

Jeff Prugh
20000 Prairie St., L.A. Times
Chatsworth, CA 91311

3/1/93

Dear Jeff,

Thanks for the book and the enclosures and your note. I've read the dust jacket, flipped a few pages and saw all the ~~xxx~~ unsolved cases, read the Atlanta mag article and wrote a letter to a friend who is in publishing to see if I could generate any interest in him for a quality paperback reprint. I have no idea whether he will be but in any event you are bound to nothing if not interested. Reprint with new info added. You'll know if he is interested if you hear from him.

I'll be sending copies of your Katzenbach/Wallace piece to a few historian and a sociologist friend who can use it in their teaching.

Katzenbach has to have the most dependable of conveniently undependable memories, to which he has attested often enough.

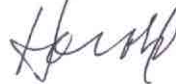
What you say about Rawls makes sense out of what Dan Moore was indicating and didn't spell out. I've not heard from him in years and probably won't again.

My experience with ABC is the opposite of yours. I think it was 20/20 rather than Nightline. I told them never to darken my door again. They took up an afternoon, an hour or more on tape, and used a sentence or part of a sentence in what amounted to a puff bit on Oliver Stone. I told them that having no interest in personal publicity it was easy to tell them where to go - forever more. I think nothing like that ever happened to them. The woman reporter, who was good, was surprised. So I spelled it out for her and I do not expect them to have any further interest in me on anything.

I'm a little unsteady and not fully clear in the head today, as you can see from the salutation, but I'm glad to have the book and will be reading it when I have a chance to read again. Despite the fact that its weight actually presents a hazard to me, believe it or not. If a hardback of any weight slips it is likely to peel the skin in a forearm back in a triangle of about an inch. Comes not so much from age as from the fragility of the skin after all those years on so much coumadin.

Dettlinger looks and sounds like an interesting man.

Again thanks, and best wishes,



Jeff Prugh

February 27, 1993

724 Ridge Drive
Glendale, California 91206

Dear Harold:

How great to catch up with you after too many years. Who knows what can be done if a meeting of great minds such as Weisberg, Moore and Dettlinger can be arranged.

I'll be sure to introduce myself to Chip Selby (we're virtually from neighboring communities). And if I can think of any avenues to pursue with regard to your latest book, I'll run them by you first before proceeding.

Attached please find a copy of The List, still the only book ever published about the Atlanta murders and one that has been widely attacked but never successfully challenged.

(Interestingly, the Atlanta Journal and Constitution --which ignored our book for almost a year after it was published in 1984--commissioned Wendell Rawls to savage it in a "review" that filled half the op-ed page. Rawls thinks justice was done in the case. Chet can tell you how Rawls helped sabotage an ABC Nightline report on the cases --a report that Nightline pulled at the 11th hour in 1987, the only time ABC had bailed out other than 20/20's ballyhooed segment on the Kennedys and Marilyn Monroe, also pulled.)

Look forward to staying in touch. All best to you and Lil...

Best regards,



Attachments

Copies: Chet Dettlinger
Dan Moore

Dear Dick (I presume David is still away),

3/1/93

As I indicate in something I'm holding for an enclosure to send you, my head is not clear today so I hope this is. I am calling to your attention a 10-year old book that may be ready for a reprint that I think can be successful. Lil is copying the dustjacket and an article. I've just gotten the book and have not had time to read it. How it all happened may also hold some interest if not literary possibilities.

Last week I had a phone call from a stranger in Birmingham, Alabama, from Dan Moore, former deputy chief United States Marshal there. He was impressed by my appearance on the Fox King assassination special. He lost his job over his determination to try to do something about corruption, particularly judicial corruption, in Birmingham. Although confined to a wheelchair, he is still trying. In the course of our conversation, it turned out that he knew a friend with whom I lost contact a decade or so ago, Jeff Prugh, then the LA Times ~~from~~ Atlanta office. He said he'd be in touch with Jeff and would ask him to phone me. Jeff did, and we had another long talk.

Jeff coauthored a book on the sensational Atlanta murder case of Wayne Williams. I enclose an article he wrote on it. It refers to an ABC Nightline show about to be aired. Jeff tells me it was savaged by the Atlanta Journal and Constitution and although completed was not aired. I think I ^{will} recapitulate with reasonable accuracy in ^{my} say that the entire black Atlanta establishment was involved in pinning a bunch of unsolved murders of blacks on a convenient goat who was without resources, influence or friends who could be very helpful. However, as the article and dust jacket indicate, there was a man who cared and who tried, Dettlinger, who ^{see} book Jeff coauthored.

