



U.S. Department of Justice
Civil Rights Division

RM:PF:SW:raj
144-3-1434

Criminal Section - PBR
250 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20530

(b)(7)(C)

MAY 02 2010

Eight Mile, Alabama 36613

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) Rodell Williamson, on or around May 19, 1967. We regret to inform you that we are unable to proceed further with a federal criminal investigation of this matter because there is insufficient evidence to indicate that a racially motivated homicide occurred. Please accept our sincere condolences on the loss of your (b)(7)(C).

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 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 36 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 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. Williamson'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 (b)(7)(C) Fitzgerald T. 04/30/10

(b)(7)(C)

As part of its review of the circumstances of your brother's death, the FBI obtained newspaper articles from 1967; the 1967 FBI file; and a copy of Mr. Williamson's autopsy report. Due to the extended time period (42 years) between the incident and the initiation of the current federal investigation, and the lack of searchable computerized records from that area, Wilcox County officials were unable to locate any existing local reports pertaining to Mr. Williamson's death.

According to our review, on May 22, 1967, Mr. Williamson's body was found floating in the Alabama River near Camden, Alabama. Mr. Williamson's body was snagged in a fisherman's trot line and clad only in trousers. The two fishermen who discovered Mr. Williamson's body, and a special deputy who helped recover it; subsequently told FBI investigators that there were no marks on it or injuries to it. The autopsy report also indicates that there was no evidence of physical trauma to Mr. Williamson's head, body or brain. Muddy water and debris from the river was found in Mr. Williamson's lungs, which shows that he was still breathing when he entered the river, and the cause of death was likely drowning. The manner of death was classified as accidental. A toxicological analysis of Mr. Williamson's blood revealed an extremely high alcohol level (0.32 gram percent).

The 1967 FBI file indicates that the investigation was opened at the request of the Alabama Branch of the NAACP. (b)(7)(C) stated that an individual named (b)(7)(C) saw Mr. Williamson walking down the road past (b)(7)(C) house just before dark on May 19, 1967. A few minutes later, (b)(7)(C) saw a state trooper car traveling in the same direction as Mr. Williamson was walking. While (b)(7)(C) did not see the car stop, he heard a car door slam shortly after the car had passed. It may be that this individual's surname was wrongly reported and that the actual surname was (b)(7)(C). (the (b)(7)(C) Mr. Williamson's (b)(7)(C)). In any event, it does not appear that the FBI located or interviewed (b)(7)(C) although they did interview (b)(7)(C)

Mr. Williamson's (b)(7)(C) told FBI investigators that she had no idea what happened to Mr. Williamson, but felt that he probably met with foul play because he had been attending civil rights mass meetings and enticing people to vote. (b)(7)(C) stated that she heard that on the night of May 20, 1967, a woman named (b)(7)(C) saw Mr. Williamson walking past her house on the blacktop road north of Lower Peachtree, Alabama. (b)(7)(C) stated that she also heard that (b)(7)(C) saw a state trooper car just as Mr. Williamson walked past her house and heard a door slam. (b)(7)(C) stated further that (b)(7)(C), who identified Mr. Williamson's body, said that Mr. Williamson's neck was so swollen that he thought it may have been broken.

The FBI subsequently contacted (b)(7)(C) who stated that she had not seen the victim on the night of May 20, 1967. (b)(7)(C) did not confirm or deny the presence of a state trooper car on her street that night.

Neither the 1967 FBI investigation nor the 2008 review produced evidence to indicate that your (b)(7)(C) death was other than accidental or to substantiate the allegation made by (b)(7)(C) that Mr. Williamson was the victim of foul play because of his involvement in the civil rights movement.

After careful review of this incident, we have concluded that there is insufficient evidence to indicate that your (b)(7)(C) death constitutes a racially motivated homicide. Therefore, it is not covered by the Emmett Till Act. 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 on the loss of your (b)(7)(C)

Sincerely,

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