

Brenton butler essay sample

[Government](#), [Military](#)



On the morning of May 7th, 2000 the murder of Mary Ann Stephens occurred. She was a tourist to Jacksonville, Florida along with her husband. The two were staying at the Ramada Inn Hotel and had just come from breakfast when they were approached by a young black man who held them at gunpoint, took Mrs. Stephens' purse then proceeded to shoot her between the eyes. When the police first arrived, the elderly woman's body was several inches away from the path on which her and her husband were walking along to get back to their room. Her body was strewn across the grass, covered in blood with the bullet and it's wound being clearly visible to the naked eye. This case became controversial and it is believed that there was racial discrimination and profiling involved because Brenton Butler, a young black male, was arrested several hours later by police.

Police Investigation

In the process of the arrest of Brenton Butler, there was no extensive investigation done by the police. During the trial, this fact was admitted by the officers when Pat McGuinness, who was representing Brenton, raised the point of them not questioning neighbours, not checking for DNA on the stolen purse etc. When they arrived at the scene, they asked Mr. Stephens to give them a description of the shooter. Mr. Stephens described the shooter to be tall, skinny build, dark shirt and shorts, a fishing hat and black in skin color. Police that were surveying the area saw Brenton Butler, who was at the time walking from his home to Blockbuster to hand out a resume, a thinly framed, tall, male wearing a dark shirt and dark shorts...coincidentally, Brenton Butler was a black male. Officer Williams and Officer Darnell told Brenton there had been a murder nearby and asked him to come with them

to ask him some questions about anything he may have seen, which Brenton agreed to. When they brought 15-year-old Brenton Butler to the crime scene, Mr. Stephens immediately identified Brenton as being the murderer and asked the officers to bring him closer, at this time he positively identified him as being his wife's murderer. When brought into the police station, Officers William and Darnell passed Butler onto Detective Glover.

Detective Glover got Brenton to confess to the murder. He did this by physically threatening the life of Brenton and saying that for every ten seconds that passed in which Butler didn't sign the confession, he would hurt him. He represented that by showing Brenton his gun. Detective Glover then brought Brenton out into the woods where the gun had allegedly been hidden and wanted Brenton to show him where it was, which Brenton did not know. Because of this, although there was no sufficient evidence to prove such actions, Detective Glover punched Butler in the stomach twice and once in his left eye. If more investigating would have been done, they would have accounted the fact that Brenton was 5 inches shorter and many years younger than the man that Mr. Stephens reported. Brenton also had a very noticeable logo on the front of the shirt he was wearing, when Mr. Stephens spoke of what the murderer was wearing he said the shirt had been plain.

Also, when Mr. McGuinness spoke with Brenton's mother in their home, he got a look at Brenton's hat collection, which consisted of 3 hats, none of which were anything remotely close to the " fishing hat" which Mr. Stephens identified on the murderer. Mr. Stephens also never mentioned the murderer wearing glasses, which Brenton wears everyday and would have been visibly

noticeable to Mr. Stephens considering the position of the murderer at the time in relation to himself. Neither officers nor detectives felt the need to question neighbours asking if they had seen Brenton at the times specified in their report, they didn't feel the need to gather background information on Brenton or consider the fact that Brenton Butler had never been in jail before that date, therefore he had never committed a crime in Jacksonville, Florida. Brenton Butler was charged with armed robbery and the first degree murder of Mary Ann Stephens on May 7th, 2000. Brenton Butler

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What about the Forensic Investigation...?

Like the police investigation, there was a lack of forensic involvement in this case as well. Brenton Butler was solely charged based on the fact that, an eye witness, Mr. Stephens identified Brenton as the murderer. Many will declare this case to be racial discrimination and racial profiling, due to the fact that Brenton was a black male like the murderer. Brenton just happened to be in the wrong place at the wrong time. In the forensic investigation, after finding Mrs. Stephens' stolen purse in a garbage container a mile away from the murder, they should have tested the purse for DNA and finger prints. If they had done this, they would have seen that Brenton Butler's finger prints were in fact not to be found on the purse, instead they would have those of another man and Butler would have been instantly proven innocent.

Key people involved in the case

Brenton Butler – the accused

Officer Darnell – police officer, one of the officer's that arrested and questioned Butler
Officer Williams – police officer, the second officer that arrested and questioned Brenton
Detective Glover – detective and son of the sheriff, Butler was passed on to Glover to give him a confession, Glover allegedly beat Brenton in the woods and threatened him and forced him into signing a written confession
Pat McGuinness – lawyer, he was the leading lawyer representing Brenton, after the trial he did more investigating
Anne Finnell – lawyer, she was also defending Brenton in his case
Harry Shorstein – State Attorney, decided to prosecute the case after Brenton confessed
Mr. Stephens – retired, he was a tourist visiting Jacksonville with his wife who was shot by a young black male, he was an eye witness to the case, he identified Brenton Butler as being the murderer of his wife
Mary Anne Stephens – retired, held at gunpoint, robbed and murdered

Trial Process

In this case, following Brenton Butler's arrest, he taken in for a 12 hour questioning and then signed and verbally confessed to the murder after being threatened by Detective Glover. State Attorney Harry Shorstein decided to prosecute the case. During the trial, the main focus of the defending lawyers was lack of procedure, lack of investigation and police brutality. All that the prosecution lawyer could focus on was the fact that Mr. Stephens had reported a tall, skinny, black male wearing dark clothing, which would describe Brenton, and the fact that Brenton confessed to the robbery and murder. The police and detectives involved in the case, other

than the eye witness who identified Brenton and the false confession, did nothing to gather evidence to prove Brenton guilty.

