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ANT 101

Jackson

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Supreme Court of the United States v. O'Hara

Prior to my selection, I had no hands on experience in dealing with criminal law. Upon receiving the letter informing me of my upcoming jury duty in the case of the Supreme Court of the United States v. O'Hara, I decided to familiarize myself with the legal and court systems, and purchased several informative books on topics such as the processes of the courtroom and standard legal jargon, so as not to feel uneducated on the topic. Considering I hold partial power in deciding the fate of the accused persons, I refused to take this experience lightly. Of all the topics in the articles I read, the phrase that impacted my prerogative the most was: "proof beyond a reasonable doubt." In layman's terms, this phrase means that the defendant or the prosecution, whichever I decide to side with, has provided me with enough proof to make a decision without hesitation. Forensic Case #356228 was a difficult one to decide upon. The skeletal remains of a man were found in the woods of a deer hunting area by two hunters unrelated to the case. The first possible victim, Robert Rutherford, is a 65 year-old African American man who had a history of conflict with the defendant, John O'Hara. The second possible victim is Stephen Morton, a 40 year-old Caucasian man who went missing six years ago. Mr. Morton had no relationship with Mr. O'Hara. After hearing what each attorney had to say and reviewing the crime scene and skeletal material, I have

made my decision of which man this unidentified body belongs to and whether or not Mr. O'Hara was responsible for causing his death.

Upon developing my conclusion, I began my critical thinking while focusing on the crime scene. Many key items were discovered in the woods that the police taped off. Of the most importance were the skeletal remains –both human bones and deer bones were found. The deer bones were obviously the result of a deer dying from natural causes or possibly being killed by a hunter and not recovered. In addition, a rosary, a Gerber 650 knife, a Remington 650 Bullet, a Winchester 30-06sprg, a flask, zip-loc bags, an unknown electronic device and an empty pill bottle were discovered. Each of these items of evidence is important to the case and jury's decision. As far as the rosary goes, there are not many substantial inferences that can be made. Both potential victims had unknown religious beliefs so the rosary could have easily belonged to either of them. However, one could assume that, as practicing Catholics are not methamphetamine users, the rosary most probably would have belonged to Robert Rutherford. But, as stated before, this is just speculation and could not hold up as legitimate evidence. In addition, both men owned and carried with them a Gerber 650 knife, so that evidence is null and void.

With the remaining evidence lie some thought-provoking notions. Both the Remington 650 bullet and the Winchester 30-06sprg have serious significance to the case. At first glance, the sight of bullets triggers a conclusion of murder. However, coming from a family of avid outdoorsmen, I was quickly able to notice that neither of the bullets had been fired, leading me to believe that the unidentified man could simply have been carrying them in the zip-loc supply bag, perhaps in preparation for a hunting

season or for protection –again, this is speculation. The flask found at the scene at first lead me to believe that the man had to be Robert Rutherford, seeing as he would often drink while hunting. However, upon further analyzing, it occurred to me that this notion was simply speculation, rather than fact. Although Rutherford would be the more obvious answer, Morton could have just as easily been carrying a flask that day. Once again, due to speculation, this evidence is deemed null and void. The electronic device was too weathered to discover its true identity, so it cannot be used to determine the identity of the man. The final significant piece of evidence is the empty pill bottle. This bottle is also inconclusive because both men had a particular condition for which they were prescribed medicine. In conclusion, the evidence, apart from the skeletal remains, was inconclusive. Each piece could be twisted and shaped to support the body belonging to either man. The most important conclusion drawn from the crime scene was that neither of the bullets found had been shot. Therefore, no evidence at the “crime scene” can be connected to foul play.

As shown above, it was impossible to look solely at the objects of the crime scene to find the answer. Looking closer at the skeletal remains is the only way to make the answer clear for a solid judgment as a juror. From the skeleton of the deer, a skull, one antler, and both femurs were recovered. Examiners got even luckier with the human body. They were able to find the skull, both upper arm bones, both thigh bones, the left lower leg, an assortment of cervical, thoracic and lumbar vertebrae, a forearm with gnaw marks, various ribs, a pelvis, some wrist bones, several toe bones, and both shoulder blades. Examiners were able to reconstruct the body to form the basic outline of its original form. To justifiably account for the gnaw marks present on the forearm, I will

argue those to be the result of an animal in search for food after the body had already begun to decayed. Also, to account for the irregular break in one of the ribs found, it is probable that this was the result of the injury that led to the death of the victim. The latter statement will be further analyzed later.

