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Memphis False Confession: The strange story of a murder, an interrogation and a sex scandal

Why would anyone admit to a crime they didn't commit? New info from a 2017 homicide offers a rare look at a false confession — and raises questions about MPD interrogation tactics.

Daniel Connolly, Memphis Commercial Appeal

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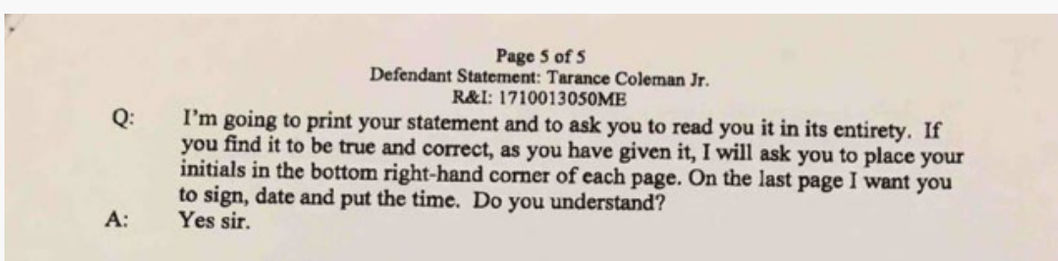
It was past midnight in the Memphis Police Department homicide office, and the interrogation of Tarance Coleman Jr. had entered its 10th hour.

Early in the process, at about 3:30 p.m., the 27-year-old had signed away his right to remain silent.

Now, after midnight, the officers gave him more papers to sign.

"They just kept forcing me. 'Sign the paper, you can go home. Sign this," Coleman recalled in an interview.

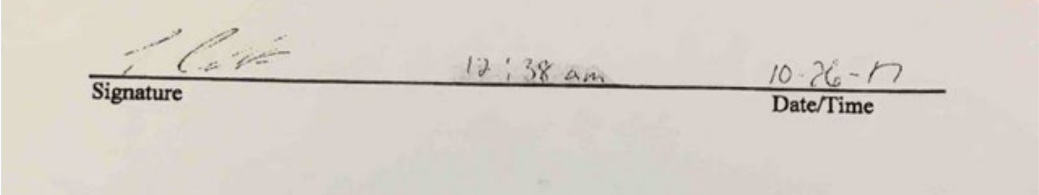
He did sign the papers — his initials appear on each page, his signature at the very end, along with the time, 12:38 a.m.



Page 5 of 5
Defendant Statement: Tarance Coleman Jr.
R&I: 1710013050ME

Q: I'm going to print your statement and to ask you to read you it in its entirety. If you find it to be true and correct, as you have given it, I will ask you to place your initials in the bottom right-hand corner of each page. On the last page I want you to sign, date and put the time. Do you understand?

A: Yes sir.



Tarance Coleman Jr.'s signature on the confession document.
SCREEN SHOT OF A MEMPHIS POLICE DEPARTMENT DOCUMENT

His lawyer would later argue that officers had threatened his family, lied to him by telling him his own father had blamed him for a shooting, deprived him of food, kept him half-naked in a cold room and subjected him to "relay" teams of trained interrogators.

As he signed on that night in 2017, he said he was thinking about one thing. "Thinking I'm going home."

Instead, he was admitting to a crime that would make headlines across Memphis and throughout the nation for its sheer absurdity.

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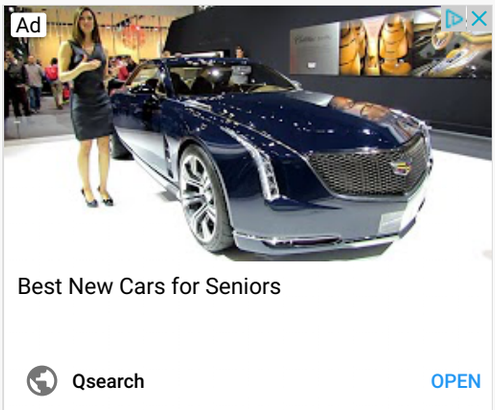

The case of the 'Mean Mugging'

According to the written confession, Coleman gave his father and another man a ride to the warehouse where they all worked. When they arrived, the coworker reportedly gave Coleman a disrespectful look — a "mean mug."

That's it — no words exchanged, just a mean look. Police said the "mean mug" alone prompted Coleman to grab a gun and shoot his coworker to death.

Yet new evidence has emerged that strongly suggests the shooting didn't happen that way.

No gun was ever found. Another man fled the shooting scene. One year later, that man was accused of a homicide in Georgia, and remains jailed there today.

Coleman's family would spend thousands of dollars trying to clear his name — an effort that may have gained traction when one of his police interrogators, Eric Kelly, resigned from the department. Kelly was accused of charging a young woman with a crime, then carrying on a sexual affair with her.

That interrogator's involvement aside, Coleman's false confession illustrates broader issues. Certain police interrogation practices, including lengthy interrogations, repeated accusations, and feeding a storyline and excuses to the suspect can lead to false confessions, said Steven Drizin, co-director of the Center on Wrongful Convictions at Northwestern University law school.

