PAPERS OF THE NAACP


Series B:
Legal Department and Central Office Records, 1940–1955

Project Coordinator:
Randolph Boehm

Note: A printed reel guide has been provided for your use.
March 8, 1950

Mr. R. L. Matthews, President
Montgomery Branch, NAACP
Post Office Box 101
Montgomery, Alabama

Dear Mr. Matthews:

We have received the newspaper clippings concerning the case of Willie B. Carlisle which you sent to us. We also received clippings from someone in Tuskegee.

Would you kindly keep us informed concerning developments in this case, for we are interested in seeing (1) that the guilty parties are given just punishment, and (2) what course the State will take in the matter.

If you feel that there is anything that this office can do, or if your branch undertakes any action or cooperates in the matter, kindly let us know.

Very sincerely yours,

Jack Greenberg
Assistant Special Counsel

cc: Alabama State Conference
Prisoner Dies After Beating By Policemen

LAFAYETTE, Ala. — (AP) — A young Negro died yesterday of injuries after being arrested by two policemen who said they caught him letting air out of a tire on a police car.

Chief W. A. Garrett quoted Officers James Clark and Dow Mitchem, as saying they whipped the Negro after taking him to jail Saturday night and that during a struggle, he fell and struck his head. He died in a hospital.

Garrett identified the victim as Willie B. Carlisle, about 17. Chief Garrett said the officers reported they "tended to" Carlisle after putting him in jail. By that, the chief said, they meant they whipped him.

The City Council suspended the two pending an investigation, Mayor Pro Tem Harold Huggley announced. Coroner Herbert Millford has called an inquest for today.

2 Policemen Accused in Negro's Death

LAFAYETTE, Ala. — (AP) — Two white policemen were charged with first-degree murder yesterday in the death of a young Negro who was fatally injured in jail here. The officers had arrested him for deflating the tire on a police car.

Ptl. James R. Clark and Doyle Mitchum waived preliminary hearing and were released under $5,000 bond each pending the next session of the Grand Jury March 6.

The warrants charge the two officers with beating 16-year-old Willie B. Carlisle with a rubber hose after they had put him in the Lafayette jail Saturday night. The Negro died in a hospital Sunday morning.

Sheriff J. M. Abney quoted the two policemen as saying they struck the Negro because he pulled a knife on them.
Negro, 17, Dies Of Injuries After Arrest

2 LaFayette Officers Suspended Pending Fight Investigation

LAFAYETTE, ALA., Feb. 20—(AP)—A young Negro died of injuries here Sunday after being arrested by two Lafayette policemen who said they caught him letting air out of a tire on a police car.

Chief W. A. Garrett quoted officers James Clark and Doy Mitchem as saying they whipped the Negro, after taking him to jail Saturday night, and that during a struggle he fell and struck his head. He died in a hospital yesterday morning.

Garrett identified the victim as Willie B. Carlisle, about 17, of Lafayette.

Late today, the city council suspended the two officers, pending an investigation, Mayor Pro Tem Hugguley said. Corner Herbert Milford has called an inquest for 10 a.m., Tuesday.

Chief Garrett said the officers reported they "tended to" the Negro after putting him in jail. By that the chief said they meant they whipped him.

Garrett said State Toxicologist Paul Shofflett, of Auburn, made a preliminary examination of the body today and gave head injuries as the probable cause of death. He said Shofflett is scheduled to make a final report at the inquest Tuesday.

The chief said the two officers didn't explain how the Negro happened to fall.
2 Officers Face Murder Count

By REX THOMAS

LAFAYETTE, ALA., Feb. 21—(AP)—The state charged two white policemen, Tuesday, with beating to death a young Negro in their squad car.

First degree murder warrants were sworn out against Patrolmen James E. Clark and Doyle Mitchum, who had been suspended by city council.

The two officers were released under bonds of $2,000 each.

Chairman John E. Owens was called off and the charges held.

(Turn to page 5-A)

2 Officers Face Murder Count

(Continued from Page 1)

The next Chambers County grand jury which meets March 6, will start the trial.

Chief W. A. Garrett quoted the patrolmen as admitting they struck the young Negro but claiming he died as a result of a fall. The sheriff said the officers gave this account of the incident:

They put Carlisle out of a stable Friday night and he let the air out of their tire and got away. They arrested him Saturday night. He pulled a knife and they struck him. Later, he fell in his cell and hit his head on the concrete floor.

Chief Garrett earlier had quoted Mitchum and Clark as saying they "whipped" the Negro and he fell during a struggle.

