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Simple Justice-Introduction to the case

🛅 January 20, 2015 💹 Justice Project 📄 UW Tacoma Justice Project 📜 No comments



This is the first in a series on the murder of Julius Williams and the subsequent conviction of Irvin Carter Jr. To read the rest of the series as it's published each Monday, visit thetacomaledger.com.

By Eva Revear, Joanna Sappenfield, Danielle Burch, Chelsea Vitone, and Brittany Hale

Jessica Williams remembers getting a call in early September 2006 from her mother-in-law, who was shaken up after dreaming the previous night that her son had been murdered.

"She was like that, all spiritual, prophetic," she said. Prompted by the dream, Jessica went to search for her 24-year-old husband, Julius Williams.

She hadn't seen him for a few weeks: He'd moved out and started living with someone new, and she'd filed a protection order against him alleging that he threatened and physically abused her. Around the same time he also left the Army: He was set to deploy to Iraq with his unit, but went AWOL because he didn't want to go to war, Jessica said.

Jessica said she found Julius playing basketball in the Hilltop. He told her he loved her and would report for duty the following Monday. That was the last time she saw him.

On Sept. 8, 2006 Williams' body was found on the sidewalk of Bryant Elementary School, shot five times – once in the front, four times in the back. He'd avoided the dangers of war only to become a victim of street violence in his own neighborhood. The investigation quickly focused on Williams' friend, Irvin Carter Jr. Williams' new girlfriend told police she heard him talking loudly with Carter that night outside her apartment, and anonymous tips rolled in that he had shot "J-Dub." Within days, the lead detective sent the state crime lab a bullet from a shooting in Carter's home in which he was the victim four months earlier and two bullets recovered from Williams' body. A day later, the results came back: The bullets were fired from the same weapon. A month after the homicide,

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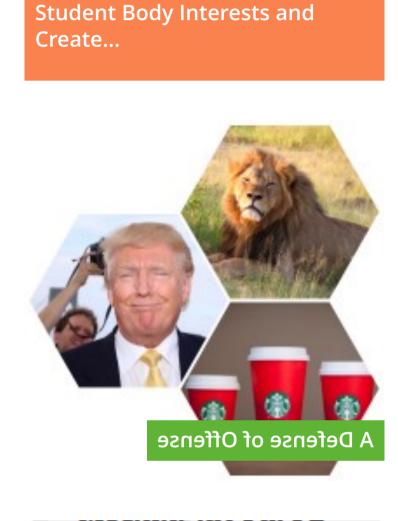
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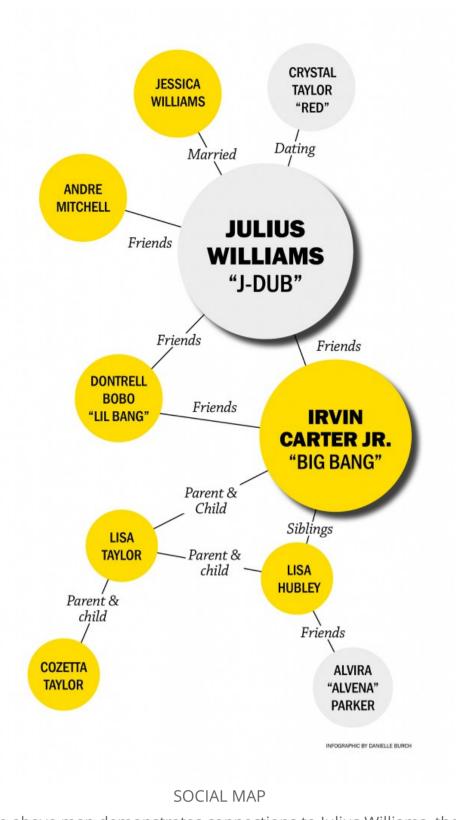
The Good:

- · There's plenty of action and drama.
- · The actors are all great as the characters you love.

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to tell what's going on.





The above map demonstrates connections to Julius Williams, the deceased, and Irvin Carter Jr.

Yellow circles denote sources we were able to contact and who agreed to be interviewed for this story.

Infographic by Danielle Burch

police stumbled on an eyewitness who said he saw the whole thing.

Two years and two trials later, Carter was convicted of the murder and sentenced to 39 years 8 months in prison. Judge Thomas Felnagle said, "if there ever was a murder that could be described as senseless, it is this one." Carter, now 31, has always maintained his innocence.

A five-month investigation by the UWT Justice Project raises questions about the evidence used to convict Carter. The prosecution's only eyewitness has changed the details of his story repeatedly, including in recent interviews with UWT Justice Project reporters. Prosecutors told jurors that in May, Carter shot himself with his own gun while cleaning it, though a woman admitted to shooting Carter in a 911 call. And jurors were told that the bullets from the two shootings definitely came from the same gun, although without a weapon experts say that's difficult to prove: Some courts have limited how ballistics evidence can be presented over the past decade to reflect that lack of scientific certainty.

As reported earlier by the UWT Justice

Project, the lead investigator in the case has said he's taking another look at it and plans to interview Williams' wife based on information she first shared with the project's student reporters.

The student-led investigation included reviewing more than 2,500 pages of court and police documents and interviewing dozens of people— some of whom did not cooperate with police but agreed to be interviewed by UWT Justice Project reporters.

THE NIGHT OF THE MURDER

On Sept. 7, 2006, Williams and his new girlfriend "Red," whose legal name is Crystal Taylor, were at her apartment in Tacoma's Hilltop getting ready to go out to a nightclub, according to Taylor's testimony.

At about 8:30 or 9 p.m., Carter showed up at the apartment, according to both Taylor and Carter's police interviews.