Tarance Coleman Jr. stands in court.
ARIEL COBBERT/ COMMERCIAL APPEAL

He and his colleagues have documented hundreds of false confessions around the country, including cases in which DNA evidence cleared the suspect and even cases in which the suspect confessed to a crime that never occurred, such as killing someone who later turned up alive.

He said false confessions are dangerous because juries usually can't imagine why an innocent person would admit to a crime. That harms not just the people who confess — false confessions also pose a danger to the broader public, he said.

"Well, as long as the wrong person is locked up, the true perpetrator is out on the streets free to wreak havoc and mayhem on the community . . . It's staggering how many other people commit murders and rapes when innocent people are locked up for their crimes."

The MPD did not respond to inquiries about its current interrogation techniques, nor has it described any steps it is taking to focus on the guilty and prevent false confessions. That matters now more than ever: a record number of homicides took place in the city last year, more than 330 killings, and this year is likewise proving deadly.

Many of the homicides are still unsolved, and a large number of cases involve interviews of witnesses and suspects.

Warehouse jobs and rap dreams

This account of a false confession is based on interviews with Tarance Coleman Jr., his father Tarance Coleman Sr., who was also interrogated for a period of nearly 12 hours, other family members, attorney Coleman Garrett, a review of available court records as well as crime scene photos, surveillance images, and other discovery materials that the prosecution turned over to Coleman's defense team.

The Shelby County District Attorney's office declined to comment for this article. The MPD did not respond to repeated requests for comment in June and July.

The story begins in southeast Memphis, an area full of logistics companies — the biggest, FedEx, is a household name, but countless other, lesser-known warehouse firms dot the landscape in office parks of long buildings with truck bays.

One of these companies is a clothing supplier called Staton Corporate & Casual. Its Memphis location is near the intersection of Lamar Avenue and Winchester Road.

A portrait of Tarance Coleman Jr. (right), his grandmother Stella Coleman and his father Tarance Coleman Sr.
JOE RONDONE/THE COMMERCIAL APPEAL

On Oct. 25, 2017, Tarance Coleman Jr. left home in a red 2018 Toyota Tundra truck, a rental vehicle, and picked up his father, Tarance Coleman Sr. They were stockers for Staton, handling the supply of T-shirts, helping unload trucks and fulfill orders, the elder Coleman said.

The younger Coleman had faced a domestic violence charge in 2012, but he completed a diversion program in 2016 and the case was dismissed. He hadn't been in serious trouble since, according to records.

That morning, father and son picked up a coworker, Marcus Nelson, who had celebrated his 23rd birthday a few days earlier.

Marcus Nelson
COURTESY NELSON FAMILY

The younger Coleman said he knew Nelson was trying to make it as a rapper. He said they didn't socialize much outside of work. "But I know he was a cool, nice dude. And he worked hard with us."

The Commercial Appeal met with Nelson's mother and sister. They declined to give an interview.

Nelson's Facebook page is filled with signs of his longed-for rap career — two days before the shooting, he posted video of himself singing in what looks like a home recording studio. In July, he had also posted a more slickly produced rap video in which he flashed a big handful of money and at one point appeared to aim a gun at the camera.

It's unclear how much of this gangster imagery was creative storytelling and how much truly reflected his life. He had a low-level criminal record, including a 2014 marijuana possession charge that was resolved through diversion and dismissed.

On the morning of the shooting Nelson used Facebook to post the words "Major Morning" and "#Major" along with images of an alarm clock, a pile of dollar bills, and a bag of money.

The last message on Marcus Nelson's Facebook page.
SCREEN SHOT FROM FACEBOOK

He had tagged earlier posts with similar words. According to a timestamp, that last post went up at 8:35 a.m.

He would be pronounced dead less than an hour later.

Coleman 'pulled in like normal.' Then, 'Pop-pop-pop-pop-pop!'

On the way to the warehouse, the three stopped for drinks and snacks at a Family Dollar and a donut shop. The elder Coleman said they were in a good mood that morning. "We laughed and talked the whole ride to work."

About 8:55 a.m., the red Toyota Tundra rolled into the warehouse parking lot.

"I just pulled in like normal," the younger Coleman said in an interview. "And then just heard shots."

His father gave a similar account. "So Marcus got out of the truck before we did. And when he got out and closed the door, he was looking at me and Junior through the window. And then shots just started ringing out. Just 'Pop-pop-pop-pop-pop!'"

Both father and son said they tried to take cover by ducking down inside the vehicle. They both said they didn't see who fired the shots.

Outside the truck, Nelson fell to the pavement, fatally wounded. Police would find the bag of donuts lying near him, along with several shell casings.

Read the forensic report.

Someone in a black BMW drove away.

An undated photograph shows a memorial at the site where Marcus Nelson was killed.
DISCOVERY MATERIALS IN TARANCE COLEMAN JR. CASE.