Jeff is certain there was a miscarriage of justice. After all these years the case is under appeal. One of the lawyers handling the appeal is Bershowitz. If Williams prevails this work may well be the cause of it.

The rights after 10 years may well have reverted. If so this means it could be available for quality paperback reprint, probably also with new information added.

I know Jeff as a fine person and a fine, careful reporter. He is temporarily back with the LA Times on its San Fernando Valley edition. ^{His} 818/772-3200.

I write in haste on the chance that if ~~there~~ ^{this} seems of possible interest and is available, perhaps you'll get it before David returns. Jeff sent me the copy of the book and I suppose could give David one.

Best to you all,

Harry

Wayne Williams And 'The List'

By Jeff Prugh

On February 10 and 12, CBS television will broadcast a mini-series titled "The Atlanta Child Murders." The program, which features an all-star cast including Martin Sheen, Jason Robards and James Earl Jones, seems likely to rekindle memories of one of the worst periods in Atlanta's history, that stretch between 1979 and 1981 when police sought to solve the 28 killings that made the official list.

Along with the memories, the national airing of this show is also likely to raise a more fundamental question: was Wayne Williams really guilty of the killings?

Jeff Prugh, formerly the *Los Angeles Times*' correspondent in Atlanta, covered the ongoing story of the missing and murdered children and young adults. Along with Chet Dettlinger, an ex-assistant to the Atlanta chief of police, Prugh wrote a book about the case, titled *The List*. As he reported the events and researched the book, he became increasingly skeptical about how the investigation was conducted and whether Wayne Williams was, indeed, the multiple murderer that the prosecution and the press portrayed.

What follows is his personal assessment.

At night, Wayne Bertram Williams — convicted killer of two adult ex-convicts — sleeps in a one-person cell at the Georgia Diagnostic and Classification Center in Jackson. By day, he works in the prison's general population. He does clerical chores that are galaxies removed from the dreams he chased, but never reached — dreams of bright lights and big bucks and streets paved in platinum — as a would-be pop-music promoter.

He seems outrageously miscast as the guy whose interrogation by the FBI provoked a *New York Post* headline: "ATLANTA MONSTER SEIZED." He hardly looks the part of the only person convicted in the murders of young Atlanta blacks between mid-1979 and mid-1981 — a crime spree that traumatized the city, tugged at heartstrings around the world and ranks among the worst in American history, if not the most publicized string of killings since Jack the Ripper.

Wayne Williams stands all of 5 feet, 7½ inches, and wears thick glasses that make his eyes and cheekbones appear disproportionately small for the rest of his features. He looks as if Central Casting discovered him in chem lab. He could be a stand-in for Gary Coleman.

He is 26 now, this enigmatic wisp of a

fellow, whom many in the news media still erroneously call a "convicted child killer" and whom prosecutors, in final arguments, called a "mad-dog killer." In his prison whites, Williams appears thinner than the familiar profile he cut at 23, back when he was a pudgy suspect with a bushy Afro, convicted of killing two other black men: Nathaniel Cater, 27, and Jimmy Ray Payne, 21. This month, Williams will begin serving the fourth year of two consecutive life terms for first-degree murder.

Is Wayne Williams the "Atlanta Monster"? Did he really, as a jury decided, kill those two victims? And is he responsible for the deaths of 22 more victims (most of them children) whose cases were "cleared by arrest" after the trial and blamed officially on Williams?

From where I sit, the verdict is "not guilty." The system succeeded only in persuading a jury to find Williams guilty; in my opinion, it failed to prove guilt beyond a "reasonable doubt."

"Reasonable doubt." The words are chiseled so deeply into this saga that they stand as an epitaph to an investigation mishandled, a mystery unsolved, a nightmare in which murders of young Atlanta blacks did *not* stop when Wayne Williams went to jail. It's a litany of questions the police did *not* ask, evidence the

jury did *not* hear, news the media did *not* report. It's a "rap sheet" of police sloppiness, evidence lost, death certificates altered, cops trying to arrest one boy months *after* he turned up dead, skeletal remains mixed up.

