

Wrongly Imprisoned Man Won't Shut Up About It

JOLIET, IL—George Howard Buell, an inmate wrongfully imprisoned at Stateville Correctional Center for third-degree sexual assault and aggravated battery, won't shut the hell up about being innocent.

Buell, 46, an Elmhurst, IL electrician, was convicted of raping and burglarizing his elderly neighbor in 1994, despite the fact that he was at work when the crime occurred. He was mistakenly sentenced to a prison term of 20 years to life. Since then, his imprisonment has been a source of nonstop bellyaching.

"I'm completely innocent of the charges brought against me," Buell said in yet another long-winded jailhouse statement last week. "I am a victim of inept police work, conflict-of-interest issues among the prosecution, and a lackadaisical defense. Anyone with even a peripheral familiarity with my case could see the inconsistencies. It's a complete miscarriage of justice."

Buell's insufferable tirades have taken the form of numerous appeals to state and federal courts, unsuccessful attempts to launch public

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reopened for review. The same procedure could be instituted in other states to rectify injustices that are outside the bounds of the regular legal system.

Prime cases for such review are the second-degree murder convictions of seven men under very dubious circumstances related to an Armistice Day fracas between pro-union and anti-union people in Centralia, Washington on November 11, 1919, that resulted in the deaths of four men, and the lynching of one man kidnapped from the county jail.⁸

End notes:

¹ Historical Court Clears Chief Leschi's Name, Gregory Roberts, *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, p. B1, B4, December 11, 2004.

² Historical Court Clears Chief Leschi's Name, Gregory Roberts, *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, p. B1, B4, December 11, 2004.

³ Indian Chief Hanged in 1858 is Cleared, AP, *The New York Times*, December 12, 2004.

⁴ Chief's Retrial, 146 Years in the Making, Sarah Kershaw, *The New York Times*, December 5, 2004.

⁵ Historical court clears Chief Leschi's name, By Gregory Roberts, *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, December 11, 2004.

⁶ Historical Court Clears Chief Leschi's Name, Gregory Roberts, *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, p. B1, B4, December 11, 2004.

⁷ Justice, 146 years later, By Rob Carson, *The News Tribune* (Tacoma, WA), December 11th, 2004.

⁸ One of the most complete accounts of this case is, *The Centralia Conspiracy* by Ralph Chaplan (1920).



petitions, and e-publishing a 400,000-word autobiography titled *Won't Someone Please Hear My Anguished Plea*?

"Okay, I get it—he's innocent already," said Eric Holsapple, Buell's court-appointed attorney. "Like

I don't know that. I only toiled for, like, forever years making a case out of it. Every time I talk to him, I have to brace myself—okay, here comes the sob story, again."

After spending four years trying to capture the media's attention with the story of his innocence, the wrongfully imprisoned inmate began pestering the courts in 2001 for additional DNA testing or a declaration of a mistrial.

"I will take a lie-detector test. I will do anything. I don't belong in prison," the incessant motormouth said. "The security tape in the garage where I work shows me pulling into the lot at the time the crime took place. It wasn't admitted as evidence. That fact alone should be grounds for a mistrial."

Buell's cellmate, Bob Hannan, has heard the "in jail for a crime I didn't commit" song and dance "about a million times." Said Hannan: "The parking lot surveillance videotape, the horrible injustice. I've heard it all. A lot. I didn't like the way they handled my case either. But you don't hear me yammering about it all the time. It's called moving on."

The consortium of attorneys and social-justice activists who were unlucky enough to have been assigned the task of getting Buell and his big, wrongfully imprisoned mouth out of jail have gotten perhaps the biggest earful of his whining.

Darron and Eugene Buell speak to reporters after dragging themselves to yet another prison visit to hear their brother go on and on about his innocence.

Tania Schultz, a senior staff attorney at Northwestern University's Center On Wrongful Convictions, has worked on Buell's case for over two years. Although she is convinced that Buell is innocent, she is "fed up" with the subject.

"Even the unjustly incarcerated should do other things in prison, like lift weights, or knit," Schultz said. "Sadly, securing his freedom seems to be George's sole interest in life. He's obsessed with getting his life back."

Added Schultz: "All the time, it's 'free me'

this, 'free me' that. Me, me, me, me, me."

Buell's brother Darron, who visited the prisoner last Friday, reported afterward that Buell "did most of the talking. No prizes guessing what he was talking about," Darron added.

Buell's sob story will be heard by the Illinois State Supreme Court during its next term.

"I can't wait. Since being incarcerated, my innocence is all I have to cling to in this horrible, horrible place," said Buell, echoing comments that he has made to anyone who's had the misfortune of being in contact with him at any time during the past decade. "This goes beyond my worst nightmares of anything I could imagine ever happening to me, and I hope the justice system finally does something—anything—to free me from this living nightmare."

"I just wish he'd shut his trap about it," attorney Holsapple said. "I'm working on his appeal. That's more than most prisoners get. But is he satisfied? No. All he cares about is getting out of jail. I'm like, 'George, get a life.'"

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52 weekly issues of *The Onion* are \$39.95.

The Onion

1360 Regent St. #173

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