The interrogation begins

Police arrived within minutes. The father and son stayed on the scene and spoke with officers. Police documents written that day include their statements that the truck pulled in, then they heard shots.

Homicide investigators brought them downtown for further questioning.

The elder Coleman said that as he rode in a police car, an officer told him, "It ain't looking good for ya'll . . . Like 'Your son is in trouble with this.' I kept telling him, too, I was like, 'No, we ain't did nothing.'"

An investigator with MPD's homicide unit, Sgt. Michael Coburn, was assigned to take the lead on the case.

He and others got surveillance video and looked for a gun, but couldn't find one, Coburn wrote in a report.

Tarance Coleman Sr. signed an "advice of rights" form that afternoon at the police office. It begins, "You have the right to remain silent. Anything you say can be used against you in court. You have the right to talk to a lawyer for advice before we ask you questions. . ."

His son signed his own version of the form at 3:32 p.m.

The language from these forms comes from the 1966 U.S. Supreme Court decision in Miranda v. Arizona. The father and son could have refused to answer any questions, or ended the interview at any time. Instead, they talked with police without lawyers.

Most people waive their Miranda rights and talk with police alone, said Drizin, the law professor.

He reviewed documents at The Commercial Appeal's request and said that in this case, the father and son likely wanted to help the police find out who killed their coworker.

"They say 'I don't have anything to hide. I'm more than willing to talk to you. Let's go,'" he said.

"What they don't understand is that once they waive their Miranda rights, courts have given police officers almost free rein to do whatever they have to do in order to get a confession."

He said guilty people often waive their rights, too. "Because they want to know what kind of evidence that police officers have against them." That can help them decide whether to plea bargain or inform on other people, he said.

> **What they don't understand is that once they waive their Miranda rights, courts have given police officers almost free rein to do whatever they have to do in order to get a confession.**
>
> Steven Drizin, co-director of the center on wrongful convictions, Northwestern University law school

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Dad's account: 'We ain't did nothing'

Police interrogated the father and son in separate rooms. The elder Coleman said the accusations came fast.

"They immediately came in and just started saying, 'OK, your son killed him. Do you want to tell us what happened? Where's the gun?'"

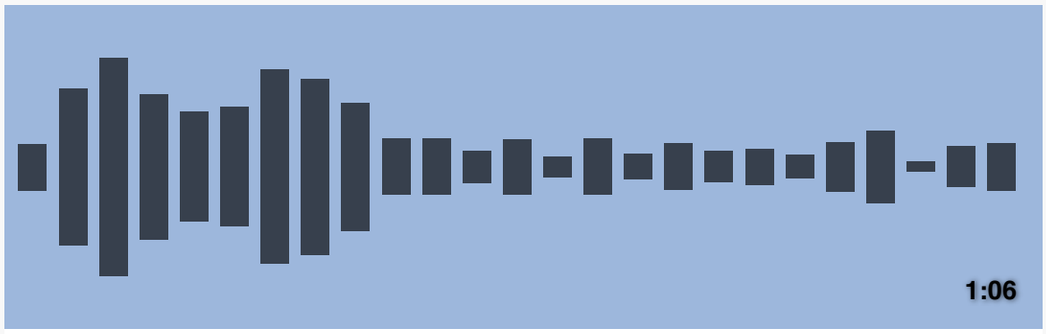
"I kept saying, 'What gun? We ain't did nothing.'

"'Yes you did. We got witnesses that said that someone said they seen you have a gun and you ran with a gun.'"

This went on and on, he said.

After many hours, officers eventually said they would let them go home. Right after that, they came back, he said.

"And said, 'We got him. We got him! I told you I was gonna get your son!'"



And my job had terminated us.

- Tarance Coleman Sr. describing the police interrogation

Listen to the full audio

"The detective came in and put the folder in front of me saying that — they told me that they finally got him. He confessed."

"And I said 'Confessed to what?' He was like, 'He did the killing, he did the killing! We ought to charge you too for accessory!' I said 'You can't charge me with nothing because he ain't did nothing!"

He said the police officers brought his son in to him, this time in handcuffs.

"And he kept saying, 'Dad, I ain't do it! Dad. I ain't do it, Dad!'"

The father would sign his own witness statement at 2:19 a.m., nearly 12 hours after signing the "advice of rights" form. He didn't admit guilt, nor did he implicate his son, though he did appear to repeat what police told him about his son confessing. "It's a shocker to me," the written statement says.

Read Tarance Coleman Sr.'s full statement.

Junior's account: 'They're like threatening my life'

Interrogated in a separate room, Coleman Jr. said the officers repeatedly accused him.

"To them, they don't never believe what you say. You automatically guilty to them . . . "

"Like hollering. They'll make threats to you, talk crazy to you and all that. They're like threatening my life, anything. Family-wise."

A later court filing from Coleman's lawyer made more specific allegations: that police lied to Junior and told him his father had told them he shot the victim. That officers threatened to give his family's address to a local gang member if he didn't cooperate.

