

The Actual Death of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.
extracted by Dick Atlee, 14 January 2016, from the deposition in
William Pepper; *The Plot to Kill King* (Skyhorse Publishing, 2016), pp. 688-700

Video Deposition of Johnnton Shelby

In the Matter of:
Corretta Scott King vs. Lloyd Jowers
July 10, 2014

Q: For the Plaintiffs: Mr. William Pepper

Q: For the Defendant: Mr. Lewis Garrison (in italics)

Transcription: Brian Dominski, Alpha Reporting Corp.

Note: Redundant and unrelated-to-the-flow exchanges or fragments have been omitted as shown

Q. Johnnton, first of all, on behalf of all of us here and fellow counsel, Mr. Garrison, we want to thank you very much for coming in and spending this time with us and telling us the story that is been with you inside you for many many years -- but has never really been properly developed. So let us begin. Let me ask you what is your full name?

A. Johnnton Terrance Shelby.

...

Q. Who was living with you at the time?

A. I had two younger brothers and one older brother...and two uncles... [younger brothers] of my mother.

...

Q. What was your mother's full name?

A. Lula Mae Shelby.

...

Q. How old was your mother at that point in time in her life?

...

A. ...She was born in 1936.

Q. So around then she was in her mid-30s?

A. Yes.

...

Q. How old were you at that time?

A. ...Nine.

...

Q. Where were you on the 4th of April, 1968, when Martin Luther King was assassinated?

A. At home.

...

Q. The assassination took place at 6:01 in the evening. So you would have been home from school?

A. Yes.

Q. All right. Where was your mother?

A. At work.

...

Q. What did she actually do? What was her work?

A. She was a surgical aide.

Q. She was a surgical aide at which hospital?

A. St. Joseph Hospital.

...

Q. How long had she worked at St. Joseph's hospital?
...
A. ...I'm not sure... I would say [she started] 1964 or 1965.
Q. 1964 or 1965. So she had been working at the hospital for three or four years?
A. Yes.
Q. Do you know what her job was? Do you know what she was supposed to do as a surgical aide?
A. Well the operating tools, I mean, you know, scalpels and sutures and all that stuff, she would bring that out and set it up in the surgical room, and as they need them taken out, she would take them out, you know, and they'd put them on the tray, and she'd take them and put them in the -- then when they get full, they would take that out and get another tray, and whatever they use, they would put that in there when they get through with it.
Q. So she specifically assisted the doctors who were performing ... surgery or surgical procedures?
A. Yes.
...
Q. Okay. Now, when Martin Luther King, Jr., was hit by this bullet... at about 6:01 in the evening, your mother was on duty, was she?
A. Yes.
...
Q. ...And she was attending to Dr. King along with the other medical staff. Is that right?
A. Bringing the instruments... to set it up.
Q. In and out of the emergency room doing her job?
A. Yeah, staff.
...
Q. Did you speak that evening at all about with your mother?
A. She called later on that evening and spoke to my older brother... and said she won't be home, she got to stay, they won't let her come home.
...
Q. Did they keep other people in the hospital as well, other staff?
A. Everybody that was on that shift that night.
...
Q. Okay. Now when did she finally come home?
A. I think it was around 11:00 the next day, about 11:00 o'clock that morning.
...
Q. What happened when she came home?
A. She came in the house. She sat down, she said, you all come here. Us that was there, my younger brother was six, my older brother, he was gone, and so it was just us, and my other two brothers -- I mean her two brothers were gone, they weren't there.
...
Q. So she got you all into the living room?
A. Yes.
...
Q. Did she appear to be upset?
A. She was.
Q. What did she say?
A. She said "They killed him." She just kept saying "They killed them."
...
Q. What more did she go on to say? Did you ask her anything?
A. She said it was low down and dirty and she said "They killed him," and she cried. We said "Mama, it is going to be all right, it is going to be all right." She just kept saying "They killed him, I can't believe they was that low down."
...

Q. How did she describe what went on, the mistreatment and what they did? What did she say?

A. Well, they had brought him in. There was this gurney, I guess a gurney, and she said there was blood all over. She was talking about how the side of his face from here, his chin, bottom chin and part of his neck and shoulder, part of that was just blowed away.

...

Q. Then what did she say they did? What happened?

A. She said they went to working on him.

Q. They were working on him in the emergency room?

A. They was working on him, yeah.

Q. Did she say how many doctors were there or just that they --

A. She didn't say.

...

Q. Then what happened?

A. Somebody was saying -- I think she said somebody said they found a slight pulse, and that's when the man walked in the door and said "Everybody stop working, I mean you all stop, let that nigger die."

Q. So somebody walked in the room. Was that Dr. Breen Bland?

A. She didn't call no name. She just said it was the head of surgery. She knew that person. She knew who she was.

Q. He was the head of surgery?

A. Yes.

Background Information On Dr. Bland's Role

Note [p. 262]: "Ron Tyler Adkins [of the local family most involved], under oath, told me that Dr. Breen Bland, who, remember, was also the Adkins family doctor, was in fact, the head surgeon at the hospital. He said he was present and overheard conversations between his father and Dr. Bland, and then, following his father's death, between his brother (Russell Junior), Police and Fire Director Frank Holloman, and Dr. Bland about the importance of Dr. King being taken to St. Joseph's if he was still alive. Ron recalls that Dr. Bland was prepared to give him a certain lethal injection if it became necessary."

