



WATSON WITH FRIENDS AFTER HIS ACQUITTAL

Lance Watson (center) with Arlander Wormley (left, wearing beret) and Nathaniel Johnson (right, holding books).
—Press-Scimitar Staff Photo

Sweet Willie's Verdicts: ^{10/9} 'Not Guilty' and 'Guilty' _{2/69}

Lance (Sweet Willie Wine) Watson has been acquitted of charges in a Memphis court, the same day he was found guilty in Circuit Court in Forrest City, Ark.

A Criminal Court jury of five Negroes and seven whites, including one white woman, yesterday acquitted Watson of charges of pistol carrying and disorderly conduct.

An all-male, all-white jury in Forrest City found Watson, a member of the Memphis black militant group called the Invaders, guilty of being a disorderly person.

In the Memphis case, Watson was identified as one of a group of young Negroes who made threats and

caused a disturbance in the Jump & Grab Drive-In Grocery, 591 E. H. Crump, on the night of last Nov. 27.

The jury foreman said today that the jurors noted "some discrepancies" in the testimony of the state's witnesses. Six persons who were in the store that night made positive identification of Watson from the stand.

He said he felt the state had not established beyond doubt that Watson was in the store that night and that the jurors felt there was "some possibility" the witnesses were mistaken. The first vote was nine to three for acquittal, he said. The three who voted guilty later changed their votes after

deliberation that lasted about 30 minutes.

Earlier Watson, 31, wearing dark glasses, a knee-length, black leather jacket and blue jeans, denied from the stand that he was in the store that night.

The bearded civil rights activist testified he spent the evening at Clayborn Temple where members of the Invaders were preparing a Thanksgiving dinner for needy blacks in the community.

Shortly before midnight, he said, several of the workers went out to buy fried chicken and soft drinks but he remained behind. He claimed he knew nothing about the disturbance at the

grocery until told about it later when the others returned. He contended the state's witnesses mistook him for another man who looks like him.

On cross examination, Watson did admit he had been arrested several times and had twice received sentences to the state penitentiary. He was sentenced to five years for grand larceny in 1961 and to three years for burglary third degree in 1965, he said.

He said he became involved in the civil rights movement in 1965 and that his only arrests since that time have been in connection with civil rights activities.

Watson's alibi for the night of Nov. 27 was backed by James Pegues, 55. Asked by Asst. Atty. Gen. Terry Lafferty if he belonged to the Invaders, Pegues said he was treasurer of the organization but added, "I'm not militant."

After the verdict Watson, represented by Philip E. Kuhn and Brett Stein, was congratulated by a number of his beret-wearing friends who had been in the courtroom for the two-day trial. As the jury filed out, he broke away from the group and shook hands with several of the jurors and thanked them for the verdict. Before the decision was announced, Watson had said he expected to be found guilty because he didn't think a Negro could get justice in a Southern court.

In the Arkansas case, Watson was charged with being a disorderly person the night he was beaten by a crowd of whites. He received facial lacerations and a broken left elbow during racial clashes in August, following picketing and marching by Negro demonstrators.

The jury upheld the \$1,000 peace bond under which Watson was placed for one year by Municipal Court Judge O. H. Hargraves. The peace bond would be forfeited to the city should Watson be convicted of being a disorderly person in Forrest City during the next year.

Watson, who was not in court, was represented by Philip E. Kaplan of Little Rock.