Tarance Coleman Jr.
JOE RONDONE/THE COMMERCIAL APPEAL

His lawyer also said police took most of his clothes for tests, leaving him with only his shorts and shoes in a cold room. Both the father and son later tested positive for possible gunpowder residue. Positive tests can indicate someone fired a gun. However, an FBI web site says positive tests can also result from being near a shooting, or from contamination — for instance, an officer touches a pistol, then touches the suspect.

Coleman Jr. said police offered a way out — he could sign a statement and leave.

He said when he signed the statement, he believed the police had typed up his denials on the paper.

He said he didn't read the document.

"They took my statement like they believed me, like ever. 'Sign this, you can go home. We know you telling the truth.' All along, it was a lie."

He had just signed an admission that could put him in prison for years.

In the written confession, Coleman is quoted as saying that Nelson looked at him wrong.

Q: Did you and Mr. Nelson have an argument today?/
A: No.

Q: Did Mr. Nelson make any kind of verbal threat towards you before the shooting?
A: Naw, it was like a mean mug.

Q: What is a mean mug?
A: It the way you look at a person.

Q: Did you say anything to Mr. Nelson before you shot him?
A: Naw.

Q: Tell me in your own words the events that took place before, during and after the shooting?
A: I got up to go to work. I had to go and pick up my father and Marcus because we all work together. I stopped at Family Dollar and then I stopped at the donut shop n Winchester right next to Reese BBQ. Then we pulled up to work in the truck. I was driving, my daddy was in the front passenger seat and Marcus was on the backseat driver's side. Marcus got out the truck and I was putting on my work shoes. I got out the truck and Marcus was standing on the drivers side by me. Then he gave me this look, he mean mugged me. That was when I was placed in

A screen shot from Tarance Coleman Jr.'s written confession, which was typed by Sgt. Eric Kelly.
SCREEN SHOT OF A MEMPHIS POLICE DEPARTMENT DOCUMENT

"Then he gave me this look. He mean mugged me. That was when I was placed in fear so defended myself. I reached under the driver's seat and got the gun out and I started shooting him."

Coleman said he didn't use the memorable "mean mug" expression. "That's what they put in there."

Advertisement

No recording of interrogation

The confession report says the statement was taken by Coburn, the lead investigator, and another sergeant, Eric Kelly. Kelly typed the statement. No video or audio recording of the interrogation is available.

This statement is being taken at the Homicide Office, 170 N. Main rm 10-13 on Wednesday 25th at 11:50 p.m. to, Sgt E. Kelly IBM 4679 and Sgt. M. Coburn IBM# 2463, relative to Homicide which occurred at, 3791 Knight Rd on, 10/25/2017 and which is filed under R & I #1710013050ME

Questioned by: Sgt. E. Kelly IBM 4679 and Sgt. M. Coburn IBM# 2463
Typed by: Sgt. E. Kelly

A screen shot from Tarance Coleman Jr.'s confession
SCREEN SHOT OF A MEMPHIS POLICE DEPARTMENT DOCUMENT

In 2018, the Institute for Public Service Reporting at the University of Memphis pointed out a curiosity about the MPD — it was a rarity among departments nationwide in that it usually didn't record interrogations, even in homicide cases.

Defense lawyers argued it was a deliberate strategy: without a recording, police were free to threaten suspects during interrogations, lie to them, then convince them to sign confession documents that used the police officers' own words, not the suspect's.

The MPD has said it began recording interrogations in July 2019.

According to the official timeline in the Tarance Coleman case, more than nine hours passed from the moment he signed the waiver of Miranda rights to the moment he signed the confession.

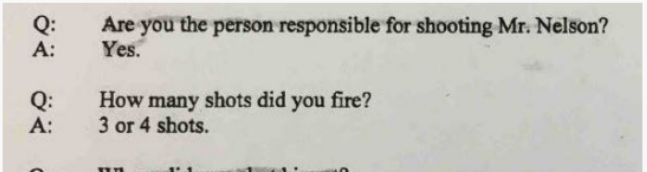
It takes only about six minutes to read the entire five-page confession document out loud, suggesting the police left out hours of interaction.

Drizin, the law professor, reviewed the confession and said he was struck by the vagueness of the answers.

For instance:

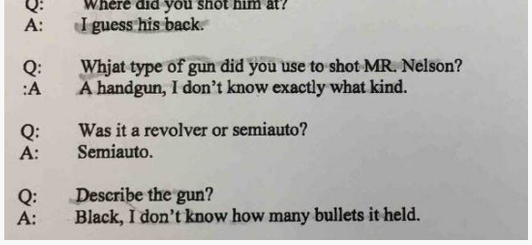
Q: “Where did you shot him at?”

A: “I guess his back.”


Q: Are you the person responsible for shooting Mr. Nelson?
A: Yes.

Q: How many shots did you fire?
A: 3 or 4 shots.

Tarance Coleman Jr.'s



Q: Where did you shot him at?
A: I guess his back.

