

# Famous social activist visits NCCU

***"Wade in the water***

***Wade in the water,  
children,***

***Wade in the water***

***God's gonna trouble the  
water."***

By Maddie Marshall and Tessa Platek

The negro spiritual "Wade in the Water" was lifted up in unison by the crowd gathered in the B.N. Duke Auditorium at North Carolina Central University.

An older black woman sat center stage, singing the hymn along with the crowd. Ruby Sales, the founder and director of The SpiritHouse Project, was seated in a crème-colored armchair, prepared to give a speech as a part of a Durham Community Conversations session.

As stated in her biography, "Ruby Nell Sales is a nationally-recognized human-rights activist, public theologian, and social critic, whose articles and work appear in many journals, online sites, and books." The SpiritHouse Project was incorporated in 2001 by Sales.

As stated on the project's website, "SpiritHouse is a social justice organization that brings multi-ethnic people and intergenerational communities together in a process of community formation."

This Community Conversation with Sales is a part of a larger tour of speaking engagements and events in North Carolina. The events were planned in cooperation with the Duke Chapel administration. Events took place Feb. 1-3, which included breakfast with the clergy and a conversation exclusively with NCCU students.

The event that took place at NCCU was planned in collaboration with the Department of Spiritual Dialogue and Development.

As Ms. Sales began her speech, her words flowed out more as poetry. It was a spoken word performance. Sales began with the story of ships traveling to the Americas carrying passengers against their will.

"How did we sing our song in the strange new land? That was the question the first generation of Africans who were captured by the waterside and found themselves wading in troubled waters, taken away from their familiar environment. Never to hear the sound of Big Mama's voice again. Never to hear

*"How did we sing our song  
in the strange new land?  
That was the question..."*

Ruby Sales



**Social activist Ruby Sales sits center stage in the B.N. Duke auditorium at NCCU. Sales was the guest of honor in a series of talks on racial injustice and social spirituality planned by the Duke Chapel clergy.**

the sound of sister counting the grain again. Never to hear the village drums again," said Ms. Sales.

She carried the audience through time, connecting numerous events and people to a singular struggle. Through her narrative, Sales told the story of white supremacy in America. She spoke of events like the genocide of the Native Americans, the story of Ruby Bridges and the abuse of minority labor in the nation. Despite describing such dark aspects of America, past and present, Sales managed to convey a message of hope.

"I offer you a real privilege, and that is the privilege of becoming the best self that resides in you. Movement is hard work, but we have to trouble the waters," said Sales.

Ms. Sales' speech inspired many listeners, including students and faculty at NCCU.

The Rev. Gloria Winston-Harris, Director of the Department of Spiritual Development and Dialogue at NCCU, described her most important takeaway from Ms. Sales' speech, discussing her concentration on "from womb to the tomb." She spoke of how Ms. Sales specifically requested her speech to be opened with a rendition of "Wade in the Water," highlighting what she summarized as "wading through the lives of the children who endured." The Reverend also mentioned finding hope in the point Sales made in within the current social context: "Movement is hard, but we must trouble the waters."