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THE ATLANTA CHILD MURDERS

CNN viewers: Williams 'guilty' in Atlanta child murders

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This story started on September 6, 2010 -- Updated 1424 GMT (2224 HKT)
i CNN iReport



"I had always assumed adults were to be trusted," said Jackie Proulx, left, seen here with her siblings in 1980.

Atlanta, Georgia (CNN) -- Three decades after serial killings of African-Americans in Georgia shook much of the nation, most respondents to a nonscientific CNN poll say Wayne Williams committed what came to be called the Atlanta Child Murders.

Although Williams was convicted only of murdering two adults, police blamed him in the murders of two dozen African-American boys and young men that lasted from 1979

STORY HIGHLIGHTS

- Nonscientific poll: 68.6 percent believe Wayne Williams is the Atlanta child murderer
- Many African-Americans across the U.S. recall being frightened by the case
- Years later, one woman says case leads her to closely watch her kids

to 1981.

In Williams' first TV interview in at least a decade, he insisted to CNN's Soledad O'Brien that he's innocent. He's serving two life sentences.

A two-hour CNN documentary, "The Atlanta Child Murders," invited viewers to weigh the evidence and hear from witnesses in the case, and then go to CNN.com to cast votes on whether Williams is "guilty," "innocent" -- or the case is "not proven."



Gallery: Atlanta Child Murders overview

Nearly two out of every three persons who voted in the nonscientific poll said they would convict Williams.

According to poll results, 68.6 percent of respondents said Williams was guilty. Only 4.3 percent said he was innocent.

The remaining 27.1 percent chose a third option, "not proven," which was added to the CNN poll to offer a middle ground.

More than 55,000 persons took the opportunity to register their opinions about the case on CNN.com.

By March and April of 1981, bodies were turning up at the rate of one a week, stoking fears among Atlanta residents and many people across the nation.

In San Mateo, California, news reports detailing the killings drove 8-year-old Tyika Mitchell, her mother and her grandmother to the TV each night. The memory still gives Mitchell chills, she said.



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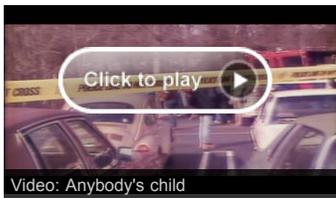
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"I remember being scared to death, especially since he was only killing little black kids, and as such, I believed that it was only a matter of time before the killer got to me," said Mitchell this week. The family had roots in Atlanta, heightening their concern.

"It felt like every day a new dead child had been discovered," she said. "I remember my mom and grandmother discussing how they recognized the area of Atlanta the kids were being found in," she said.

[iReport: Mitchell's memories of scary times](#)

Growing up in Atlanta, Texas, Lisa Dickerson was a 17-year-old high school student at the time. The murders made her more frightened during a class outing. "It affected everything that we did," she said. But looking

back on the case, Dickerson feels police may have gotten the wrong man.

"I never thought that [Williams] killed the little boys, and I had a doubt about the two older men," she said. "I think he made himself look guilty, but I don't think he did it."

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In Atlanta, Georgia, at the time, Jackie Proulx was a 4-year-old white girl, who also recalls being shaken by news of the killings.

"My little friends and I talked about being scared, and would talk about how to defend ourselves against the bad guys," Proulx said. "I also had several nightmares during that time about being chased and terrorized by a monster."

Proulx said she just couldn't believe there were people in the world that would hurt or kill children. "I had always assumed adults were to be trusted, so it made me feel vulnerable."

[iReport: A frightening time in Atlanta, Georgia](#)

Years later, trust for adults, even strangers, became a theme in a college thesis that Mitchell wrote for a criminal justice course. She wrote that children would "feel comfortable getting into a car with" Williams because he was a black man from the community.

I think [Wayne Williams] made himself look guilty, but I don't think he did it.

--Lisa Dickerson



Mitchell, who said she holds degrees in criminal justice and social science, also explored a deeper syndrome in her thesis, self-hate, which she attributes to negative images and stereotypes of blacks advanced by mainstream media.

"Then you have Wayne Williams, who took it to the extreme and engaged in a sort-of genocidal killing spree of only downtrodden African-Americans," she said.

To this day, the serial killings affect Proulx's parenting of her four sons, ages 4 and 8. "We have had many discussions about what to do in various situations, like getting lost, or being approached by someone they don't know," said Proulx.

"I keep them close to me at all times. I do not let myself just assume they are safe, even in our neighborhood."

Williams was convicted of killing two adults -- Nathaniel Cater, 28, and Jimmy Ray Payne, 21 -- whose bodies were found downstream

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from a river bridge where police spotted him.

Jack Mallard, who prosecuted the case, believes Williams was responsible for many more deaths during the period. "I would say about 25 of the 28 male victims on the list," he said.

Early in the case, Williams failed an FBI polygraph test, which is not admissible in court. DNA science was not widely used at the time of Williams' 1982 trial. But results from the 2007 testing of DNA evidence in the case have implicated Williams in the death of at least one 11-year-old victim, Patrick Baltazar, according to expert DNA scientists.