Q: Whjat type of gun did you use to shot MR. Nelson?
:A A handgun, I don't know exactly what kind.

Q: Was it a revolver or semiauto?
A: Semiauto.

Q: Describe the gun?
A: Black, I don't know how many bullets it held.

full statement

Read more

"You don't guess about these details," Drizin said. "You remember these kind of details."

He pointed to other signs that the confession is doubtful: the apparent lack of a motive for the shooting, and the lack of corroborating details. A good police interrogation of a guilty suspect will discover details that the police don't yet know — for instance, the location of a murder weapon or incriminating text messages, he said. That didn't happen in this case.

Hiring a private lawyer

Tarance Coleman Jr. was jailed and charged with voluntary manslaughter. A grand jury later indicted him on a first-degree murder charge.

For his grandmother, Stella Coleman, it was a shock. "Disbelief and crying. I couldn't believe it."

Family members hired Coleman Garrett, a longtime criminal defense attorney. They had to come up with thousands of dollars in legal fees. "We just had to sacrifice and struggle and pay Mr. Garrett like we could," the grandmother said.

Criminal defense lawyers often have to protect the rights of people who have committed a crime.

In this case, though, Garrett concluded his client was innocent. "There's no evidence of him committing a crime," he said. "It made no sense."

So why did he confess?

... he went in there thinking that he could explain to them, tell them what happened. And he was willing to cooperate on the front end and didn't realize that he was going to be charged with murder.

Coleman Garrett, criminal defense attorney

JOE RONDONE/THE COMMERCIAL APPEAL

"In the first place, he's not a very strong-minded person," the lawyer said. "Secondly, he went in there thinking that he could explain to them, tell them what happened. And he was willing to cooperate on the front end and didn't realize that he was going to be charged with murder."

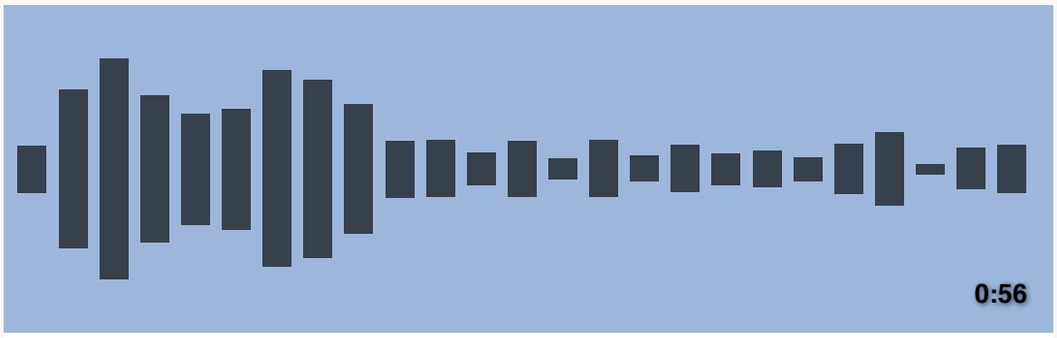
He said police frequently use psychological tactics, like handcuffing someone to a bench in a cold room and leaving them there for couple of hours. And they'll alternate pleasant interactions with shouted accusations, he said.

After a while, a suspect will start agreeing with whatever the investigators say.

"I mean, it sounds real stupid. But if you're not a strong-minded person, and you go through that kind of ordeal, it's not hard to break 'em down. And that's what happened."

Garrett filed a motion to throw out his client's confession. Though some false confession cases involve people with intellectual disabilities, Coleman is a high school graduate and his lawyer didn't make any claims about his education or intelligence. "It's more ignorance of the process," the lawyer said.

The motion never went before a judge, but the lawyer won a concession in another area. Roughly one month after the shooting, Coleman was released on $65,000 bond, according to records. He was later required to visit a "day reporting center" for drug tests and check-ins.



You know it was kind of sad to see him go through that. For people judging him

- Tarance Coleman Sr. explains how news coverage of the shooting impacted him and his son

Listen to the full audio

Though he was free for the moment, he, his girlfriend and their young children still faced hardship. His father said both he and his son had been immediately fired from their warehouse jobs after the shooting. And few people wanted to hire a man with a pending homicide case. The younger Coleman eventually found other logistics work, but his girlfriend said financial problems forced them to give up the apartment they were renting together and move in with his grandmother.

Just over two years later, Eric Kelly's scandal explodes

In January 2020, Eric Kelly's case blew up. News accounts published details of the detective's sexual relationship with a young woman he had charged in connection with a homicide case, including photos of the woman posing with guns in Kelly's home. Personnel records revealed multiple allegations against Kelly dating back as far as 1997, including intimidation, cursing and beating suspects.

Former Memphis Police Department homicide investigator Eric Kelly appears in court on Oct. 26, 2020.
DANIEL CONNOLLY

MPD internal investigators concluded that Kelly had lied to them. Every case that Kelly had ever touched in his decades on the force was now in question. He resigned, and was later charged with official misconduct. His lawyer entered a not guilty plea.

