



# OPINION

## Offbeat Oregon History

*In trial, prime suspect became star witness against likely innocent man*

BY FINN J.D. JOHN  
For the Sentinel

On April 22, 1943, a jury of Albany-area housewives, millworkers and farmers brought back a verdict against the strange, well-dressed black man who stood facing them. It was “guilty.”

The verdict brought to an end a trial that had been so laden with stereotypes and literary tropes that the following month, Sunday magazine “American Weekly” recapped the whole affair with a dramatic package headlined, “Actual Crime with All the Settings of Fiction.” It laid out, in sensationalistic prose with lurid illustrations, the official storyline: Murderer Robert E. Lee Folkes, a cook in the train’s dining car – having spent the evening shirking his job duties, drinking cheap liquor and making boorish passes at random white maidens, and now afire with carnal lust – tiptoes into the Pullman coach, planning to rape the lovely young Martha James at knife-point. When she awakens and screams, he cuts her throat to silence her, then leaps out of the berth and races back to the kitchen, where he stations himself over a cold stove and pretends he’s been cooking eggs on it the whole time.

Meanwhile, a brave and noble U.S. Marine has heard the scream and is racing to her rescue – alas, too late to do anything but help penetrate the murderer’s defenses, break his alibi and see that justice is served.

Left unmentioned in the American Weekly account were a couple other literary tropes that the trial fitted so well. It was every bit as race-baity as the 1915 movie “Birth of a Nation,” depicting Black Man as a bestial creature with an uncontrolled lust, ever yearning to “defile” the daughters of middle-class white people. And in other ways, it was almost a straight rip-off of the railroad-train variant of the classic “locked-room mystery,” like “Murder on the Orient Express” by Agatha Christie. And, according to Western Oregon University professor Max G. Geier’s book about the case, that was not an accident.

Also left out of the story are a wide range of inconvenient facts that make Folkes’ guilt almost impossible to believe in – chief among which are the fingernail clipping samples that were taken and tested after the murder and revealed traces of nothing but starch, grease, flour and baking soda – absolutely no blood.

Geier makes a powerful case

that Robert Folkes was a scapegoat, a target of opportunity seized upon to solve a very specific set of problems faced by nearly everyone in a position of authority. To win a conviction against him, prosecutors tried, successfully, to distract from the lack of actual evidence by manipulating their story to make it as familiar as possible, and appealing to the prejudices that had made “Birth of a Nation” such a popular movie in those dark pre-war years of nationwide Jim Crow-ism.

In fairness to those jurors, this likely wouldn’t have worked on its own. But in combination with a confession that had almost certainly had been either fabricated or beaten out of Folkes during a three-day interrogation session with Los Angeles Police Department officers at the city jail, it was more than enough.

But one of the most striking things about this case is how overwhelming was the evidence against that Marine who claimed to have come too late to Martha James’ rescue – Pvt. Harold Wilson.

Wilson, it turned out, had been released from the brig the day he boarded the train in Washington; he’d been locked up there for an alleged sexual assault. His commanding officer was sending him to a combat unit, in the same way misbehaving German soldiers were sent to the Eastern Front. He might very well have been thinking this train trip would be his last few hours of freedom.

And the witnesses’ accounts dovetail perfectly with an attempted sexual-assault-at-knife-point gone wrong. Each remembers the words slightly differently, but most agree it started with a woman saying, “I can’t stand this any longer!” followed by, “He’s killing me!” and a horrible scream. Sleep-fogged passengers poked their heads out of the curtains to see Wilson already bending over the still-bleeding body. Then one of the passengers pulled the cord to summon the steward, and it was only after that bell rang that Wilson started shouting that murder had been done.

Wilson’s story started out sketchy and changed almost every time he retold it. First he claimed to have run to the end of the train in pursuit of the killer and seen no one; then, when a trainman replied that he had to have seen at the very least a cook, a waiter and a steward, he changed his story to include all three of those characters. He miscounted the number of cars he

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“IT’S SYNCHRONIZED MOSQUITO SPRAYING, SEWAGE, SLIME + TOXINS TRIATHLON AND THE SUPER BUG GYMNASTIC ROUTINE.”

## 'A resolve to police justly and thoroughly'

*A statement in response to the tragic killing of police in Dallas from the Oregon State Sheriffs Association*

We are saddened by the horrific events that transpired in Dallas last week that resulted in the deaths of Officer Brent Thompson, Officer Patrick Zamrippa, Officer Michael Krol, Officer Michael Smith and Officer Lorne Ahrens. Our thoughts and prayers go out to the families of these slain police officers from the Dallas Police Department and the Dallas Area Rapid Transit Police Department.

