

The Death of a Rising Star The Ray Willis Report

By: Ray E. Willis



Ray E. Willis

He will long be remembered for his memorable role in African-American filmmaker Spike Lee's blockbuster cinematic hit "Do the Right Thing" for his exceptional portrayal of Sweet Dick Willie, a middle-aged black man who hung out on a street corner with his buddies.

The real name of this relatively new comedic talent who was just starting to make his mark on the stage and in movies was Robin Harris. Harris died in his sleep last Sunday morning after performing his special brand of standup comedy at the famed Regal Theater in Chicago. In a strange twist of fate, Harris was found dead in his hotel room by his mother, who had accompanied him on his engagement to Chicago.

For those of you who are musing out loud at this point and who think it is totally inappropriate that I would mention the name of Harris' character here in print, let me remind you that upon his death the NEW YORK TIMES, CHICAGO TRIBUNE and even our own local REVIEW-JOURNAL also made mention that he was famed as Sweet Dick Willie in "Do the Right Thing."

Anyway, who's actually to know that the name didn't originate because a man named Dick Willie was such a sweet person that people just started to call him "Sweet" Dick Willie?

His recent newfound popularity as Sweet Dick Willie began with just a bit part that wasn't supposed to amount to more than a couple of lines. But Harris was so impressive that Spike Lee gave him creative freedom to develop the character beyond what was originally intended. So, instead of a one-time small part, the character Harris portrayed made several appearances throughout the movie. The rest is film history.

Many who have seen "Do the Right Thing" are quick to acknowledge that Harris stole the show away from other big-name actors who were also in the movie, including the likes of current Oscar nominee Danny Aiello and Ruby Dee and Ossie Davis.

Watching the antics of Harris on stage and screen, you scarcely would have known that he was a bona fide college graduate, which he was.

His other major screen credits include Eddie Murphy's "Harlem Nights" and "House Party" which is now playing in movie houses here in Las Vegas and throughout the United States.

His was a career which was just on the verge of taking off.

Not generally known for extravagance, most recently Harris operated from his personal home base which was a comedy center located in the inner city of Los Angeles. He prided himself in not ever forgetting where he came from. Harris always said that if he couldn't make his own people laugh, it wasn't worth venturing forth out into the world to try and make other people laugh.

To the untrained ear his standup routine sounded like it was just so much jive talk coming right off the top of his head. Glib, but good. Make no mistake about it though. He had a masterful delivery which evoked the full range and richness of the English language with slang and epithets tossed in for good measure.

His greatest joy in life was to make people laugh. And for that the world was a little bit better off than it is now that he's gone. Yes, gone,

Housing Commissioner Comes Under Scrutiny

By Muhammad Abdullah

Mr. Louis Conner, owner of Seven Seas Restaurant and Housing Commissioner on the City of Las Vegas Housing Commission Board, has come under intense scrutiny by angered residents in the low-income housing projects. Mr. Conner was appointed to sit on the board in 1987 and recently has had his business picketed by residents who feel that he does not represent the best interests of the tenants.



Louis Conner

According to Mr. Cliff Brown, President, and Ms. Gayle Gonzales, Vice President of the Tenants Rights Association, the picketing was to demonstrate their dissatisfaction with the "Art Sartini Administration" and Mr. Conner's affiliation with Mr. Sartini. Mr. Sartini, former Executive Director of the Las Vegas Housing Authority, was forced to resign his post several months ago.

Mr. Brown said that the group feels that Mr. Conner had an opportunity to select a highly qualified black man for the Director's post with his highly controversial "swing vote", but ended up

but not forgotten. Robin Harris. Dead at a mere 36 years of age.

swinging his vote for a less qualified white candidate. He felt that Conner had a favor to be repaid for money that he received from the City of Las Vegas to invest in his business.

"The purpose of the picketing was to demonstrate that we are serious about getting the tenants' concerns addressed and that we are willing to do whatever is necessary to get results. Our purpose was not to damage or degrade his business in anyway," continued Brown.

For sometime now there have been allegations circulating that Conner had sold out his vote for political favors owed to Mayor Ron Lurie.

Conner said that an extensive character and background check was run on all four candidates for the Executive Director's post. Two of the candidates for the African American, one was Caucasian and one was Hispanic. Brown contends, however, that Mr. Monroe Watson, who is black, had 25 years experience at HUD (The Department of Housing and Urban Development) and was the best qualified candidate and should have been elected to the post. He said that Mr. Carl Rowe, the white candidate, was selected instead as a favor and not because he was the best qualified. Mr. Tom Goldson, the second African-American candidate for the post, was selected as Deputy-Executive Director, a newly created post.

Conner said that the board was searching for a "good administrator" and that Mr. Rowe fit the qualifications by being in administration with the federal government for 15 years, including the FBI, as well as having run a successful consulting firm. He also pointed out that Mr. Goldson was strong in "housing experience", which balanced the director's slot.

Conner said the allegations were "ridiculous" because

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Nation's Black Doctors Plan Las Vegas Convention



From left, Walter O. Shervington, M.D., New Orleans, Speaker of the NMA House of Delegates; Vivian W. Pinn-Wiggins, M.D., Washington, D.C., President of the National Medical Association; Yvonnecris S. Veal, M.D., St. Albans, N.Y., Chairman of the Board of Trustees, NMA; and Charles Johnson, M.D., of Durham, N.C., NMA President-Elect.

Las Vegas -- The Board of Trustees and officers of the National Medical Association met here last weekend to plan the 95th Annual Convention and Scientific Assembly of the nation's black physicians to be held here at the Bally Grand Hotel, July 28-August 2, 1990.

"We are on the front lines for those who are medically underserved and disparately affected by potentially preventable or curable diseases," declared Vivian W. Pinn-Wiggins, M.D., of Washington, D.C., NMA's president. She is the chairperson of the Department of Pathology at Howard University's college of medicine.

The NMA, founded in Atlanta in 1885 when organized medicine excluded black doctors, is "a voice for those who are concerned about equal opportunity for the minority health provider

and equal access to health care for all Americans," she added.

The NMA, headquartered in a fully paid for new building in Washington, D.C., has influence and visibility although black physicians comprise only three percent of the nation's practicing physicians. U.S. Secretary of Health and Human Services Louis Sullivan, newly appointed New York City Health Commissioner Woodrow Myers, Jr. and Reed Tuckson, M.D., formerly the commissioner of public health in the nation's capital, are all active NMA members.

The NMA's Annual Convention and Scientific Assembly brings together black and other physicians and medical researchers to exchange views on diseases adversely affecting black

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THE SENTINEL-VOICE

Nevada's only black community newspaper.
Published every Thursday by the Brown Publishing Co., Inc., 1201 South Eastern Avenue, Las Vegas, Nevada 89104
Telephone (702) 383-4030.
Serving Las Vegas, North Las Vegas, Reno, Carson City, Sparks, Hawthorne, Henderson and Tonopah.
Betty Brown, President and Publisher-Editor; LeRoy Brown, General Manager; Ramon Savoy, Advertising and Marketing Director; Pamela Jeanne Wright, Secretary-Receptionist; Willis Brown, Production; Don Snook, Graphics; Delores Feemster, Reno General Manager; Kenny Phillips, Distribution.

Members: National Newspaper Publishers Association, West Coast Black Publishers Association.

This newspaper is audited by Community Papers Verification Service, 6225 University Avenue, Madison, W153705 (608) 238-7550.



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