

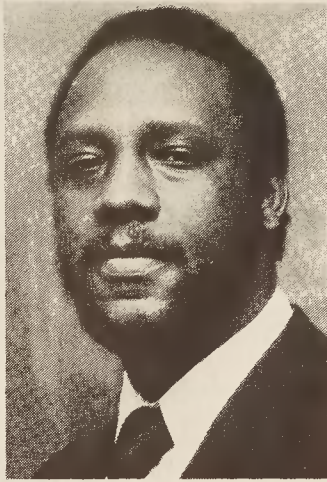
The Darryl Hunt trial: The verdict is in, but questions still linger

The recent attacks made on the professional and personal conduct of Alderman Larry D. Little during the Deborah Sykes murder trial by District Attorney Donald Tisdale and two letter writers to the *Winston-Salem Journal* are remarkable only in that their insensitivity was surpassed by their callousness.

My estimation, and the estimation of thousands of people in the black and white communities of Winston-Salem, is that Little's behavior has been extremely competent, if not heroic. As the pastor of the church that Alderman Little attends, I'm quite proud of him for three basic reasons.

First is the sanctity of human life. Larry Little was the first and most pronounced exponent of this principle which all Christians profess. That is to say, the life of Darryl Eugene Hunt, though not lived in a style which most of us would hold up as ideal, is still sacred in the eyes of God, who created us all. Where were those on the so-called "religious right," the alleged "Moral Majority" and others who say they are so urgently "pro-life" when it comes to protecting fetuses in utero but who seem blithely unconcerned about the safeguarding of black male life after it has lived 19 or 20 years?

Second, but most importantly, the equity of human life. Little's investigation was crucial in raising the following questions and making the following points: Can we conceive of any possible scenario in which a white man accused of rape and murder of a black woman would be tried in front of a jury of 11 blacks and one white? Was it actually possible for this jury to presume Hunt's innocence and put the burden of proof on the prosecution? If a black woman were the victim and a white man the accused, would the district attorney have gone to trial with absolutely no physical evidence -- no matching blood or semen samples, no



Larry Little

fingerprints, fingernails or hair samples, no murder weapon, no bloody clothes or muddy clothes or grassy clothes, etc.? How credible are the "witnesses" that Assistant District Attorney Richard Lyle cited as the sum total of the state's "case" against Darryl Eugene Hunt?

First, Thomas Murphy, the "ex" Ku Klux Klansman, had between 1.5 and 2.5 seconds on the morning of Friday, Aug. 10, to see half a black man's face and half a white woman's face. He didn't recognize the woman as Deborah Sykes, whom he'd seen each morning Monday through Thursday. He did note to a co-worker that morning that he wondered what a pretty white woman was doing with a black man and inquired about the nature of their possible offspring. It now seems he can positively identify Darryl Hunt, though he'd never seen him before in his life.

Most upsetting of all is the state's featuring of Johnny Gray as its "chief witness" and the only eyewitness to the actual murder. Gray's real name is Johnny McConnell. On Aug. 10 he called the police at 6:53 a.m. and said, "My name is Sammy Mitchell, I want to report an acci-

THE GUEST COLUMN

By REV. CARLTON A.G. EVERSLEY

dent." No name is requested when calling the police in such a situation. McConnell/Gray testified that he knew no one named Sammy Mitchell, didn't know Sammy Mitchell is Darryl Hunt's best friend and just made up the name Sammy Mitchell because he didn't want to get involved. In fact he did not get involved by revealing his "true" identity to the police until two weeks after the murder, at which time a reward of over \$12,000 was being offered. Gray says he saw a man 6 feet 2 or 6 feet 3 inches tall and weighing between 170 and 175 pounds beating a woman in the face. There were no facial bruises on Ms. Sykes' body. He testified that he didn't see a murder weapon, though she was stabbed at least 15 times.

Darryl Hunt is 5 feet 10 inches tall, 145 pounds. Gray's ex-girlfriend testified that he told her that day that he didn't know if the attacker was black or white. His ex-housemate testified that Gray told him he didn't see who made the attack.

Gray also identified for the police a man named Terry Thomas as the killer; Thomas is closer to Gray's description. Fortunately for Mr. Thomas, he was in jail at the time of Ms. Sykes' murder.