During the whole process, they didn't tell his parents where he was or that he was arrested, which by law you have to if the accused is under age, they misled Brenton's parents when they showed up to their family home asking if Brenton was there and saying they just wanted to talk to him about break-ins that had been occurring in the area. Also, Officer Darnell had told Brenton he had the right to an attorney and that if he didn't have one that he would contact one for him, which he never followed through with. In regards to the confession given and signed by Brenton, by law, a confession must be made on your own free will, you can't be pressured into a confession, swayed or otherwise or else it can be deemed inadequate to the case.

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Outcome

After the closing statements made by both opposing sides in the court room, the judge told the jury how to make their decision, then they left the courtroom to reach their verdict. It took the jury less than 1 hour to come to their conclusion. In regards to the charges against Brenton Butler by the State of Florida for the first degree murder of Mary Ann Stephens, the jury found him not guilty. In regards to the charges against Brenton Butler by the state of Florida for armed robbery, the jury found him not guilty of that as well. So in other words, the jury found him innocent of all charges. After the acquittal, Pat McGuinness, who represented Butler, set out to find the real

murderer so he could really settle the case. Someone had notified him of two possible suspects. He then tested the purse for DNA and found that the prints on the purse matched to one of the names given to him.

Jermel Williams pleaded guilty to second-degree murder and was sentenced to ten years in prison. He also testified against Juan Curtis, who's fingerprints matched those found on Mrs. Stephens purse. Curtis was found guilty of first-degree murder and sentenced to life in prison. Although later it was found that because there was no confession, they had denied Curtis' right to a fair trial, so they granted him a retrial in which he was found guilty and sentenced to two consecutive life terms. In February 2001, Brenton's lawyers announced that they were pursuing a civil lawsuit in which they wanted \$2.5 million in damages against the city, Sheriff's department and the individual officers. Eight months later they refiled the lawsuit and wanted \$8.5 million instead. The Butler family accepted 775,000 from the city as a settlement in 2002. They accepted this amount because of various reasons including how long the case would be dragged on and how difficult it was to prove the case under the federal civil rights law. Brenton Butler Now

Brenton Butler is now 28 years old and has written a book about his experience called "They Said It Was Murder". The book includes new details about the beatings, his time in jail and other injustices in the investigation. Also it discusses the impact the case had on his family and the near-death of his mother due to the stress of his arrest.

Miscarriages of Justice

Brenton Butler spent 6 innocent months in jail. His civil rights were violated. They took him to the crime scene under false pretenses, didn't inform his parents of his whereabouts or that he had been arrested (in the beginning) and lead his parents to believe that they had only come to their home because they were asking the teenagers in the neighbourhood about reoccurring break ins. Also, during Brenton's questioning, he was threatened and forced into signing a confession by Detective Glover and the other two officers and Brenton was taken into a forest and beaten by said detective. These were all obviously injustices in the case. Why? Because officers and detectives are supposed to abide by certain laws and the rights of the accused and in this case they did not and they were negligent. Another injustice was the fact that anyone accused of committing a crime is innocent until proven guilty. In Brenton's case, as soon as he was spotted walking on the sidewalk, he was instantly guilty.

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Personal Reaction

Like the Steven Truscott case, this just shows us, even though this took place in another country, how flawed our system is. It shows us that even police officers can be racially discriminating and don't abide by the laws. This case taught us that one second we can be doing something completely normal and habitual and if you end up in the wrong place at the wrong time, you never know what could happen. It also teaches us that we need to be more aware of our rights and be more educated on what to do in that kind of

situation. In my opinion, I still trust the law and I still trust the police officers will protect me. After hearing about Brenton Butler and what he had to go through and how poorly he was treated it makes me fear the thought of something like this ever somehow happening to myself. It makes me doubt the judgment of our government and our law enforcers. It also makes me realize that society to is very judgmental and racially discriminating. In my opinion, as well as in the opinion of many others, Mr. Stephens only identified Brenton Butler as the murderer because of his race. The lack of evidence backs this theory up. It's not just Mr. Stephens that react in that fashion of jump to that conclusion though. Although the whole segregation generation has passed us, we still discriminate against others, mainly because they are different from ourselves and we don't know about their culture etc.

Hearing about Brenton Butler's case made me wonder what his family must have gone through. The stress they must have been under, the anxiety, the frustration and anger...it made me wonder how I would have handled the situation if I were in it. I also can't help but think what if Brenton had been a white male...he wouldn't have been stopped by the police that day and wouldn't have been identified as the murderer. What if the police and detectives had done more to find evidence, what if they had tested the purse for fingerprints once they found it, why didn't they check the purse for fingerprints...cases like this are very thought provoking and make you ask so many questions that can't be answered. I'm glad that he was proven innocent after everything he went through and I'm glad he has been able to move on with his life and share with others his experience through his novel.