while then moves on.” Covering the Black community is “why we’re here,” he continued. Dipping in and out “is not going to happen with QC Metro.”

Said Johnson, “We offer a different perspective, one from the African American perspective.” He cited the difference in his paper’s coverage of the Gloria Pace King United Way story which applied a context missing from mainstream media stories. We’re not in conflict with mainstream media, he said, we offer a different perspective.

All three publishers agreed that “systemic inequities” drive the African American narrative. As Dixon put it, the pandemic and Black Lives Matter have illuminated so many systemic disparities.

“They pulled the scab off, and it’s begun to bleed again. We’ve talked for ages, but we seem to get nowhere.” What’s happened this past year, she continued, “opened the lens wider” on all these disparities.

The problems facing the Black community today aren’t new and they didn’t just happen, Burkins said. Every time African Americans have made economic and political steps forward there have been significant backlashes.

He cited three books which highlight laws and government policies that have made these systemic inequities so engrained and so exceedingly difficult to irradicate:

*Wilmington's Lie: The Murderous Coup of 1898 and the Rise of White Supremacy* by David Zucchino; *The Color of Law* by Richard Rothstein and *The Color of Money: Black Banks and the Racial Wealth Gap* by Mehrsa Baradaran. \*

Dixon added a fourth. *Caste: The Origins of Our Discontents* by Isabel Wilkerson. \*

Most major decisions affecting African American lives have been out of their hands, the publishers admitted.

Laws and policy decisions at the federal, state and local level have, for decades, conspired to reinforce systemic and ongoing inequity, Burkins said. He cited Red lining – official federal policy -- as the major reason Blacks have been unable to build wealth.

Johnson cited the routing of I-85 and I-77 as the major reason for dividing the community’ Black population. “We had no say in how this tore our community apart,” he said.

Education about how our racial inequities came to be is desperately needed, Dixon said. “We need the truth. It can be mind boggling, life changing when we get the facts straight.”

Burkins pointed out that even as a South Carolina native, he did not know until recently that during reconstruction the S.C. legislature was the only one in the country with a Black majority.

Race relations haven’t really changed that much, said Burkins, even though the country is becoming browner and headed to becoming a minority-majority nation. Every time there’s been advancement,

there's been push back. You can see that today, he said. The "ugliness on display is becoming more acceptable."

"Voter suppression is clearly a major issue today because of the last election, Johnson said. He noted that the problems of crime, social justice and racism are all interconnected.

Each began their remarks with a brief publication history:

The Charlotte Post traces its history to its 1878 founding by the AME Zion church. It separated from the church in the 1920s then went through several owners before it was acquired in 1974 by Johnson's father who led the paper until his death in 1986. Gerald Johnson said his father "suckered" him to run the paper. With a background in math, science and computers he was working for a local bank when his father convinced him to take over interim leadership for three months while he took medical leave. What Johnson did not know was that his father was terminally ill. The rest, he said, is history.

Pride Communications, Inc. was founded in 1993 by The Charlotte Observer. Dixon, who started at the paper as an administrative assistant by then was a successful ad salesperson and began to sell advertising for the publication. She gratefully acknowledged Rolfe Neill's mentorship. In 2001, Observer leadership decided to sell the Pride publication. After agonizing over what to do, Dixon purchased the publication, becoming a reluctant entrepreneur.

Glenn Burkins, a former Wall Street Journal reporter who covered the White House and a former business editor and assistant managing editor at The Charlotte Observer, launched QC Metro in the fall of 2008 after the election of Barack Obama. He had become intrigued by Baristnet, a hyperlocal news website begun in New Jersey in the early 2000s. There was not such website directed at the Black community in the U.S. and he believed Charlotte had the right size and demographics to support such a venture. Today QC Metro has an average of 175,000 readers each month, 80 percent of whom are Black.

\*Here are the recommended books:

- *Wilmington's Lie: The Murderous Coup of 1898 and the Rise of White Supremacy* by David Zucchino makes the case that Wilmington, N.C., was once a mixed-race community with a thriving black middle class when in 1898, white supremacists staged a coup that changed everything.
- *The Color of Law* by Richard Rothstein makes clear that it was de jure segregation — local, state, and federal laws and policy decisions — that promoted discriminatory patterns that continue to this day.
- *The Color of Money: Black Banks and the Racial Wealth Gap* by Mehrsa Baradaran challenges the myth that black communities could ever accumulate wealth in a segregated economy. Instead, housing segregation, racism, and Jim Crow credit policies created an inescapable, but hard to detect, economic trap for black communities and their banks.
- *Caste: The Origins of Our Discontents* by Isabel Wilkerson examines the unspoken caste system that has shaped America and shows how our lives today are still defined by a hierarchy of human divisions.

\*A recording of the program is available here: <https://vimeo.com/528017714>

Introductions begin at the 7:15 minute mark.