Judging from the skeletal remains, I have been able to identify who the body belongs to. Looking further into possible sex, age, race, and stature, I have found the body to be that of Mr. Robert Rutherford. Several factual elements have led to this conclusion. As both possible victims are male, the sex of the skeleton was assumed to be in concordance, but nothing should ever be merely assumed. To confirm this assumption, I compared the Nuchal Crest of the skull found at the scene of the crime to a portrayal of one of both a female and male. Because both featured a clear outward ridge, the picture of the male was an obvious match for the skull found at the crime scene. Also, the shape of the pelvis found at the crime scene was an absolute perfect match for that of a male. There is no doubt in my mind that the victim was indeed male.

Discovering the age of the body was more of a challenge. However, pure common knowledge helped me to determine that. I, along with several other jurors, learned back in elementary school that a suture exists along the top of our skulls, and as one ages, the suture closes up more and more, creating a measureable factor to determine relative age. The suture on the skull found at the crime scene was nearly unnoticeable. Because Mr. Morton was a young adult of thirty-four years when he went missing, his suture would not have been as completely closed as that of a, say, fifty-six year-old man like Mr. Rutherford. Therefore, the age determination of the body also points to Mr. Rutherford.

Discovering the race of the male was one of my easiest tasks throughout my investigation for the truth. African and Caucasian peoples have distinctly different facial bone structure. Because the skull was recovered from the crime scene, this conclusion was easy to make. The skull was a perfect match to that of a person of African origin. The eyes and nose are more wide set than that of a white person, according to current data. Also, judging from the serious protrusion of the jaw, the unidentified man must have been black. Biology does not lie.

Discovering the stature was easier in some ways than the others, but more difficult while at first glance. I am not a mathematically or scientifically inclined person, so I was completely baffled at the fact that a forensic scientist could look at bones and come up with the height of the victim's body. However, after paying close attention to the key witness forensic scientists that testified during the trial, it has been made clearer to me. Using the femur bone found at the crime scene, scientists were able to find the height of the man by simply measuring the femur and plugging it into a mathematical formula, which answer the question of height. After listening to their solution and trying it on my own, I have discovered that the body belonged to a man that was approximately five feet and five inches tall. Mr. Rutherford stood five feet and six inches tall, while Mr. Morton stood five feet and seven inches tall. The body obviously had to belong to the shorter man of the two, Mr. Robert Rutherford.

Using the skeletal remains to discover the age, race, sex, and stature of the body was key to determining who the body belonged to and forming my decision while serving on this jury. The physical evidence found at the crime scene supports my conclusion as well. Due to biological facts, the body of the victim belongs to an African American male

measuring approximately five feet and five inches tall. This description fits our first possible victim, Mr. Rutherford, perfectly. However, determining which man the body belonged to was only half of my job. Once I determined that fact, I also had to determine whether or not Mr. O'Hara was guilty of putting Mr. Rutherford in his current condition. My overall outlook is to expect the best out of people, so the common phrase "innocent until proven guilty" sticks out at me in this situation. This viewpoint has helped me to be open-minded. Although the two men did have conflict over hunting grounds, we cannot just assume that Mr. O'Hara would kill Mr. Rutherford over these conflicts. Looking solely at the remnants of the crime scene, there is absolutely no evidence proving that Mr. O'Hara, or anyone for that matter, murdered Mr. Rutherford. I have come to the conclusion that, because he was an older man with several health issues, Mr. Rutherford was in poor health and had been carrying alcohol with him while hunting. As apparent by pictures of the crime scene, the land was not cleared, leaving room to argue that an older man may find the terrain difficult or tiring to navigate. He could have simply tripped and was injured by something lying in his path, but this is just one possibility out of many. Either way, I would rule his death as accidental and uncaused by the defendant. Because no solid proof of murder exists, "beyond a reasonable doubt," I will be casting the vote of not guilty in the case of Supreme Court of the United States v. O'Hara, Forensic Case #356228.