Note [pp.635-6, 644]: In a deposition under oath on December 10, 2009, Ron Tyler Adkins said:

A. There was a man [Marrell McCullough, a black military intelligence operative deployed undercover with the local police and who had become part of King's Memphis retinue] that was assigned to get to King before anybody could run up from anywhere to get to King and make sure he was dead... it was already arranged that before Dr. King left here, that he was to go to St. Joseph Hospital down the street. He was never going to make it out of that emergency room alive if he was wounded.

Q. Why?

A. Well, they was going to put him to sleep.

Q. Who was going to do that?

A. I figured Dr. Bland was going to do it... I knew what his job was to be because Junior and mother had already told me if he made it through -- they was not going to let him go to Baptist, they was not going to let him go to John Gaston... [the hospital] that saw most of the gunshots and stabbings... They were going to take him to St. Joe. So Bland's office is right here. St. Joe is sitting right here [50 yards] right across the parking lot... [After the shooting] I was watching for Dr. Bland... I saw Dr. Bland leave out of the front and head for the front of the hospital...

Q. He is listed on the death certificate.

Q. And who was there with him?

A. There was -- when he walked in there, there was two guys with suits on. I can't tell you what color, because she didn't say, what color suits they had on. And then think she said state troopers came in there with their rifles and there was two outside.

...

Q. After he said -- this head of surgery said "Stop working on that nigger and let him die," what did he say after that? What happened after that?

A. "All you all get out of here, get out of here."

Q. He threw them all out of there?

A. Everybody.

...

Q. Your mother was one of the people that had to get out?

A. One of the last people to hit that door.

...

Q. What did she hear or notice as she was leaving?

A. Hawking.

...

Q. "Hawking"? What do you mean?

A. Like getting ready to spit.

...

Q. And she heard that?

A. She looked back and she saw them spit.

Q. And then when she looked back, what did she see?

A. She didn't see them pull the air tube out. She heard it, shoo, shoo, shoo, shoo.

Q. Did she see them spit or did she just hear them spit?

A. She saw them spit. The first guy spit, that's when she heard the hawking, and the other guy spit.

Q. They were spitting on the body?

A. Yes.

Q. And the breathing tube had been removed?

A. Yes, because that's when she heard that shoo, shoo, shoo, shoo, shoo.

...

Q. What then did she see after that?

A. The pillow.

Q. Tell us about the pillow. What do you mean "the pillow"?

A. The guy picked up the pillow and went over his head like that.

...

Q. The head of surgery picked up a pillow and what did he do with the pillow?

A. Put it over his head.

Q. He put it over his head, over his face?

A. Over his face.

Q. To block his breathing?

A. Yes.

Q. Did she say how long the pillow was there, or was she just then --

A. She was walking on out the door.

...

Q. All right. So she told this to all of you?

A. She got -- yes. The more I think about it now, I think she got away with it because they was killing a man. So everybody's attention was on what he was doing including the people with the guns. They wasn't looking at her, so she slowed down as she was going out.

...

- Q. Okay. So she was outside. Did she say she saw many military people around in uniform outside?
- A. She saw in the hall she said two guys outside the door, two military I guess National Guard. She saw a lot of police. There was a lot of them outside, but they didn't let them out. They told him they couldn't leave, to go wherever they was going, whatever room they sent them to.
- ...
- Q. Did you come to believe that the officials at the hospital told everyone not to speak at all about what happened there?
- A. My mother never said that, but Dorothy Bryant, when I called her for you ... that came out of her mouth when I called her.
- Q. What did she say?
- A. They told all of us not to say a word.
- Q. They told --
- A. Whatever you know, don't talk.
- Q. They told all of them not to say a word?
- A. Every one of them.
- Q. And what would happen if they said a word? What would happen?
- A. Lose their job.
- ...
- Q. *Mr. Shelby, did you your mother ever reveal to you or any member your family of any other employees who were there by name that were there when she was told to leave? Did she ever --*
- A. Dr. Bryant and Dorothy Blake.
- Q. *Are either one of these ladies, Ms. Blake or Dr. Brian Blake, are they still living now?*
- A. Dr. Bryant.
- ...
- Q. I have spoken to Dorothy Bryant. She is still afraid of losing her pension. She is 89 years old. She is not hostile, but she is just not going to discuss these things, I guess...
- ...
- A. I actually told her -- that's when she told me -- she told me something she didn't tell you. They told everybody not to talk.
- ...
- Q. Right. She didn't tell me that. She just wouldn't talk.

Final Thought

Dick Atlee

Note [p. 710, paraphrasing]: In 2014, one of the world's leading forensic pathologists, Cyril Wecht, unaware of the above information, reviewed the MLK autopsy report, and, based on that and the time elapsed between the shooting and declaration of death, he expressed the opinion that

1. *The spinal cord severing and cutting of the subclavian artery and jugular vein were not amenable to repair and would ultimately be fatal.*
2. *However, these would not have been visible to the doctors at the hospital who started life-saving procedures, and, due to King's unconsciousness, they couldn't have performed neurological tests that would have been able to ascertain the spinal chord damage.*

The implicit conclusion is that although King would have eventually died, the intent and actions of Dr. Breen amounted to murder.