

March

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Charleston is a big step in the direction of organizing to challenge the tide of attacks occurring against Blacks."

Not everyone is thrilled that Shabazz and company are advocating for Williams.

Two weeks ago, two groups — the Logan County Improvement League and the American Friends Service Committee's Empowerment for Women Plus — sponsored a biracial candlelight vigil at a church two miles from where Megan Williams was allegedly held captive and tortured.

Their message: they support the young Black woman, deplore the alleged racial degradation, and want the world to know that what happened is not indicative of their community.

They also urged Logan County authorities to prosecute the case to the fullest extent of the law, even including hate crime charges.

But the coalition, which has welcomed the NAACP and Southern Christian Leadership Conference's participation, then blasted those from "outside" who planned to march and rally in Charleston soon.

"We understand that groups from outside Logan County have expressed the intention of coming into our community to show their displeasure," James Hagood, spokesman for the coalition said, making veiled reference to Shabazz and the BLFJ.

"We want to send a message to these people that we are actively engaged in planning peaceful actions to demonstrate our intention to see that Ms. Williams receives justice in Logan County. We do not condone or support violence of any sort from any extremist group."

Meanwhile, there has been criticism that many of the national women's groups have been quiet about the Megan Williams case.

There are numerous blogsites online dedicated to keeping up with the case. The Black Press is keeping the story alive, as are Black talk radio hosts like Imhotep Gary Byrd in New York, who discusses the latest developments weekly on his programs.

Clearly, part of the strategy in holding a massive demonstration in Charleston is to get Megan Williams' story back into the major

media, and national headlines.

As plans for the Nov. 3 national march and rally are being readied, the court cases for the accused are moving steadily along.

Probable cause has been determined by a local magistrate for all six defendants now.

So far, at least three of the six suspects waived their right to preliminary hearings, with one, Karen Burton, already having her case sent to the grand jury.

That panel is expected to take up charges against the remaining five not now, but in January, for reasons that weren't apparent at press time.

Burton, who allegedly cut patches of Williams' hair off while making the "This is what we do" remark, was the last of the six to have a preliminary hearing on October 4.

In addition to kidnapping and first-degree sexual assault, Burton faces malicious wounding, assault during the commission of a felony and thirteen counts of battery.

Part of the evidence against Burton is a statement given to investigators by

Bobby Brewster alleging that she, her daughter Alisha and George Messer cut Williams' hair off, beat her, choked her, slashed her ankle and forced the Black woman to eat feces.

Brewster's police statement confirms that Burton repeatedly called Williams "nigger" in the course of allegedly attacking her.

In her statement to police, Burton denied doing anything to Williams.

Defense attorneys in the case are already raising the specter of filing change of venue motions, citing the intense local media coverage thus far, and how their clients have been portrayed.

The attorneys say their clients, who they allege have been threatened, cannot get a fair trial in Logan County.

Prosecutors counter that the likelihood of the trial being moved is slight at best, saying that other high-profile cases have been fairly and successfully tried in Logan County.

For info, go online at BlackLawyersforJustice.org or phone (202) 397-4577, or email shabazzlaw@aol.com.

Cash Michaels writes for the Wilmington Journal.

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Color Divide

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in the fields. "That created a lot of animosity among slaves and began to replicate itself even after slavery," Harrison said. "Once Blacks were able to have their own groups, they too adhered to the whole system of lightness being better."

One of the ways they did so was the "brown paper bag" test, in which Blacks whose skin was darker than the bag's color were denied inclusion into social events or organizations.

But lighter-skinned Black women also complain they, at times, are accused of not being "Black" enough.

Tamika Franklin, who works with Toney, says she was taunted as "White girl" by other Black children. The 30-year-old administrative assistant has very light skin, freckles and reddish-brown hair. She says Whites appear to be more accepting of her than other darker-skinned Blacks.

"I'm closer to their shade, so they're a little more comfortable with that," Franklin said.

That's because Whites set the standard for what is considered attractive and acceptable, Pearl Jr. said. "I believe

they think the lighter you are and the straighter your hair, the more you resemble them and the better you are," she said. "We have been taught as African-Americans to be less African, less dark."

The issue is central to "Other People's Skin," four novellas released this month

and co-authored by Atkins and three other Black women. The fictional work looks at discrimination that results from "colorism" in the Black community.

Atkins has a fair complexion and long, light brown hair. Her mother is Black and father is White.

"People have mimicked me to my face ...that I talk White or proper," said Atkins, who earned a master's degree at Columbia University. "An ex-boyfriend told me I should talk more Black and go to a tanning salon to get darker. Another man told me I should dye my hair brown if I wanted to do business with Black people."

"We often face hatred within the race, and it's more hurtful from your own people than the mainstream."

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by Marty Frierson
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