Kelly's problems likely weakened the case against Tarance Coleman Jr. Meanwhile, the defense lawyer had been trying to draw prosecutors' attention to another suspect: Brandon Pittman.

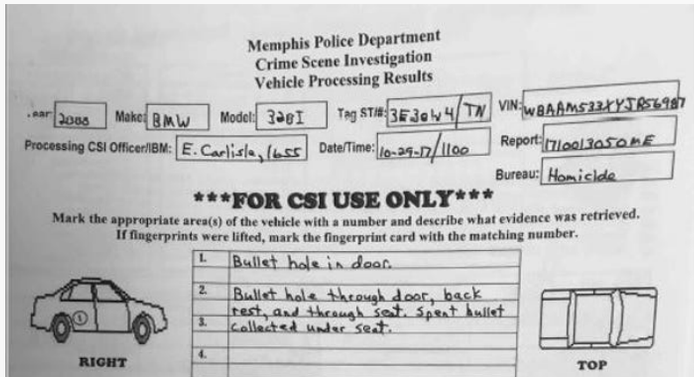
A wrinkle in the case: The driver of the black car

It turned out the MPD had taken a close look at Pittman, too.

On Oct. 29, 2017, about three days after Tarance Coleman's confession, Coburn, the lead homicide investigator, wrote a formal request seeking permission to search Pittman's car.

Tarance Coleman Jr. had told police a black BMW was parked when the shooting occurred and left afterwards, Coburn wrote.

Coburn wrote that he watched video surveillance that confirmed this.



Memphis Police Department
Crime Scene Investigation
Vehicle Processing Results

Year: 2008 Make: BMW Model: 328I Tag ST#: 3EJ0W4/TN VIN: WBAAM533XYJR56987
Processing CSI Officer/IBM: E. Carlisle, 1655 Date/Time: 10-29-17/1100 Report: 171001305OME
Bureau: Homicide

FOR CSI USE ONLY

Mark the appropriate area(s) of the vehicle with a number and describe what evidence was retrieved.
If fingerprints were lifted, mark the fingerprint card with the matching number.

1. Bullet hole in door.
2. Bullet hole through door, back rest, and through seat. Spent bullet collected under seat.
3.
4.

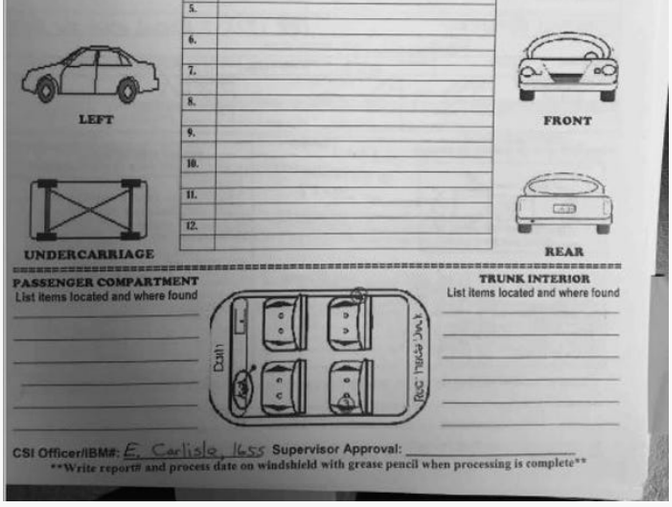
RIGHT TOP

The document says Pittman worked at the same warehouse and reportedly drove a black BMW.

A warehouse manager said Pittman never showed up on the day of the shooting and that on the next day, he called and said he was quitting his job, Coburn wrote.

On October 28, Coburn found a black 2000 BMW 328i parked at the home of one of Pittman's relatives. He saw it appeared to have a bullet hole in the door.

The search warrant was approved. Among the evidence found in Pittman's car was a bullet that had apparently passed through the door and some other material before landing under the seat.



A page from the Crime Scene Investigation report on Brandon Pittman's vehicle.
SCREEN SHOT OF A MEMPHIS POLICE DEPARTMENT DOCUMENT

Homicide investigators interviewed Pittman on Oct. 29, 2017.

Once again, there is no available recording of the interview, so it is unclear exactly what he said. But the written account says Pittman told detectives he was at the shooting scene, in a car parked two spaces away. He said he saw the red truck arrive, heard shots, then drove off.

He said he went home and didn't report the shooting because he was scared.

And the bullet hole? Pittman said a bullet struck his car when someone shot up his house earlier in the month, according to the report.

Written records say he identified several images from the crime scene. Among them was a surveillance image of a parking lot and a black car. It bears a handwritten notation.

"This is me leaving after the shooting. (Signed) Brandon Pittman 10/29/17."

Police let him go.

This surveillance image bears the handwritten notation, "This is me leaving after the shooting," along with what looks like Brandon Pittman's signature.
DISCOVERY MATERIALS IN TARANCE COLEMAN JR. CASE.

