



U.S. Department of Justice
Civil Rights Division

RM:PF:CG
144-19M-1755

Criminal Section - PRB
930 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20530

APR 12 2010

(b)(7)(C)

Atlanta, GA 30316

Dear (b)(7)(C)

We are writing to inform you that the Department of Justice and the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) recently conducted a review of the circumstances surrounding the death of your (b)(7)(C) Maceo Snipes, on July 18, 1946. We regret to inform you that we are unable to proceed further with a federal criminal investigation of this matter because the men responsible for your family member's death, Edward Williamson is deceased, as is Lynwood Harvey, the only other person present when Mr. Snipes was shot. Please accept our sincere condolences on the loss of your family member.

Over the last 50 years, the Civil Rights Division of the Department of Justice has been instrumental in bringing justice to some of the nation's most disturbing civil rights era crimes. Today, the Division continues to use its resources and expertise to identify, locate, and, where possible, prosecute those responsible for committing racially-motivated crimes committed more than 40 years ago.

In 2006, the FBI began its "Cold Case Initiative" — a comprehensive effort to identify and investigate racially-motivated murders committed decades ago. Toward that end, each of the 56 FBI field offices searched their "cold case files" to identify incidents which might be ripe for investigation. In February of 2007, the FBI announced the next phase of the initiative, which includes a partnership with the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), the Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC), and the National Urban League to assist the FBI in identifying additional cases for investigation and to solicit their help. In October 2008, the "Emmett Till Unsolved Civil Rights Crime Act" ("Emmett Till Act") became law giving the Department of Justice additional tools to investigate "violations of criminal civil rights statutes . . . result[ing] in death" that "occurred not later than December 31, 1969."

The federal review concerning Mr. Snipes's death was begun pursuant to the Cold Case Initiative and the Emmett Till Act. This review was conducted by FBI Special Agents and an experienced "cold case" civil rights prosecutor. We have now concluded that review and wish to inform you in writing of our findings.

cc: Records Chrono

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As part of its review of the circumstances of Mr. Snipes's death, the FBI retrieved the 1946 FBI file relating to the shooting; interviewed you; contacted the Taylor County Sheriff's Department and the Georgia Bureau of Investigation; and conducted searches of Georgia death records.

According to our review, the day before the shooting, July 17, 1946, Mr. Snipes was the only African-American in the Rupert, Georgia, Voting District to vote in the gubernatorial primary election. Accordingly, in August 1946, the FBI investigated the shooting at the request of the Department of Justice to determine whether Mr. Snipes had been killed because he had exercised his right to vote.

(b)(7)(C) Mr. Snipes (b)(7)(C) told the FBI that (b)(7)(C) and (b)(7)(C) were (b)(7)(C) in the house with Mr. Snipes when Mr. Williamson and Mr. Harvey drove up and called Mr. Snipes out of the house. According to (b)(7)(C) there were three or four men in the car. (b)(7)(C) stated that Mr. Snipes talked to the men and then (b)(7)(C) heard two shots, a pause, and then a (b)(7)(C) third shot. Mr. Snipes came back into the house, holding his arm. Mr. Snipes told (b)(7)(C) that Mr. Williamson had shot him because he had tried to get Mr. Snipes to work at a saw mill. (b)(7)(C) then went to find someone to take Mr. Snipes to the hospital. Mr. Snipes had been fatally wounded and died on July 20, 1946, at Montgomery Hospital in Butler. (b)(7)(C) said that when a (b)(7)(C) brought Mr. Snipes's clothes back from the hospital, (b)(7)(C) found a white-handled knife in a pocket.

(b)(7)(C) Mr. Snipes (b)(7)(C) told the FBI that (b)(7)(C) too, saw four white men in the car (b)(7)(C) that drove up to the house and that two of the men were Mr. Williamson and Mr. Harvey. Like (b)(7)(C) (b)(7)(C) heard three shots. (b)(7)(C) further confirmed that Mr. Snipes said that the men had wanted him to work at the saw mill for several days and he could not. Mr. Snipes told (b)(7)(C) (b)(7)(C) that he had started back toward the house after one of the men reached for a gun. The men told Mr. Snipes not to run and then shot him.

Mr. Williamson told the FBI that, on July 18, 1946, he and Mr. Harvey drove to Mr. Snipes's home to collect a \$10 debt Mr. Snipes owed him. Mr. Williamson claimed that when he suggested to Mr. Snipes that Mr. Harvey pay the debt in exchange for Mr. Snipes working at Mr. Harvey's saw mill, Mr. Snipes refused the offer, pulled out a knife, ignored a warning to step back, and then stepped toward Mr. Williamson. At that point, Mr. Williamson, who was still sitting in the car, pulled a .32 caliber pistol from the glove compartment and fired two shots at Mr. Snipes, fatally wounding him.

Mr. Harvey gave the FBI a similar account of the shooting, except that Mr. Harvey said that Mr. Snipes took two steps back prior to pulling the knife out of his pocket. Moreover, Mr. Harvey did not confirm that Mr. Williamson warned Mr. Snipes to back away or that Mr. Snipes stepped forward before Mr. Williamson shot him.

On July 22, 1946, a Coroner's Jury in Butler ruled that Mr. Williamson acted in self-defense. In September 1946, the Department of Justice instructed the FBI to close their investigation, having concluded that all the available testimonial evidence indicated that "the shooting arose from a personal difference unrelated to the act of voting."

The FBI conducted searches of Georgia death records and obtained death certificates indicating that Mr. Williamson died on October 29, 1983, and Mr. Harvey died on March 26, 2003.

After careful review of this incident, we have concluded that in the unlikely event that additional investigation could identify the other man or men alleged to have been in the car with the now deceased Mr. Williamson and Mr. Harvey when Mr. Snipes was shot, we would be unable to establish that they were criminally liable for the actions of Mr. Williamson. Accordingly, we have no choice but to close our investigation.

We regret that we cannot be of further assistance to you. Again, please accept our sincere condolences for the loss of your family member.

Sincerely,

Paige M. Fitzgerald
Deputy Chief in Charge of the Cold Case Initiative