At Wayne Williams' trial in 1982, no one testified that he saw Williams harm anyone. No one testified that he saw Williams stop on a bridge, let alone throw anything into the Chattahoochee River (where a police recruit on stake-out duty had sworn he heard a "splash"). No witnesses testified that they knew where or when or how the victims died.

The case against Williams is entirely circumstantial; it hangs precariously on fiber evidence. Consider, too, evidence that the jury didn't hear, to wit:

Eyewitnesses had told authorities they saw some victims killed by persons *other* than Wayne Williams. It says so in the authorities' own reports. Example: in the case of 13-year-old Clifford Jones, a visitor from Cleveland who was strangled with a yellow rope at a northwest Atlanta coin laundry, police documents show that there were five eyewitnesses, all of whom knew the suspect — a black male in his late 20s.

The suspect was not arrested in this case. One officer wanted to make an arrest, but he was rebuffed. It was explained that one eyewitness was retarded. The boy's case now is closed. It is one of those 22 "cleared by arrest" cases officially charged to Wayne Williams, based on "fiber evidence."

There are those who think Williams won't survive in prison or on the street. They contend that the guilty verdict was, in its own way, a death sentence — one the state didn't seek, but one that presumably will be carried out some way, someday, by somebody.

"Do you fear for your life?" an interviewer asks Williams.

"No . . . I put my trust in God. That's all anybody can do. I've been threatened."

Interestingly, Williams' interviewer, too, became a suspect in Atlanta's murders. He was questioned briefly by police in the spring of 1981 — one month be-

fore Williams fell into their laps, and became the primary suspect.

His name is Chet Dettlinger, 49, a white former assistant to the Atlanta chief of police and an ex-U.S. Justice Department consultant. The Louisville born ex-cop wears a beard and has a meticulous eye for detail. He learned so much about the cases that some police officials and FBI agents had asked for his help, some reporters had invited him to brief their editors and news departments, and Wayne Williams' lawyers would ask Dettlinger to sit at the defense table during Williams' trial.

Dettlinger began investigating Atlanta's killings voluntarily in the summer of 1980, when some victims' mothers complained that Atlanta had a problem with murdered children — while public officials said they saw no problem. That was before then-Public Safety Commissioner Lee Brown, amid severe community pressure, formed a special police investigative unit called the "Atlanta Metropolitan Task Force on Missing and Murdered Children."

Dettlinger's stock-in-trade is asking questions nobody else asks — and finding forests when everyone else is looking only for trees. When then-Mayor Maynard Jackson and Commissioner Brown insisted that the task force was leaving "no stone unturned," Dettlinger looked under boulders and rocks that the police missed.

What he found was enough material to fill a book (which he asked me to help him write) — a book called *The List*. The book minces no words. Using police files and lab reports, *The List* attacks the investigation and raises doubts about Wayne Williams' guilt.

Worse yet, it documents *more* unsolved killings of children and young adults than those assigned to an official list of cases investigated by the task force. Thus, Atlanta's tragedy was worse — in numbers — than what our public officials told us. These additional victims, who made nobody's list, were just as missing — and just as murdered — as those who made *The List*.

Tell just about anyone that you think Wayne Williams might not be guilty, and the response almost inevitably is: "But . . . the murders stopped, right?"

Wrong. The question is: *Which* murders? It was *The List* — not the murders — that stopped when Williams went to jail in June of 1981. To make *The List* (which ended with 28 murder victims, all but two of them males; all but five of them children), a victim had to be age 7 to 27, male, female, killed by stabbing, or shooting, or ligature strangulation, or manual strangulation, or suffocation, or bludgeoning, or "unknown" causes (changed later, in some cases, to "probable asphyxia," which means nothing more than a victim probably stopped breathing).

The only constant thread of *The List* was that all its victims were black. So, if you use the arbitrary age, sex, race and cause-of-death parameters that Lee Brown used in compiling *The List*, no one can really say those kinds of murder cases ever stop. When asked why some victims were not on *The List*, Brown replied that they weren't "connected" to those on *The List*. But then, he said, illogically, that cases on *The List* weren't connected to each other, either.

Without valid parameters, then, *The List* of cases was so narrow that it distorted the world's view of what was happening in Atlanta. Chet Dettlinger and I, using police reports to the FBI and medical examiners' reports, counted at least 63 *more* victims who fit the same criteria as those 28 who made *The List*. Of those 63, at least 22 turned up dead after Williams went to jail.

