

2016

Poetic Justice

Darrell Cannon

Follow this and additional works at: <https://lawecommons.luc.edu/pilr>



Part of the [Civil Rights and Discrimination Commons](#), [Criminal Procedure Commons](#), [Environmental Law Commons](#), and the [Human Rights Law Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Darrell Cannon, *Poetic Justice*, 21 Pub. Interest L. Rptr. 186 (2016).

Available at: <https://lawecommons.luc.edu/pilr/vol21/iss3/3>

This Special Feature is brought to you for free and open access by LAW eCommons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Public Interest Law Reporter by an authorized editor of LAW eCommons. For more information, please contact law-library@luc.edu.

Poetic Justice

Darrell Cannon*

“You gonna tell us what we wanna hear?”

*What you’ve just seen. . . is something that
Jon Burge and his henchmen inflicted upon us. . .*

The pain, the anger, it never goes away. Never ever.

My name is Darrell Cannon. Five days after Gregory Banks was tortured, the *exact* same detectives got me. And these sadistic buzzards went a step further. When they tortured me on November the second, 1983, Peter Dignan told me—he was more explicit than he was with Greg—he said “for niggers like you, we have a scientific way of interrogating you.” And before that day was over with, I clearly understood what he meant by scientific. Please understand that I’d never confess to be an angel, by no means. But never in my life had I been treated the way that these same detectives that got Greg and tortured me—I had never been treated like that before in my life. Throughout that entire day, my name was never Darrell Cannon; my name was always “nigger this,” “nigger that.”

So even to this day, when clergymen and other people say: “Son, let it go. You know, let God deal with it. Forgive ‘em,” my reply continuously is: “You know, you have a right to say that because you’re clergy and you want peace.” But for me, I hate the air they breathe. I’ll continue to hate the air they breathe until they’re no longer on the face of the earth. Because, when you put a shotgun in a man’s mouth, like they did me, and they took me to an isolated area on the South Side of Chicago, and I was cuffed behind my back, they told me before they day’s out that I would speak, I would tell them everything they wanted to know. And during that day of November the second they split my upper lip, they chipped my two teeth, in forcing a shotgun barrel in my mouth. Try and imagine being in an isolated area. And they told me, and I repeat: “Nigger, look around. Nobody’s going to hear or see nothing we do to you today.”

And the man took a shotgun shell, Peter Dignan – I’ve always testified, and I’ll continue to say, that Peter Dignan is the most vicious one out of all the other detectives, because he, along with the rest of them, *enjoyed* torturing

* Edited by Nickolas Kaplan and Emily Blumenstein, from his spoken remarks at the PILR Symposium on October 30, 2015, at Loyola University Chicago School of Law. Thank you for your powerful testimony and unwavering courage in the fight against injustice.

Black men. They enjoyed it beyond a shadow of a doubt. And when Peter Dignan told me, said “Nigger, listen,” he took the shotgun with the shell and he turned his back, so I couldn’t see him. And I heard a click. And I honestly thought that he was taking the shotgun shell and placing it up in the chamber because when he turned back around to face me, I did not see the shotgun shell.

So they said “You gonna tell us what we wanna hear?” I said “No.” One of the other detectives said “Go ahead, blow that nigger’s head off.” And at that point Peter Dignan tries to force a shotgun in my mouth. I didn’t allow him, voluntarily, to do so, so he had to force the barrel of the shotgun in my mouth. And when he *finally* was able to do that, and they asked me again was I going to tell them what they wanted to hear, and I tried to say “No,” he pulled the trigger.

And I heard that (click sound). And he took the shotgun back out of my mouth. And he went in his vest pocket and showed me the shotgun shell.

He repeated that three times. The third time that I heard that click, the hair on the back of my head stood straight up.

I honestly thought that he had blew my brains out. But he didn’t. But they wasn’t finished there.

They tried to hang me by my handcuffs while I was cuffed behind my back. They wrenched my shoulders, and doing so, at one point it became very comical because Sergeant Burns almost fell off the back of the bumper that he was standing on when the other two detectives lifted me up to him. That morning, there was a fine mist rain. So the bumper was very moist. And when he almost fell, for a minute, I got some relief because I almost laughed, you know, at this comical individual. But then he got serious. Because that same 45 automatic that Greg saw Burns with, is the same 45 that he put to my head, and told me, “Don’t move, nigger. Don’t move.”

And they re-did the handcuffs, from the back to the front. And cuffed them again.

