



The I. C. Norcom Protest

By
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Day 9
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Scriptures for Mediation

"... and you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.' The second is this, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these."

Mark 12:30-31

Critical Race Fact!

Instead of facilitating Black land ownership, President Johnson advocated a new practice that soon replaced slavery as a primary source of Southern agricultural labor: sharecropping. Under this system, Black laborers worked white-owned land in exchange for a share of the crop at harvest minus cost for food and lodging, often in the same slave quarters that had previously inhabited. Because Johnsons' administration required that landowners pay off their debts to banks first, sharecroppers frequently received no pay and had no recourse.

Prayer:

Lord, thank You for the voice and the power to protest. Help us also with the vision and platform to see, and help others to see a new reality. In Jesus Name, Amen.

The year is 1969, as a freshman at I.C. Norcom High School, I, Orion Watson Willis, participated in a non-violent protest along with the entire student body, led by then SGA president, Kinwood Harris. Attorney Henry Marsh, the Virginia State NAACP President, assisted the protest by filing documents on behalf of Norcom's students against the Portsmouth Public School Board. We were protesting the closure of I. C. Norcom High School in order to accommodate the Civil Rights Act of 1964. Rather than send white students into Norcom which had a predominately black student population, the School Board fought to close the school permanently. The court injunction filed by the NAACP worked temporarily. However, the Portsmouth Public School Board decided to test the resolve of the "Norcom Faithful" once again.

The year is now 1971 ...December.. Once again, the School Board has decided to take up it's position to close Norcom. Under leadership of SGA President Harrell, Gene Keeling, the student body took up a more aggressive approach. To draw national attention to our plight. We boycotted classes for 6 weeks to STOP the closing of our beloved I.C. Norcom.

The protest began with the sound of the fire alarm signaling the timely walk out of classes by the entire student body. Police dogs and armed Portsmouth police officers confronted the protesters, daily, for close to 6-weeks. The National Guard was called in. The media was biased, and police Chief Crowe and officers stormed the building, confiscating and damaging video footage of their crimes against the students.

The protesters were soon joined by the Rev. Dr. Benjamin Chavis of Wilmington N.C. a renowned civil rights leader who along with his posse, became known as "Wilmington 10." And by now, the media recognized the students as a viable serious group, and we became publicized as the "Radical Militants"

In early February, 1972, after many meetings and intervention by City Council and strong community support from various groups in the minority community, including our parents, Pastors, and observers, the SGA negotiated a deal to retain I. C. Norcom as an integral part of our great history of the city of Portsmouth. As a result, over 50 years later, as a graduate of the HISTORIC Class of "72" ICNHS, I am proud to have participated and I am happy to be celebrating the 111th anniversary of I.C. Norcom High School "To set our ideals HIGH you say, will make us a SUCCESS.... Our training ALL we owe to YOU. THE SCHOOL THAT WE LOVE BEST !!!" Congratulations Greyhounds!!

Questions to Ponder

Name a time when you felt the need to protest? How did it go? What were the gains? If you had to do it all over again, what would you do differently?