Gray, in a lineup where Darryl Hunt was No. 4, was told to write the number of the murderer. He wrote "1-4." Detective J.I. Dalton testified that Gray told him he meant by this that "the No. 1 one suspect is No. 4."

Gray did not identify any "No. 2, 3 or 4 suspects;" he never intended to do so, nor was he asked to. His girlfriend testified in court that Gray told her that he wasn't sure whether the person he thought was the murderer was No. 1, a light-skinned black man, or Hunt, who is dark-skinned.

Gray, charged with felony robbery, was in jail under a \$50,000 bond for most of the Hunt trial. After he testified, before the trial ended, he was released on his own recognizance. Dalton testified that Gray had been given at least \$200 by the police before the trial. Is this the kind of evidence that should be used to snatch life or liberty permanently away from another human being?

The state's third "witness" was Roger Weaver, the Hyatt House employee who believes he saw Hunt that morning and that Hunt left bloody paper towels and stains in the bathroom. Weaver did not mention this to the police immediately. He asked a good friend to reconstruct events in his (Weaver's) mind.

Weaver did not approach the authorities until late September or early October. He did not identify Darryl Hunt in a lineup

"... The God of justice will not sleep while the innocent are imprisoned and the arrogant remain in office."

until May 13, after Hunt's name and face had been splashed all over local newspapers and television screens. Dalton testified that the reason for this delay was due to the fact that he and Weaver work two different shifts.

Fourth, the state alleges that Margaret Marie Crawford, Hunt's 14-year-old white ex-girlfriend, who's been a prostitute since age 11, signed statements that might tend to imply Hunt's involvement or knowledge of the crime. She says that the police asked for a sample of her signature and then attached the statements above it.

Contrary to Lyle's closing argument, people defending Hunt don't want to believe Crawford lied if she signed these

statements and is telling the truth now when her sworn testimony is that Hunt is innocent. We choose to believe the psychiatric evaluation of Crawford, which says that she is unable to tell the truth consistently about anything and should therefore be summarily discounted as any kind of witness for either side.

Again we must ask whether it is fair to take away Darryl Hunt's personal freedom for life on the "strength" of such conflicting testimony from a girl with the personal problems Crawford has.

That is the basic summation of *The People of N.C. vs. Darryl Eugene Hunt*, which Larry Little has played such a pivotal role in uncovering.

Finally, there's the brevity of life. Darryl Hunt's life -- all of our lives -- is too short to spend all, half or any part of it imprisoned for a crime he did not commit. Little's dedication to preventing such an outcome should be commended, not condemned.

In closing, I must address some

questions to District Attorney Tisdale and the recent *Journal* letter writers. Why didn't Tisdale deny Hunt's allegation that the district attorney offered him \$12,000 to implicate Sammy Mitchell? Did Tisdale offer Hunt a plea bargain of second-degree murder during the jury's deliberation of the verdict? Does anyone believe Johnny Gray/McConnell just happened to make up the name Sammy Mitchell, which is what brought Darryl Hunt into the picture in the first place?

Does anyone believe Dalton's report of Gray saying that "1-4" means "the No. 1 suspect is No. 4?" Why did Dalton attempt to deny that Gray had identified Terry Thomas as the murderer?

Is there no "reasonable doubt" that Darryl Eugene Hunt murdered Deborah Brotherton Sykes on Aug. 10, 1984?

Further, and perhaps more importantly, do you believe black people will sit idly by while a white-dominated criminal justice system snatches any ol' body to satisfy a societal need for vengeance for a brutal crime? Do you mistakenly believe there are no white people of good will who will stand up for truth no matter what the price in popularity? Do you mistakenly believe you can intimidate, harass, silence or discredit Alderman Little in the eyes of the black community, which esteems him as a leader without peer and a fighter for positive things without equal?

Are you so foolish as not to realize you only serve to heighten Little's visibility and credibility amongst his constituency, including Hunt as an individual and thousands of blacks and whites of good will philosophically, by your snide and crude tactics? Does the level of smugness within your office rise to the height of feeling above investigation yourself?

And finally, do you have no faith that the God of justice will not sleep while the innocent are imprisoned and the arrogant remain in office?

The Rev. Carlton A.G. Eversley is the pastor of Dellabrook Presbyterian Church in Winston-Salem.

FROM MY POINT OF VIEW
By Allen Johnson

Allen Johnson is on vacation getting other points of view. His column will appear again on this page next week.

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