

# The Hunt drama's other player

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In reality, it happened in the early afternoon of Aug. 22, 1984. "I was coming from the (Samaritan) Soup Kitchen (on Patterson Avenue) and I stopped at the poolroom on Trade Street," Thomas said. With a nickel bag of marijuana in his pocket and some bourbon, he sat down with "six black guys" who were drinking vodka. He drank with them.

"One of the guys sat down beside me and said, 'Ain't you the guy I seen over there with that girl? Ain't you the guy I seen kill that girl?'" Thomas said.

That person was Johnny Gray (alias, McConnell), who later became the prosecution's chief witness in Hunt's murder trial. Gray was referring to the person he had seen assaulting Mrs. Sykes on the day of the murder.

"I told him, 'Hell no,'" Thomas said.

Thomas said Gray became angry and said, "You a m---f----g lie."

Thomas said he didn't want any trouble, so he decided to leave.

Two blocks later, Thomas said he boarded a bus headed for Hanes Mall. As the bus circled the block, the police stopped it in front of the Wachovia Building on Main Street. Gray had approached an officer near the bus stop to tell him that Thomas was involved in the murder of Mrs. Sykes.

Thomas said the officer boarded the bus, came back to his seat and told him to get up.

"He said he had orders to bring me in for suspicion of murder," Thomas said.

"I relaxed then," he said. "I knew then I only had to worry about the reefer."

Thomas said he had heard about the murder of Deborah Sykes on television and knew the police were looking for two black males -- one of them tall. Thomas is about 6 feet, 2 inches tall.

"Because I'm tall, I figured I'd be picked up," he said.

He was taken to a detective's office on the second floor of City Hall.

"They had me sitting in a room," Thomas said. "Johnny Gray was sitting just outside the door, about as far away as that pole," he added, motioning toward a pole less than 15 feet away.

When asked about his involvement, Thomas said he told the officers there was no way he could have killed Mrs. Sykes.

"I told them I had an iron-clad alibi -- I was in jail across the street," Thomas said, referring to the Forsyth County Jail. Two officers took him across the street and confirmed his story, he said.

Thomas said he was cited for marijuana possession and let go. He said he was picked up between 2:30 and 3:30 p.m. and released around 6:15 p.m.

One of the officers who interrogated Thomas was Detective James I. Daulton, the chief investigator of the murder. Daulton testified during the trial that Gray never identified Thomas, but only said Thomas resembled the murderer.

However, the transcript of an interview of Gray by Daulton and officer W.G. Miller, conducted

on the day of Thomas' arrest, reveals Gray saying, "On the word of my mom and dad, on myself as being a man," that he would be willing to go to court and swear that Thomas was the man he saw committing the crime.

Additionally, Miller has admitted since the trial that Gray identified Thomas on the day in question. Miller said he took Thomas to the county jail to be identified only because Gray had said Thomas was Mrs. Sykes' murderer. Miller has also said Daulton was present during the identification.

"They shouldn't have tried that man (Hunt) with the little evidence they had," Thomas said. "I knew Johnny Gray was lying. If he misidentified me, why not misidentify somebody else?"

"He could've been using me or somebody to cover up for somebody else," Thomas surmised. "It could've been a friend of his or something."

Thomas said he should have been called to testify.

"Why didn't they bring me to court?" he said. "Because the statement he made to me at the poolroom would've proven that he identified me. 'He was sure -- or he wouldn't have been so bold at the poolroom.'"

A city manager's review of the police handling of the case contends that Thomas was con-

sidered a suspect in Mrs. Sykes' murder, and that he is the person Johnny Gray pointed out to the officer at the bus stop downtown on Aug. 22.

A subsequent internal investigation of the police's handling of the Hunt case has led to Daulton's demotion to a civilian job in the police communications room.

He was stripped of his police certificate for giving "deceptive testimony" on the witness stand during the trial, and for "unbecoming and unsatisfactory" behavior.

According to police records, Daulton's demotion was not based on his testimony about Gray's misidentification of Thomas.

Meanwhile, Hunt's attorneys have filed motions in the state Supreme Court to have Hunt's conviction overturned. They say "massive prosecutorial misconduct," including Thomas' misidentification, were covered up at Hunt's trial. They also say that Miller is the most important witness who did not testify at the trial.

Hunt is serving a life sentence and Thomas, who quit school after the 10th grade, says he is concentrating on bettering himself.

"It would be wonderful if I could learn computers," he said, "something that would help me."

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## Panel

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conditioning of a group of people.

"We need to ask, 'Why have these young men given up?'" Huntley said of the young, unwed black fathers depicted in the documentary.

Dr. William Turner, who teaches in the social sciences department at WSSU, agreed, saying the program failed to discuss any of the history involved in the current status of the black family. Turner suggested that viewers put the program in a broader, historical context.

"The film is a little more entertaining and shocking than informative," Turner said. "A short 150 years ago, the state of North Carolina forbade black people to get married. If you don't put the film into a total context, the meaning isn't as strong. We can't just look at it as a film that makes us gnash our teeth and wring our hands."

Profiles of single parents in the documentary suggest that increasing numbers of black people are content to turn to welfare for financial support. Louise G. Wilson, retired director of Experiment in Self-Reliance and a member of the panel, said that isn't always true.

"I, too, once felt that people were on welfare because they wanted to be, but when I became involved I found that that isn't always the case," Mrs. Wilson said. "Many of them say they don't want welfare. They get \$197 a month. What are you going to do with \$197 when you've got to pay rent if you're not in subsidized housing? You've got to buy food and clothes for your children. It doesn't go very far."

The Moyers documentary also pointed out that more than half of all black families are headed by single women. But the panelists said the film neglected to discuss one of the causes of that statistic -- black male unemployment.

"Everyone asks, 'Where's the man?'" That's what everybody wants to know," said Mrs. Wilson. "He's hiding so the social workers don't know he's living with his family. He can't get a job and he can't stay at the house because the family will lose the money. If we respected him, we'd offer him training to help

him get on his feet. If he's not made to assume his responsibility, is he to be blamed?"

Dr. Turner said unemployment has historically been a problem for blacks. Citing the findings of a major study, Turner said, "Every 25 years since slavery, either the majority group has asked, 'What are we going to do with black people?' or there has been a war going on. People do not, and have not, had jobs."

The Rev. Carlton A.G. Eversley, pastor of Dellabrook Presbyterian Church and one of the more outspoken members of the panel, traced the cause of the crisis in black families even deeper.

"The first thing we need to say is that racism is the problem," said Eversley, who was raised in the Bedford-Stuyvesant community in New York. "It's a fact that old, white, rich males run the world. There is a major problem with the self-esteem level of black males."

Eversley said the documentary was a "good report" and called Moyer a "good reporter." He also voiced concern over what he termed the "abdication of the white community's responsibility for the total community."

The panel cautioned viewers against feeling the film depicted isolated incidents and offered suggestions for a plan of action to reverse the trend in the black family.

"I look at the film as a black mother and as a citizen of Forsyth County," Mrs. Wilson said. "While the film is about New Jersey, I would have to talk about Forsyth County. Rest assured that some of the same things are happening in North Carolina and in Winston-Salem. I challenge all of you to let these young people know that someone cares. We need to have workshops with parents and work with them in parenting their children."

Eversley suggested that blacks begin to assume responsibility for healing their own wounds.

"There are some things that we can and must do for ourselves," he said. "There is a litany of black complaints that says, 'We are so abused.' I'm not 10 years away from my teen-age years and

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