They made me lay sideways in the backseat of a detective car. They pulled my pants and shorts down, and the man took out a cattle prod. And he turned it on. And he stuck me on my bare testicles.

Never in my life. . . pardon me. I’m not hurting. I’m just, just that mad. Any time I talk about this, I get *just that mad*. Because, I was never allowed to fight. I was never allowed to defend myself against these *despicable* individuals.

They continued to stick me with that cattle prod. They electrocuted me.

I've been often asked, "How long did it take place?" In my mind, it's still taking place today. And that was over 30-some years ago. I could never forget or forgive anything that they did to me. But you know what, there's a flip side to this—and that is, poetic justice has come my way. Because out of the misery that I endured that day, has been a measure of justice and pleasure. Pleasure being, I've been able to travel all around the country, speaking about these atrocities that these despicable individuals inflicted upon me.

"WHAT ABOUT THE ATROCITIES HERE?"

I have been successful along with Greg, Anthony Holmes, and others to tell our story to people who found it incredible that police officers would conduct themselves in such a manner. Yet and still, history has always shown us that the Chicago police have had a very heavy hand. Going all the way back to 1968, the Democratic Convention, I mean the police there, they bust so many heads, it was pathetic. They beat people there and all they was doing was protesting.

And then if you go up a little more, to 1969, you'll find the case of Fred Hampton and Mark Clark, where they straight out assassinated them. And when they was bringing Fred Hampton's body outside, the police was laughing. "Yeah, yeah? We got it," you know, and the camera's caught it. So the Chicago police didn't just start these despicable acts with Jon Burge. They were in place before Jon Burge.

But Jon Burge took it to a new level. Because everything he learned when he was in Vietnam and when they captured Viet Congs to extract information, he brought those same torture techniques back to Chicago, Illinois. And he employed all-white detectives to his little group. And they truly reigned terror over the Black community on the South Side of Chicago. And nobody really cared about it. Why? Because crime had become outrageous and the community just wanted a stop to it—by any means necessary.

And so that gave Jon Burge and company free reign to torture people, whether they was guilty or not. And in their sick minds, they felt that if you didn't do this crime, you did some other crime that you might have got away with, so therefore, whatever we do to you *now* is justifiable. But no, it's not. This is not a Third World country, you know? This is the United States of America. We house the U.N. up in New York. But people come here from all around the world, talking about the atrocities of other countries. But what about the atrocities here, in the United States?

“MAYBE WHEN THEY DEAD, IT MAY HEAL”

It is very painful to talk about these things here, and like Flint Taylor was telling you, *anytime* I speak about this, I do in fact have to take a big swig of Pepto-Bismol before I speak in order to calm my stomach down. Because I have just that much anger in me.

I'm often asked, “Will it ever heal?” And my reply is, “I doubt it. Maybe when they dead, it may heal.” But as it stands today, it's just as fresh in my mind as it was November the second, 1983.

I'm a little better now than I used to be. I used to wake up in cold sweats. My wife used to have to wake me up because of the fact that I was sweating so bad from having nightmares about this that half the bed would be wet. And I would have bad headaches. I still have headaches.

Do you know that while in prison, they tried to torture me there too? They placed me in a penitentiary called Tamms. Tamms was a supermax prison where you're locked up 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. My bed consisted of a concrete block with a paper-thin mattress. I endured that for 9 years—9 years straight. And I often say that the spirit of my mother, my grandmother, my son, my father— all the people that passed away while I was in prison, they would not allow Darrell Cannon to go back to a single funeral – even though they had a policy allowing prisoners to go back to loved one's funerals. But that was just another form of “we're gonna break you one way or another.”

Well, you know, they didn't know Darrell Cannon. You know, Darrell Cannon's one stubborn son of a gun, thanks to the spirit of the women in my family who raised me, who taught me some valuable lessons. Please know that the men in my family was there, but the women ran it. And I'm not afraid to admit that, you know? In fact, I was the baby of the family, and I got my way. And I loved it, you know? But because of them, I was able to endure for over 24 years before I got my freedom.

“ONE HELL OF A FIGHT”

Greg mentioned Flint. I got in touch with Flint after seeing a special on TV about the Fred Hampton case. And I thought that he was a very interesting man. And I got in touch with him. And we started a dialogue. And eventually I persuaded him to take my case. Even though I had no money—I couldn't pay him. And you know one thing I am, I'm always up front. And I told him up front that I don't have any money. So if that precluded him from taking my case, I would understand because, you know, it is a business. You

have to pay the bills some way, somehow. But I'm thankful to God that something struck him that caused him to take my case.