CNN's Jim Polk and Christina Zdanowicz contributed to this report.



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EAST4THSTKID He is GUILTY !, It makes me ill that anyone gives him a platform on which to sway anyones opinion. He had his day's in court, appeals, and has far outlived any of his victims.

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JustmeJeff44 Here are several lies reported about this case and the Sanders family angle.1.One member of that family was in the klan,not 4.2.Carlton Sanders was not a tall man with a jagged scar on his neck.3.That family never lived in a trailer park and bred Siberian Husky dogs.4.The taped conversation between d... [more](#)

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JonSD He did it.

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jayheard1 Heck..Micheal Jackson fit the profile stronger than this guy.

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jayheard1

"if" is not the question. The question should be, "did he receive a fair trial"? Yes he looked and acted nuts. He blew up in court and talks in third party. He had a history with kids and unlike any sane person would do...he kept having company with kids while the nation was looking for a seri... [more](#)

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eric136

WhiteinUSA : i agree with you. No candidate for president has ever received 90% of the white vote. When a person gets that high of a percentage, there is something going on besides agreeing with their policies. As far as Williams, even if he did/didn't kill these kids, that doesn't change the fac... [more](#)

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OnlyFacts Yes.

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cr1994

the cops messed up big. really. they didnt have a case and they can't prove he through a body over the bridge. but wen a cop pulls you over people dont automatically assume you got pulled over because of the major case. then you have the blanket the cops found i dnt knw why they didnt take it but if ... [more](#)

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erica1064 Williams captured, murders stopped. Simple. Go read John Douglas' "Mindhunter" if you want to understand the brilliant profiling used.

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12hphs

Mr. Wayne Williams along with all the other convicts (ie. murders, molesters, etc...) during long term jail time. How my stomach turns just to see them try to manipulate the system. Why can't we vote to send all of them to fight in the war and send our beloved troops home? Why do they have the ch... [more](#)

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ladysou11961

hey people leave oj out of this he's as major set uphe's sitting in jail now over a football which was pay back over Ron and Nicole (that case was never PROVED !!!as far as jury of your peers...i thought at least one had to be of your raceOJ's trial was between him and the Klan minus the ropstop bu... [more](#)

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WhiteInUSA I bet you didn't watch the OJ trial... freakin racist. Every convicted criminal is in jail on 10% of the evidence they had on OJ

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JanLo

There has been no discussion about what seems to me an obvious DNA investigation direction. They found what could be WW hair on Patrick ... inconclusive. Remember the testimony of the recording studio owner

that noticed "angry" scratched on WW's forearms? Soon thereafter, they found Patrick. If ... [more](#)

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MCChad

This is about Wayne's quest for power and fame. One negative outcome of the interview is Wayne's notoriety. He got to show everyone what he looks like in 2010. He got to smile and talk to a pretty lady. He got the chance to keep this thing alive. All the evidence in the world is no match for Wayne h... [more](#)

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fullak47

I would have to say...NOT PROVEN...he may have done it. but they didn't prove it. Why does everyone keep saying he was caught dumping a body? he wasn't caught doing anything but driving his car across the bridge. that's why they let him go. there were no witnesses to testify they ever saw him with a... [more](#)

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MCChad

I do have to agree with you that it wasn't proven 100%. But, his own words and actions during the interview convinced me of his guilt. I got chills watching him. It dawned on me like a bolt of lightning. This guy enjoyed the interview and kept separating himself from what happened. If you or I got ... [more](#)

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FredFurrer Maybe, but at least it stopped the killings. Coincidence??

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fullak47 he might have i said. but the evidence wasnt enough. if i was in that jury i wouldn't have convicted him.

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MCChad Then who did it?

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capacific WHY DO you call for the sexual aspects to this case? He was the KILLER and SERIAL KILLING IS MOTIVATED BY SEXUAL DEVIANCY..... STOP ASKING FOR SENSATIONALS

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capacific

OK.this man is what he is HE IS THE KILLER !!.....FIBERS matched how about you really read the reports! he was caught in the act of dumping a body! wthell more do u all need fibers from his home were matched from vics ...FBI profiler DOUGLAS HAS THE PERP PEGGED HE NEEDS TO BR PUT TO DEATH FOR WHAT ... [more](#)

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fullak47 if he was caught dumping a body why did they let him go that night?

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sanjosemike

"Planted evidence" is always the (only) excuse left for guilty inmates to push aside damning evidence. In William's case, he refers to racism. But the cops had no particular reason to plant evidence in his case, since, after all, he was "literally" discovered getting rid of a body on site. Also cops... [more](#)

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HolyChikin

Innocent huh?? They CAUGHT him in the act of dumping a body in the water. I mean... how much more do you need? This monster is exactly where he belongs. I mean look at what he was doing at the time... scouting for talent to start a singing group. He even admitted to what he was using to lure these... [more](#)

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fullak47 watch it again. he didnt get caught dumping a body. they let him go that night because they had nothing. and he was never charged for the child murders. he was convicted for killing to men.

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