

Race-tinged case still fresh in Boston memory

BOSTON (AP) — It was an emergency call that turned the city upside down.

Ten years ago, police dispatchers heard the frantic voice of Chuck Stuart. With a gunshot wound in his abdomen, Stuart said he and his pregnant wife, Carol, had been robbed and shot.

No one doubted his story that a black gunman had commandeered their car as they left a hospital birthing class, drove them to the inner city and then shot them. Pictures of his mortally wounded wife were published nationally. The story inflamed white fears of a city where in the two months before the Oct. 23, 1989 attack, there had been nearly 200 shootings in neighborhoods with large numbers of blacks.

But a black man wasn't guilty of murder — Stuart was believed to be the killer. The 30-year-old was found dead in an apparent suicide after his brother confessed to helping hide a gun used in the killing.

The hoax, and the controversial police response, almost overshadowed the death of Carol, 30, and her infant son. The baby, delivered by Caesarean section, survived just 17 days.

"(Stuart) took advantage of the times we were in and the environment he was in," said

Boston police spokeswoman Margot Hill. "He knew exactly what he was doing."

The shootings launched an enormous manhunt, with police fanning out through neighborhood housing projects frisking black men. State politicians called for reinstatement of the death penalty.

Three weeks after the murder, William Bennett, a 39-year-old paroled convict, was arrested on an unrelated charge. He became the prime suspect after witnesses said he had boasted of the crime.

Stuart's suicide cleared Bennett, but many blacks were outraged. They accused the police of violating their constitutional rights and of railroading Bennett.

As the 10-year anniversary of the shootings approached, former police commissioner Francis "Mickey" Roache denied he ever ordered police to pursue Bennett's arrest.

"We knew Willie Bennett wasn't going anywhere, and we didn't want to serve a warrant that had nothing to do with the murder of Carol and the unborn child," Roache said.

Roache said then-District Attorney Newman Flanagan took over the investigation and ordered Bennett's arrest without ever consulting the commissioner.

Flanagan told The Boston Globe last week

he doesn't remember where the order to arrest Bennett came from. He also suggested Roache's new claims could be aimed at deflecting attention from Roache's role in the entire episode.

Bennett's lawyer, Robert George, denounced the former commissioner for trying to rewrite history at a time when Roache is seeking re-election to the City Council.

"Mickey Roache was at every bank of microphones he could find and at every television camera he could put himself in front of defending his police officers and their tactics in the Stuart case," said George.

Roache's statements also renewed racial tensions created by the case.

"The anniversary probably could have come and passed in a very reflective way. I have to tell you the former police commissioner's comments have been explosive and the reflection has turned into anger," said state Sen. Dianne Wilkerson, a leader among the city's black residents.

Accusations that the Boston police — and media — were too willing to believe a black man had fired the shots had a profound effect on the city.

Although charges were never brought against Bennett in the killing, his attorney

maintains the case led to two false armed robbery claims. Bennett was only recently released from prison after serving seven years for one of the charges, George said.

Bennett unsuccessfully sued the police department, claiming that officers violated his civil rights by coercing potential witnesses against him.

Ten years later, Boston is a radically different place. The city's homicide rate has dropped by 80 percent and once-blighted neighborhoods like the South End, Jamaica Plain, parts of Roxbury and Mission Hill are revitalized. Relations between police and black residents have improved in the last decade Wilkerson said, but tensions remain over crime.

"There is something about that particular combination that people lose objectivity and it just brings out the worst in people, brings out their stereotypes," she said.

Carol's brother, Carl DiMaiti, 47, said even though a decade has passed, his family mourns "every day."

"In my own mind, I still can't understand how anyone could do that," he said. "In the whole sensationalism of the case, a vibrant, caring, brilliant woman has been lost. Only her friends and family know that."

Jackson speaks out for minority-owned businesses

Special to Sentinel-Voice

The Rev. Jesse Jackson, president of the Rainbow/PUSH Coalition, recently issued a statement with hopes of reducing 51 percent certification for minority businesses.

The controversial National Minority Supplier Development Council Growth Initiative would affect how minority firms are defined and how they conduct business with Corporate America.

The following is Jackson's statement:

"Because this issue is so divisive I support Andrew Brimmer's position that we need more time for the study of the ramifications of the National Minority Supplier Development Council proposal to reduce the 51 percent certification for minority-owned businesses.

"I also agree with many of my colleagues in the civil rights and minority business community NMSDC should briefly postpone approval of its proposal to amend the definition of Minority Business Enterprise (MBE) in order to permit careful review. The purpose of the review should be to ensure that we preserve the basic definition of an MBE, but permit exceptions that will allow controlled companies to gain mainstream access to capital.

"We are currently under attack and the environment is extremely hostile. In the ghettos and barrios, capital costs more, insurance rates are higher, whole neighborhoods have been redlined by banks and insurance companies.



JESSE JACKSON

"The anti-affirmative action efforts in California, under the guise of Prop 229, is now exploding in Atlanta. The efforts by Sen. Phil Gramm to destroy the Community Reinvestment Act further threatens shared economic security for all Americans. Sen. Orin Hatch has worked to uphold the appointment of federal judges. The Telecommunications Act of 1996, which protects media monopolies makes media ownership more difficult. The Equal Employment Opportunity Commission and Office of Contract Compliance are largely understaffed and not enforced.

"Sen. Jesse Helms continues to challenge those who oppose use of the Confederate Flag, by vowing to block the confirmation of former Sen. Carol Moseley-Braun as a U.S. ambassador. And, in Silicon Valley, an area of immense wealth based upon government loans and contracts, of the Top 50 companies only five have a director of color on their board. These boardrooms, these suites and these offices must be opened up to the light of day.

"The people who run our

companies and who control the allocation of capital in this country must come to understand the value of inclusion. They must not be permitted to act in complete isolation from the values of democracy.

"Minority-owned businesses face many obstacles to growth, the two most important of which are lack of access to markets and capital. Majority businesses obviously have significantly greater access to the private and public capital markets. We must not prevent MBEs from attracting the kinds of investment necessary to

become self-sustaining, wealth-generating companies.

"The determining factor in identifying MBEs should be actual control over the activities of the corporation. Equity ownership is, of course, important, but if - in limited circumstances - minorities who control a company and retain a significant equity ownership interest determine that they need to bring in additional growth capital, they should, on an exception basis, be permitted to do so. In fact, the NMSDC proposal may not go far enough to ensure

adequate access to capital, since it would limit acceptable capital contributions to venture capital companies. Minority businesses should have the same access to private and public capital markets as majority companies.

"Much has been made of the threat of 'fronts' and other efforts to circumvent the rules. No one should be allowed to prevent a generation of minority entrepreneurs from competing in, and benefiting from, the vast markets created by Corporate America. Small businesses must be protected

through the rules of affirmative action and their opportunities must not decrease.

"Through the Rainbow/PUSH Wall Street Project, we have begun to successfully challenge the largest companies in America to do more to include minority businesses in the mainstream of the American economy. We in the minority community must accept the same challenge we have made to the Fortune 500 and recognize that growth requires change and economic growth requires greater access to capital."

Law Firm of Smith & Williams

ATTORNEY AT LAW



TIMOTHY C. WILLIAMS

Timothy Williams is a member of the Nevada & Illinois State Bar, practicing primarily in personal injury cases.

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1785 E. Sahara Ave. Ste. 337
Las Vegas, Nevada

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