

## **The Thin Blue Line**

The film, *The Thin Blue Line*, tells the story of Randall Adams, falsely accused of killing a police officer in Dallas, Texas on thanksgiving night around 12:30. The crime was committed near the parking lot of a gas station when the police officer pulled over a car to ask the driver to put on the headlights. The officer's partner, who managed to get a few shots off before the car sped out of site, witnessed the crime.

Earlier in the evening, Adams had been walking along in search of gas, when David Harris picked him up. Harris was 16 years old at the time, and had stolen his neighbour's car and was in the middle of a crime spree. After getting a bite to eat and watching a movie, Harris dropped Adams off at his motel room and left.

Adams then proceeded to watch the Carol Burnett Show and the Local News before going to sleep.

After several months of investigation, the police received a tip that a boy from Vidor, Texas was bragging that he had shot a cop. It turns out the t the boy was David Harris. After being interrogated, he confessed to the crime and lead police to the murder weapon, which he had thrown into a swamp. When he finally realised the seriousness of his crime, Harris shifted the blame to Randall Adams. Since the police found it more believable that a 28 year old man committed the crime than a 16 year old, they never even considered Harris a

suspect, which is odd since he already had a criminal record, while Adams had never been arrested.

Randall Adams was arrested and interrogated. He was not permitted to make a phone call, and his requests for a lawyer were refused. After refusing to sign the initial confession written up by the police, Adams eventually signed a statement saying that he knew David Harris and had been with him on the night in question. Several bad choices of words in the statement allowed the police to make assumptions that were not valid under the circumstances.

Aside from Harris, the partner of the dead officer was the only other credible witness. After her initial statement began an internal affairs investigation, she changed several important details in her testimony in order to implicate Adams. For example, one driver with a heavy coat and mid-length hair became two men and the driver of the car had bushy hair and a fur collar. She also changed her testimony concerning her location when the crime was committed. Originally she said that she had stayed in the squad car. Later she said that she left the squad car and took up position behind the accused's blue comet. In both statements, she testified to firing several shots at the car, but no trace of the bullet was ever found as the car was totalled before it could be fully searched.

There were other witnesses who came forward after a reward was offered. But, they all seem more interested in what they can gain from their testimony than in telling the truth. Their testimony was essentially useless since they were unable to pick Adams out of a police line-up.

The most controversial witness for the prosecution was the psychiatrist nicknamed Dr. Death. After twenty minutes of meaningless questions, he determined that Adams presented a risk of future violent acts. He also testified to Adams' complete lack of remorse. This can be interpreted one of two ways. Either Adams is a psychopath without a conscience, or he really did not kill the police officer.

Despite the fact that all of the evidence pointed to David Harris, the jury convicted Randall Adams and sentenced him to death by electrocution. While waiting on Death Row, Adams was tormented with stories of what happened when men were executed.

Several elements of the trial seem to be somewhat shady. For example, the District Attorney trying the case convinced the people of Vidor, Texas that the defence wanted to set up Harris. The people then began to harass the defence attorneys while they conducted their own investigation. It also seems strange that a known criminal who is out on probation is overlooked, while Adams was accused. The only explanation is that the district attorney wanted the death penalty, but it could not be applied to the 16-year-old Harris. Adams, at 28, must have seemed a much better target.

Even the Judge was unwilling to give Adams the benefit of the doubt. HE prevented the defence from offering alternate theories of the crime that implicated Harris as the killer.

Adams lawyers appealed twice. The 1<sup>st</sup> appeal to the state court was unanimously denied, but fortunately, the 2<sup>nd</sup> appeal, to the Supreme Court this

time, was successful in calling for a retrial. But, before a retrial could begin, the Governor of Texas commuted the death sentence and Adams was forced to serve a life sentence (with the death sentence commuted, there could be no retrial).

Following the trial, one of the two defence attorneys who represented Adams retired, saying that he could not be part of a system that allowed for such injustices.

We later discover that Harris was given full immunity for all of his crimes in exchange for his testimony against Adams. In an interview for this film, David Harris all but confessed to the crime, saying that he knew that Adams was telling the truth when he denied committing the murder. He said that Adams wouldn't be where he was today if he had of had a place for Harris to stay for the night.

Between when he was given full immunity and this interview, Harris had been convicted of another murder and was then waiting on death row himself.