Consider:

- April 8, 1984: The body of a black male — identified as 17-year-old Darrell Davis — is found murdered along Sylvan Road. Davis, who had an extensive criminal record as a juvenile, had given some of the most damaging testimony against Wayne Williams at the trial.

- Within a month after Wayne Williams went to jail, 21-year-old Stanley Murray is found shot to death near the streetcorner where 13-year-old Curtis Walker (who had made *The List*) was last reported alive. Lee Brown would insist that murder cases after Williams' arrest had no connection whatsoever to those before the arrest. But Stanley Murray was young Curtis Walker's uncle. Both had lived in the same Bowen Homes apartment!

Chet Dettlinger, whose role in the CBS movie will be played by Martin Sheen, had tried to give the story to the police and press. When he found no takers, he had no other choice but to start work on *The List* before the world had ever heard of Wayne Williams. He conceived this book not to reopen a murder case, but to open our minds — to remind us that what we see on "Quincy" and "Hill Street Blues" is not what we got in the real world of policing the Atlanta murders.

Still, some Atlantans react to him as if he were toxic. The *Atlanta Journal and Constitution* have declined to review *The List* or to address the issues it raises about our police and press. The Butler Street YMCA's Hungry Club Forum, a respected, predominantly black community-affairs group, recently cancelled a scheduled address by Dettlinger. The group's leader said it would be "too controversial." Dettlinger responds: "What are they afraid of hearing? And who's afraid to hear it?"

In prison, meanwhile, Wayne Williams pursues his appeal for a day in federal court, still in quest of freedom, still insisting that "the only thing I've killed is a roach in my cell." ■

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CC†

'63 SCHOOL DOOR STAND

U.S. Could Have Avoided Wallace Confrontation

BY JEFF PRUGH

Times Staff Writer

TUSCALOOSA, Ala.—On this date 15 years ago, Alabama Gov. George C. Wallace, his jaw jutting and lips pursed, stood resolutely in a University of Alabama doorway in an apparent attempt to block two black students from enrolling at the then segregated institution.

That tense confrontation between Wallace and the federal government ended peacefully when Wallace stepped aside after being informed that President John F. Kennedy had issued an order federalizing about 500 Alabama National Guard troops, who had stood by in combat readiness.

It has been assessed by many as the event that did most to polish Wallace's segregationist, states' rights image and to launch his ventures into national politics over the ensuing decade.

But what most Americans never knew was that the two students, Vivian J. Malone and James A. Hood, actually had been admitted to the university the previous day, June 10, 1963. That is shown in the school's records and confirmed in interviews with the two students and Dr. Frank A. Rose, then president of the university.

Their advance registration—done privately in a Birmingham federal courthouse 60 miles east of here—made Wallace's fulfillment of a promise to "stand in the schoolhouse door" meaningless, in the opinion of some critics.

"This has bothered me a great deal . . . I sometimes get the feeling that I was being used," Vivian Malone, now Vivian Jones, 35, told The Times in Atlanta, explaining that she and Hood had been told only that they were being pre-enrolled for their personal safety.

Nicholas D. Katzenbach, who then was deputy U.S. attorney general and who had confronted Wallace on the students' behalf at the door to the registration hall, said last week in a

Please Turn to Page 16, Col. 1



IN DOORWAY—Gov. George C. Wallace as he tried to bar blacks from entering university.

AP Photo

U.S. Could Have Avoided Confrontation With Wallace: Blacks Had Preregistered

Continued from First Page

telephone interview that he had not been aware that the students had been admitted in advance. "If I knew it, I don't now recall it," he said.

However, Katzenbach said also that the Department of Justice, under the leadership of Atty. Gen. Robert F. Kennedy, had permitted Wallace to "have his show."

Katzenbach added that Robert Kennedy had told him to allow Wallace a temporary show of defiance in hopes of averting violence similar to that which had occurred during the enrollment of James H. Meredith, the first black to attend the University of Mississippi, in September, 1962.

"I suggested to Bob Kennedy, 'Why go through with it?' They could have registered and just shown up in their classrooms," Katzenbach said. "But Bob told me, 'I don't know what (Wallace will) do if we don't go through with it and let him have his show. I don't trust him. There might be violence.' Really, there was no way of predicting how he'd react."

Katzenbach described as "flatly wrong" published assertions in recent years that the federal government had staged the incident. However, one internal Department of Justice memo dated June 8, 1963, and recently made available to The Times, contained elaborate planning, including the use of walkie-talkies and other radios, intelligence reports, a U.S. Border Patrol surveillance airplane and six Border Patrol cars transporting the two students, U.S. deputy marshals and other federal officials.