We later on incorporated Locke Bowman from Northwestern University. I wrote him as well. I had no intention of staying in prison for the rest of my life. And because of that, and because of everything I had been through, the lawyers took an interest in Darrell Cannon, and I'm thankful to God that they did. And we started to fight. It was one hell of a fight, I assure you.

I set a precedent. For the lawyers in here that know anything about law, you know that you're only entitled to one suppression hearing. Well, Darrell Cannon had two. Because the first one was crooked. I was in front of Maloney – Thomas J. Maloney. This mother here was taking bribes before I came before him, during the time I was in front of him, and after I left him. But, you know, poetic justice is so beautiful. Because the law caught up with him. And he ended up going to prison.

Now keep in mind that the judicial system still has some old tricks in mind for Darrell Cannon. Because they placed me in front of a judge who used to be a detective at Area 2, who was friends with Jon Burge and them. I said, "Damn, am I ever gonna get a break, you know?" So we had to fight and I won my right to get away from him. But again, the judicial system had no intention of letting Darrell Cannon out of prison.

They put me in front of another crazy son of a gun, and that was Morrissey. Morrissey, he was so stupid, you know, he couldn't preside over traffic court properly. That's how dumb he is. But he one day made a blunder that cost him. I wasn't even in court—Flint wasn't even there. This was another case altogether. And Morrissey was so comfortable with spouting off at his mouth, that he made an inflammatory statement about, "Well, I don't want you saying that his rights were violated, because I don't want the idiots from People's Law Office to come in here talking about police brutality." Again, as poetic justice would have it, the attorney happened to get the transcript and send it to Flint, and said, "Hey, look what Morrissey said about you!"

We started to move straight ahead with my cases. As I said, I set a precedent in having two suppression hearings instead of one. I also set a precedent in having not one revocation hearing – that's before the parole board, you're only entitled to one – I had two. Because once again, they underestimated my ability to withstand pressure. They underestimated my ability to be an intelligent Black man who knew how to fight and continue to fight.

And in doing so, eventually, the State's Attorney's office, after 20 years of litigation, walked into court and said "Your Honor, we're dropping all charges against Darrell Cannon."

"I FELT THAT I HAD A MISSION"

Now, *they* may have thought that Darrell Cannon would go away. But it doesn't work like that. You cannot torture me, send me through hell, keep me in prison while all my family members die and not allow me to go back to any of their funerals, and then suppose that I just walk out of prison and say, "OK, thank you." Now, I felt that I had a mission. And that mission was to bring light to the atrocities that the Chicago police had did under Commander Burge's watch. And so, I started my own personal crusade. I took myself to be the spokesman for all the Jon Burge victims. And I started to speak out. And I have continued to speak out.

We have done something – and I say "we," not Darrell Cannon, we, collectively; Joey Mogul, all the other beautiful people who sit here today, and those that you don't see – we started a movement, a movement that Stan Willis had the audacity to coin "reparation." Here's a Black man that decided it's time for us in Chicago to receive some reparations. And the movement started.

A lot of people that it was impossible for us to get to City Council for us to pass an ordinance against police brutality. But then, too, the City never thought that we would have gotten as far as we have gotten in the Jon Burge cases. So as a result of that, we won reparations. The City Council, without dissent, approved the reparations.

People, you need to understand that this has never been done before in America. Nowhere in America have Black people ever been given our reparations, except here in Chicago. Not even in torture. So, you see, Fred Hampton, for me, first started the words of "People Power." And I came to understand the significance of People Power, because it wasn't just Black people, it wasn't just Brown people – there were white people that were side-by-side with us during this entire movement. We had a rainbow coalition.

You know, they offered me a lot of money, once upon a time, to be quiet. I said, "Hey, you can take that money and stick it where the sun don't shine." Because I have a mission, and the mission is, all those Darrell Cannons who are still in prison, who have *not* been given a fair and just hearing, it is my mission that they get just that. And until that mission is accomplished, I must speak. I must speak each and every time I can.

Atrocities happen throughout the world. What makes us different, is that if we get involved against the atrocities and wrongdoings of our government officials, then it is incumbent on us to make the change. And because of this, I thank you for being so attentive and inviting us to speak, because it is important for you to see and hear, and engage, all of us, because you are the future. Thank you.