Pittman arrested in Georgia

Pittman was 31 at the time of the shooting. His prior criminal record had included guilty pleas to charges including aggravated robbery and cruelty to animals, according to online court records.

On Oct. 25, 2018, one year to the day after the warehouse shooting in Memphis, Pittman was accused of carrying out a fatal shooting in an Atlanta neighborhood. The victim was named Santino Simmons. Local news reports described the victim as Pittman's own brother.

Pittman faced charges of murder and other crimes and was ordered held without bond. In a 2019 court filing, Pittman said he was acting in self-defense and didn't deserve such serious charges.

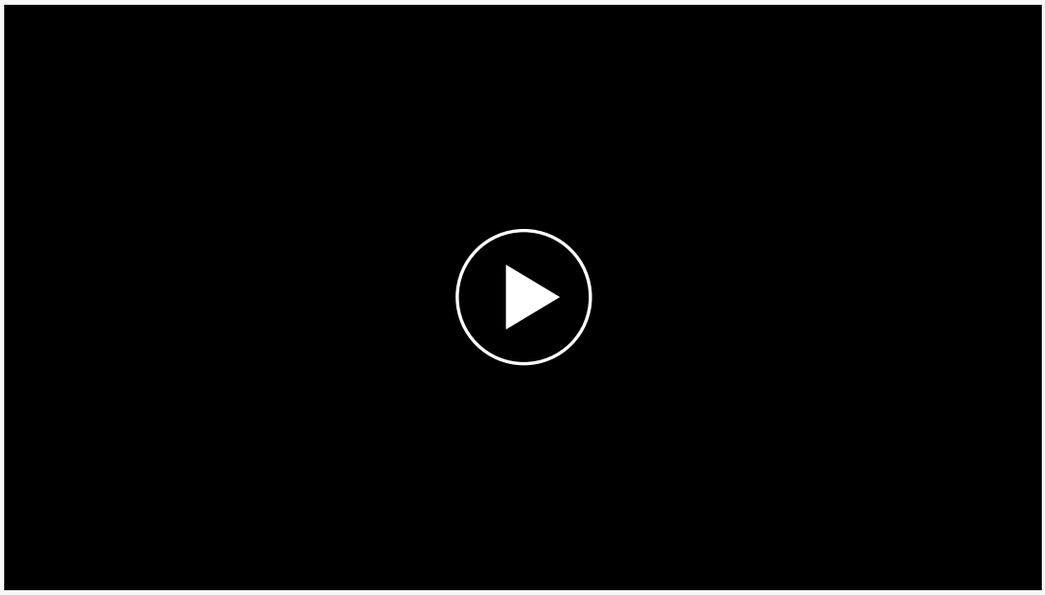
Pittman's attorney Rachel Jenks didn't respond to requests for comment. A reporter wrote a letter to Pittman in jail, and the envelope was sent back marked "return to sender."

Then in May of this year, a prosecutor called Garrett, the defense attorney. The prosecution would make a special announcement in court on May 25.

Called to court again

On that day, Coleman Jr. took a spot at the microphone in the courtroom at the criminal justice center at 201 Poplar. His grandmother, mother, aunt and girlfriend took seats on a bench behind him. The judge congratulated him on complying with supervision rules.

Tarance Coleman Jr. court proceeding May 25, 2021 (3:41)



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Then a prosecutor, Alanda Dwyer, spoke.

“Judge, Mr. Garrett and I have been working on this for a number of years. Waiting on evidence to come back and sharing information," she said. "And based upon the totality of the evidence at this point, the state doesn’t feel confident in a successful prosecution. Therefore we’d ask that the case be nolle prossed, your honor.”

“Nolle prossed” means dismissed.

A pause. The judge wrote on a paper.

Coleman shifted at the microphone.

Judge Lee Coffee spoke. “Upon recognition of the state for good cause shown, this indictment against you is being dismissed, or nolle prosequi, without cost."

"Mr. Coleman, you are discharged from any further responsibility on this case, sir, and you are free to go.”

His grandmother quietly wept.

Stella Coleman reacts after a prosecutor announces that the first-degree murder charges against her grandson, Tarance Coleman Jr., are dropped on Tuesday May 25, 2021.
ARIEL COBBERT/ COMMERCIAL APPEAL

The entire court appearance took less than four minutes. It would have been less than that, but Coleman said he needed an excuse slip for work.

Unanswered questions

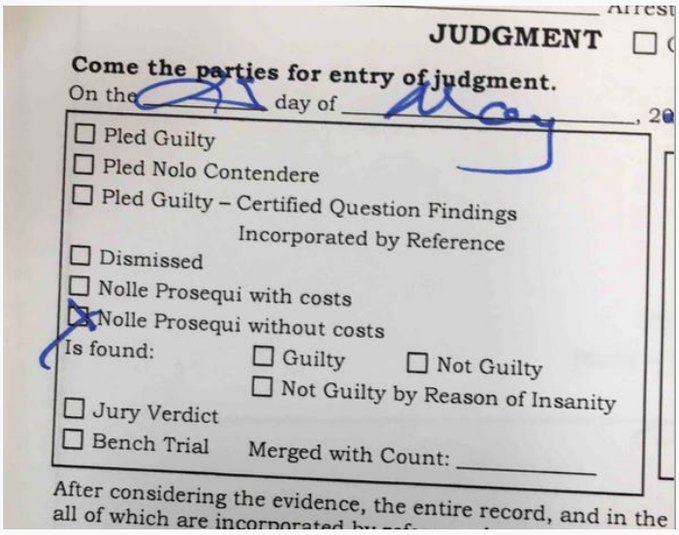
Many questions about the case are unanswered.