The memo, prepared by John W. Cameron, then deputy chief U.S. marshal, included a plan for an escape in a U.S. Army Corps of Engineers motorboat, if necessary, along the nearby Black Warrior River. The plan contained a touch of humor.

"... If it becomes necessary to flee, cars 1 and 2 will reload and take the students to the Army Engineers motorboat. Cars 5 and 6 will escort cars 1 and 2. . . . Car 6 will be left parked across the entrance to the dirt road escape route as a roadblock and the occupants thereof will run for the boat. If the boat is full—swim for it!"

Katzenbach, who was assigned to car No. 1 with Vivian Malone, insisted that "the governor was staging stuff; we were not."

"I remember stopping at a shopping center to return a phone call from Bob Kennedy," he said, "and he reminded me to 'make him (Wallace) look silly. That's what the President wants.' It was totally meaningless, other than how the governor would act if he didn't have his little charade."

The outspoken governor had vowed to defy a federal court order and to fulfill his inaugural promise of "Segregation now, segregation tomorrow, segregation forever!"

Wallace, whose current term as governor will expire in January, refused to be interviewed for this article.

But the governor denied in an interview on the CBS television program 60 Minutes that his stand in the school-house door had been a "publicity stunt."

"No, sir," he said. "It was a way to emphatically let the people know the position that we were taking and to give a warning of things to come. And since that time, the great hue and cry among politicians in both parties is: 'The federal government is too big.' Big government. They've taken over our lives."

Meanwhile, other principals in the incident have spoken with candor about events leading up to the so-called showdown, which was watched by millions on national television.

"I remember that when I registered and picked out my classes and professors, I wondered, 'Why should I have to go through it all again tomorrow?'" Mrs. Jones said in Atlanta, where she is director of the Voter Education Project, which works for the registration of black voters across the South.

"But we were too far into it by then. We were not in a position to question any plans by the Department of Justice. And my lawyers said, 'This is for your safety.' What was uppermost in my mind was my mental anguish, my personal safety and my ambitions of just getting into the university, as opposed to the philosophical reason for Gov. Wallace standing there, or the federal government being there."

"Mrs. Jones said she had had doubts about the incident after she became the university's first black graduate in 1965 and went to work for the Justice Department's Civil Rights Division as a research analyst in Washington.

"I looked around and saw how very few black people there were in the Justice Department," she said. "It just didn't add up. . . . I was disillusioned about the Justice Department, which I had trusted before. I left after only about three months. At the same time, I saw how well Gov. Wallace did in Indiana and the other primaries in the North in 1964. It seemed that he was trying to prove that people in the North can be as racist as people in the South."

Hood, 35, who said he planned some day to return to Alabama and run for governor, left the university after two months because of threats against him. He moved to Detroit, where he was graduated from Wayne State University, became a Methodist clergyman, worked in urban youth programs, campaigned for Detroit Mayor Coleman Young and now is a deputy chief of police.

Hood said that all registration arrangements except formal payment of tuition and room and board had been completed June 10 in the Birmingham chambers of U.S. Dist. Judge Seybourn H. Lynne, who had issued an injunction forbidding Wallace to obstruct "by any means" the entry of the students.

"We were told that this was to avoid the atrocities that took place at Ole Miss," he said in a telephone interview. "I don't think the governor was aware we had preregistered. No one from the governor's office was there."

"When we left the courthouse that day, I was under the impression that the governor was not going to go through with standing in the door. But later that night we found out that he was going through with it. . . . No, nothing gave me any indication then that we were being pawns. I still don't feel that way."

One of Hood's and Mrs. Jones' attorneys, Arthur Shores of Birmingham, said he did not recall if the students had been preregistered. Another attorney, Fred Gray of Tuskegee, who also worked on the case, said in an interview, "I'm quite sure his standing in the door had nothing to do with their enrollment. That was a matter between Wallace and Katzenbach. . . ."

When informed that Mrs. Jones had questioned recently whether she had been used in the confrontation, Rose, the former president of the university, chose his words carefully.

"We did not want to use those students," he said. "Yes, one can say they were used, in one sense. But they did break a historic tradition and cleared the way for better education in the South. If that hadn't been broken, I'm afraid that the South might have waffled on this question of desegregation for another decade."