



# The Wilmington Ten: Violence, Injustice, and the Rise of Black Politics in the 1970s

*Kenneth Robert Janken*

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In February 1971, racial tension surrounding school desegregation in Wilmington, North Carolina, culminated in four days of violence and skirmishes between white vigilantes and black residents. The turmoil resulted in two deaths, six injuries, more than \$500,000 in damage, and the firebombing of a white-owned store, before the National Guard restored uneasy peace. Despite glaring irregularities in the subsequent trial, ten young persons were convicted of arson and conspiracy and then sentenced to a total of 282 years in prison. They became known internationally as the Wilmington Ten. A powerful movement arose within North Carolina and beyond to demand their freedom, and after several witnesses admitted to perjury, a federal appeals court, also citing prosecutorial misconduct, overturned the convictions in 1980.

Kenneth Janken narrates the dramatic story of the Ten, connecting their story to a larger arc of Black Power and the transformation of post-Civil Rights era political organizing. Grounded in extensive interviews, newly declassified government documents, and archival research, this book thoroughly examines the 1971 events and the subsequent movement for justice that strongly influenced the wider African American freedom struggle.

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