We also extend our strong concern and unqualified support for the fellow officers and policing leaders from both agencies who now grieve this tragic loss. We understand the risks and challenges faced by law enforcement officers on a daily basis, and we laud the bravery

and integrity of officers in Dallas who responded to yesterday’s attack. In the face of an ambush and unknown assailants, police officers in Dallas continued to protect citizens at great risk to their own lives. These officers were simply doing their jobs by protecting a peaceful demonstration when they were viciously attacked. These events sadly illustrate the challenges that law enforcement face each and every day. Yesterday, these officers left home to make their communities safer and sadly will never return to their loved ones.

These tragic events have deeply affected the law enforcement profession. All Oregon law enforcement officers took an oath to safeguard the citizens of the communities they serve. They are true professionals who will remain vigilant in keeping our communities and their fellow officers safe! We want to thank Oregonians for taking time to express their support for our brave police officers here and around the nation.

We are very aware of the current tensions that exist between police and some members of our communities and we remain resolute in our commitment to continue to build trust and ensure that public confidence in Oregon policing remains strong. As incidents of violence ripple across our nation, we will not be divided or defeated. Our hearts are steeled with a resolve to police justly and thoroughly, remembering both the officers who’ve gone before us and the good people who depend upon us to step into the gap. We want to thank the citizens of Oregon for working with us in partnership and unity to keep our communities safe. We are all stronger as we work together for a safer Oregon.

We are asking all sworn officers in Oregon to wear their mourning bands on their badges from now until the day of the funeral(s) of the fallen officers, in honor of the lives lost in Dallas.

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## Carotenoids: Antioxidants that promote longevity

BY JOEL FUHRMAN, MD  
For the Sentinel

Carotenoids are yellow, orange, and red pigments present in fruits and vegetables. There are more than 600 carotenoids; the most commonly consumed and well-studied carotenoids include beta-carotene, alpha-carotene, beta-cryptoxanthin, lycopene, lutein and zeaxanthin. Some carotenoids are converted to vitamin A in the body — beta-carotene, alpha-carotene, and beta-cryptoxanthin for example; these carotenoids are important for proper immune function. Carotenoids give the skin a healthy glow and defend the body’s tissues against oxidative damage, helping to prevent chronic diseases and premature aging.



The richer your diet in carotenoids, the greater the likelihood of longer telomeres (DNA sequences at the end of chromosomes). The length of telomeres is thought to be an indicator of biological aging—the longer the telomere length, the slower the aging of cells. Many studies have connected a healthy diet and lifestyle behaviors to longer telomeres.

In a recent study, data from 3660 U.S. adults were analyzed for serum carotenoids and leukocyte telomere length. When they compared the groups with the lowest and highest levels of each carotenoid, they saw

5-8 percent longer telomeres for the groups with the highest alpha-carotene, beta-carotene and beta-cryptoxanthin levels. Researchers think that higher carotenoid levels may work by protecting telomeric DNA from oxidative damage, leading to protection against aging and chronic diseases.

Lycopene, a carotenoid found in tomatoes, grapefruit, and papaya, is concentrated primarily in the prostate, where it has potent anti-cancer effects. Lycopene-rich foods also protect the skin against ultraviolet radiation from the sun. In one study, after twelve weeks of tomato supplementation by healthy women, reddening of the skin, mitochondrial DNA damage, and markers of skin aging due to UV exposure were reduced.

Lutein and zeaxanthin, which are found in leafy greens like kale and collards, are the only known carotenoids located in the human retina. Light must pass through lutein and zeaxanthin before being transmitted to the cells that send visual information to the brain. These carotenoids filter some of the blue light that enters the retina, and this function protects the eye from damage and improves several aspects of visual performance.

Alpha-carotene is an excellent marker of high-nutrient vegetable intake, since dark green and orange colored vegetables are the richest sources of alpha carotene. In a recent study, individuals with the highest blood levels of alpha-carotene had a 39 percent decrease in risk of death compared to those with the lowest serum alpha-carotene.

Get your carotenoids from colorful vegetables and fruits. Carotenoid supplements have consistently failed to produce beneficial effects in clinical trials. In fact, supplemental carotenoids are likely to be harmful. For example, high serum beta-carotene has been associated with decreased lung cancer risk, but

beta-carotene supplements may actually increase the risk of lung cancer, especially in smokers.

In addition to their own beneficial effects, carotenoids like alpha-carotene, lycopene, and lutein in the blood are markers indicating the intake of thousands of additional phytochemicals from fruits and vegetables that work synergistically to keep the body healthy. Keep in mind that carotenoid absorption during a meal requires the presence of fat — one of the reasons to use nut and seed-based dressings on salads and raw vegetables.

*Dr. Fuhrman is a #1 New York Times best-selling author and a board certified family physician specializing in lifestyle and nutritional medicine. His newest book, The End of Heart Disease, offers a detailed plan to prevent and reverse heart disease using a nutrient-dense, plant-rich eating style. Visit his informative website at [DrFuhrman.com](http://DrFuhrman.com).*

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Personal attacks and name calling in response to letters are uncalled for and unnecessary.

If you would like to submit an opinion piece, Another View must be no longer than 600 words.

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