Relatives Decline

The murder warrants were signed by Sheriff Abbey himself after relatives of the dead Negro declined to do so. "They just didn't want to," the sheriff explained, and relied on the state to do so instead.

Identical except for the names of the defendants, the warrants charge that the policemen "unlawfully and with malice aforethought killed Willie B. Carlisle by striking him with a rubber hose."

Details were lacking to explain why the state named a rubber hose as the death weapon. Prosecuting officials declined to elaborate on it pending grand jury action. First degree murder in Alabama is punishable by death in the electric chair.
Swift Justice

The swiftness with which the law moved yesterday in arresting two white policemen on a charge of first degree murder in the case of a Negro at La-Fayette is another of many signs of the growing sense of responsibility in such matters.

The young Negro, according to the charge, was beaten to death in the jail by two white policemen. The policemen were immediately arrested and charged. The solicitor announced that the policemen will be "prosecuted to the full extent of the law."

That is all that can be asked. If the defendants are adjudged guilty as charged, their conviction will be widely known and become part of the restraint of policemen elsewhere.

Public opinion in Alabama is plainly against this kind of outrage. Public opinion is what blighted the Klan. It will likewise blight police brutality. It is becoming less fashionable all the time, as we are seeing right here in Montgomery.
March 8, 1950

Mr. W. C. Patton, President
Alabama State Conference, NAACP
1630 Fourth Avenue, Room 729
Birmingham, Alabama

Dear Mr. Patton:

The enclosed copy of our letter to Mr. Matthews is sent for your information. This case is one in which we are deeply interested, especially so because of the action which the State is taking in the matter.

Very sincerely yours,

Jack Greenberg
Assistant Special Counsel

Jg/At
Encl. 1
March 9, 1950

Dr. J. A. Berry, President
Tuskegee Chapter NAACP
Veterans Administration Hospital
Tuskegee, Alabama

Dear Dr. Berry:

Your letter of February 24 concerning Willie B. Carlisle has been referred to me for reply.

As I understand it, the state is prosecuting Mr. Carlisle's murderers. The only action which the Association could have taken would have been to press for such a prosecution. I suggest that you can be of aid to us in determining whether or not this prosecution is vigorous and sincere or is merely a sham. If the latter is the case, then we will have a distinct role to play.

I would greatly appreciate any observations you may have on the conduct of this case.

Very sincerely yours,

Jack Greenberg
Assistant Special Counsel
March 9, 1950

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Tuskegee Chapter NAACP
Veterans Administration Hospital
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Assistant Special Counsel
2 Officers Face Murder Count

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LAFAYETTE, ALA., Feb. 21—(AP)—The state charged two white policemen Tuesday with beating a young Negro to death after he let air out of a tire on their squad car.

First degree murder warrants were sworn out against Patrolmen James E. Clark and Doyle Mitchum, who had been suspended by city council Monday.

The two officers waived preliminary hearing and were released under bonds of $5,000 each. An coroner's inquest then was called off.

for the next Chambers County grand jury which meets March 6.

Clark and Mitchum were charged with killing 18-year-old Willie B. Carlisle with a rubber hose. Carlisle died in a hospital Sunday morning about six hours after he was put in jail.

Sheriff J.M. Abney and Police Chief W.A. Garrett quoted the patrolmen as admitting they struck the young Negro but claiming he died as a result of a fall. The sheriff said the officers gave this account of the incident:

They put Carlisle out of a dance Friday night and he let the air out of their tire and got away. They arrested him Saturday night. He pulled a knife and they struck him. Later, he fell in his cell and hit his head on the concrete floor.

Chief Garrett earlier had quoted Mitchum and Clark as saying they "whipped" the Negro and he fell during a struggle.

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Veterans Administration Hospital
Tuskegee, Alabama
February 24, 1950

The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People
10 West 40th Street
New York 18, New York

ATTENTION: The Legal Division

Gentlemen:

Attached is a clipping from the February 21st issue of The Montgomery Advertiser; a daily newspaper which is published in Montgomery, Alabama.

As you will observe, the clipping gives a detailed account of the brutal murder of Willie B. Carlisle, an 18-year-old youth of LAFayette, Alabama, by two patrolmen of LAFayette.

We feel sure that you have already received information concerning this shocking crime, however, we wanted to add our voice to the sound of others in speaking out against this type of inhuman treatment. We would appreciate any information you may give us concerning the possible course of action our national office may take in this matter.

Very truly yours,

J. A. BERRY, M.D.,
President,
Tuskegee Chapter NAACP

Encl: 1