Among those questions: why did prosecutors drop charges against Coleman now? Was it because of the detective's sex scandal? Because of Pittman's arrest in Atlanta? Because of something else?

The prosecutor's office isn't saying. After the May 25 hearing, the homicide case against Coleman was ordered expunged, officially removed from the record. A spokesman for the prosecutor's office, Larry Buser, said state law blocks the office from speaking about an expunged case.

Another question: what happens to Pittman, the man who left the shooting scene? Might he face charges in the shooting of Nelson? The prosecutor's office didn't answer questions on this one, either.

Another question: how many false confession cases are there in Memphis? In January 2020, the prosecutor's office announced a review of all cases that Kelly had touched. To date, the prosecutor's office has not released any detailed information about the status of that review.


JUDGMENT

Come the parties for entry of judgment.

On the 21 day of May, 20

- [ ] Pled Guilty
- [ ] Pled Nolo Contendere
- [ ] Pled Guilty – Certified Question Findings Incorporated by Reference
- [ ] Dismissed
- [ ] Nolle Prosequi with costs
- [x] Nolle Prosequi without costs

Is found: [ ] Guilty [ ] Not Guilty [ ] Not Guilty by Reason of Insanity

- [ ] Jury Verdict
- [ ] Bench Trial Merged with Count: _____

After considering the evidence, the entire record, and in the all of which are incorporated by ref

Court paperwork shows the final judgement in the homicide case against Tarance Coleman Jr. It's "Nolle Prosequi without costs." "Nolle prosequi" is a Latin phrase meaning "refuse to prosecute" and it means the prosecutor's office is dropping the charge.
PHOTO OF SHELBY COUNTY CRIMINAL COURT RECORDS.

However, at least one other confession that Kelly typed up has likewise been thrown out. That case involves Ladarius Montgomery, who signed a confession to killing a 83-year-old man. That case is still pending and the suspect is still jailed.

Another question: what steps, if any, is the MPD taking to prevent false confessions?

Alternative interrogation methods focus on finding the truth, rather than pressing someone to confess. But it is unclear what interrogation training methods the MPD has used in recent years. The MPD did not respond to multiple requests for comment for this article.

Another question: what do the homicide investigators on the Tarance Coleman Jr. case say about it? Reached for comment, Coburn, the lead investigator, said he would agree to an interview if the MPD's public information officers approved it — but they didn't respond to inquiries.

Meanwhile, Kelly faced two new criminal charges in July, both related to allegations he harassed and threatened an ex-girlfriend. Both cases are still pending. Dewun Settle, a lawyer representing Kelly in the harassment cases, declined to comment in detail, but said the legal team expects to work through the process.

An attorney representing Kelly in the official misconduct case, Arthur Quinn, declined to comment.

Going home

In the moments after the murder case against Tarance Coleman Jr. was dismissed on May 25, Coleman Garrett, the lawyer, said the case shows the criminal justice system can harm people.

"He's been to jail. He's had to make a horrendous bond that stressed the family emotionally and financially. They had to pay thousands of dollars in attorney's fees. And there's no relief for them. We talk about victims in these cases. Mr. Coleman is a victim with no relief." He later said the family may file a civil lawsuit.

Coleman Jr. expressed mixed feelings. "I'm excited. Happy that it's all over with." But he also struck a somber note. "It's hard to get my three years, four years of my life back."

He and his family members stepped onto an elevator for what may have been their last ride to the ground floor at 201 Poplar. "I ain't got to come down here no more!" Coleman said.

As they made their way to the building's exit, his grandmother continued to speak, softly. "Thank you, Jesus. Thank you, Jesus. Thank you, Jesus."

(Left to right) Nicole Wallace, Felicia Miller, Riesha Nathaniel and Stella Coleman surround Tarance Coleman Jr. after prosecutors announced the end of the case against him.
ARIEL COBBERT/ COMMERCIAL APPEAL

Correction: *The Institute for Public Service Reporting at the University of Memphis first wrote about the MPD's practice of not recording interrogations in 2018. This article has been edited to reflect the correct date.*

This story began with a tip to investigative reporter Daniel Connolly. If you have a story idea, reach him at 901-529-5296, daniel.connolly@commercialappeal.com, on Twitter at @danielconnolly, or by mail to Daniel Connolly, The Commercial Appeal, 119 S. Main, Suite 300, Memphis, TN 38103.

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