From there, their stories diverge: Carter said he stopped by to see his friend and left a few minutes later to go home because he had to work the next morning. Carter said he never saw his friend again. Taylor, however, testified that Carter was talking loudly with Williams about something she couldn't hear, then Williams changed his plans with her and left with Carter.

At about 11:30 p.m., a man called 911 to report five or six shots fired near Bryant Elementary School. Police responded to the neighborhood but didn't see anyone with a gun. They stopped a transient near the school later identified as Anthony Lyons and found a crack pipe on him. He was arrested and booked in jail for an outstanding warrant.

Around 2:30 a.m., Taylor returned from the club expecting to find Williams at her apartment. He wasn't there, so she drove around looking for him.

Carter and Taylor both told police that she knocked on Carter's window and woke him up before 3 a.m. He said he told her he had left J-Dub at her place earlier that night and hadn't seen him since, and she left.

A school employee found Williams' body the next morning at 6:30 on the sidewalk of Bryant Elementary School near where South 7th and South Grant Avenue meet. He called 911 and the

1.Peanuts is 65 Years Old To the younger generation, who may be confused about Peanuts. For those of you relating it to a healthy nutty snack, rather than a beloved cartoon classic. This is because Peanuts is a pretty old franchise. The Peanut...

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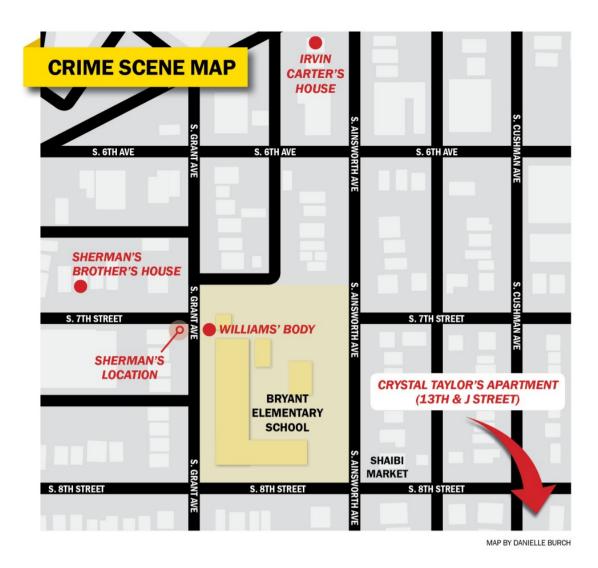
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area was blocked off the so children in their first week of school wouldn't see the body.

THE POLICE INVESTIGATION

Lead detective Brian Vold quickly focused on Julius's friend, Irvin Carter Jr., a former Hilltop gang member with a criminal history of selling cocaine and owning illegal firearms.

Taylor told police about
Carter's visit to her
apartment. Police also
received calls reporting that
"Bang" or "Big Bang" had
shot "J-Dub." Vold
remembered that Carter's
gang name included the
word "bang" from an



unrelated investigation two years earlier.

On Sept. 11, Vold sent the state crime lab a bullet from a shooting four months earlier in which Carter was the victim and two bullets recovered from Williams' body. The determination came back the next day: The bullets were fired from the same weapon, according to Terry Franklin at the Washington State Patrol Crime Lab.

As police followed up on the phoned-in tips, many of them fizzled: Several callers were acquaintances of Taylor's who were reporting what she'd already told police and then shared with them. Others refused to talk or denied calling.

It wasn't until a month later that police stumbled on an eyewitness who said he saw the whole thing. Jelvis Sherman, a then-39-year-old self-described alcoholic with two traumatic brain injuries who also took methadone and smoked a powerful type of marijuana called "purple haze" regularly, described the scene to police in detail. Sherman described three men involved—a shooter, a lookout and another man who provided the gun to the shooter. He identified Carter as the shooter and Anthony Lyons, the transient, as the lookout from police lineup photos. He did not identify anyone in a third photo lineup as the man who provided the gun.

A SWAT team searched Carter's home on Oct. 10 and police brought him in for an interview. Carter told Vold that he'd seen Williams earlier the night of the murder but left to go to bed at about 9. He said he found out about his friend's death the next day from his grandma, who saw it on the news. Carter was arrested after the police interview.

At the first trial, which started in April 2008, Carter and Lyons were charged as co-defendants. Carter was represented by Mary Kay High, chief deputy of the Pierce County Public Defender's Office, and Clarence Henderson, another public defender. Lyons was represented by Michael Schwartz, a private attorney.

Prosecutors argued that Carter had lent Williams a Tec-9 handgun and Williams didn't return it, which enraged Carter and led him to kill Williams. They said Lyons served as a lookout.

Carter did not testify in his own defense and, although his mom and grandma both said he was home in bed when the murder occurred, they were not called to testify.

The jury found Lyons not guilty but could not come to a unanimous decision on Carter's charges. The state decided to re-try Carter with the same evidence in the summer of 2008. On the second try, he was convicted and sentenced to prison.

"I've been doing this for 24 years, when you consider only 2 to 3 percent of all criminal cases go to trial, you understand that people like Carter get exactly what they deserve," Tim Jones, one of the Pierce County Prosecuting Attorneys who helped put Carter behind bars, told UWT Justice Project reporters.

But Carter said he's innocent, which he underscored at the sentencing hearing: "I was wrongfully

convicted of it through a messed up investigation by Det. Vold...I did not kill Julius Williams. I am an innocent man."

To read more about Julius Williams click HERE

To read more about Irvin Carter Jr click HERE



The covered body of Julius James Williams lies in the street near Bryant Elementary, Sept. 8th, 2006. PHOTO BY PETER HALEY | PUBLISHED WITH PERMISSION FROM THE NEWS TRIBUNE

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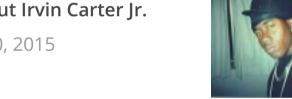


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