

Master Chronology

The Johnnie Robinson Case

September 15, 1963 - April 28, 2010

PUBLIC READING NOTE

This chronology separates established facts from reported, disputed, incomplete, and missing information. It does not resolve conflicts that the surviving record cannot resolve. The state and federal grand-jury no-bills mean that no indictment was returned; neither is a trial verdict.

Prepared for public presentation from surviving Birmingham Police Department, coroner, death-certificate, FBI, Department of Justice, witness-statement, contemporary newspaper, and disposition records.

How to Read This Chronology

Dates and times are reproduced as precisely as the surviving file permits. Where records conflict or are missing, the uncertainty is stated rather than silently resolved.

Confirmed - Supported by an official record or multiple consistent sources.

Reported - Appears in a witness statement or contemporary news account but lacks complete independent confirmation.

Disputed - Material accounts conflict about the sequence, time, location, conduct, or physical circumstances described.

Incomplete - Some relevant documentation survives, but important details are absent.

Not located - The surviving file does not contain the record needed to establish the point.

Scope

The sequence begins with the September 15, 1963 racial violence in Birmingham and the incident at Eighth Avenue and Twenty-Sixth Street North, then follows the shooting and death of Johnnie Robinson, Birmingham Police Department and coroner investigation, the state grand-jury disposition, the FBI civil-rights inquiry and 1964 federal grand-jury disposition, and the later federal cold-case review. It does not infer events that are not documented in the surviving case file and preserves unresolved conflicts over the number of shots, firing distance, and circumstances of the shotgun discharge.

1. September 15, 1963: Context, Rock-Throwing Incident, and Police Pursuit

Date / time	Movements and event	Investigative, forensic, or legal significance	Record status
10:20 a.m.	A bomb explodes at Sixteenth Street Baptist Church, killing four Black girls and injuring others. Racial violence and unrest follow across Birmingham.	The bombing and resulting unrest form the immediate citywide context in which the later encounter involving Johnnie Robinson occurs.	Confirmed
Before approx. 4:35 p.m.	Birmingham Police Department Car 45 is on patrol in the central area with Officers Jack Parker, P. C. Cheek, W. D. Haynie, and J. E. Chadwick. The officers are watching for rock throwing and disturbances.	The officers later give separate homicide statements describing their assignment and positions in the patrol car.	Confirmed
Approx. 4:35 p.m.	A 1954 four-door Ford carrying seven white teenagers travels south on Twenty-Sixth Street North. BPD records describe racist lettering on the car, a Confederate flag, and a Confederate-style hat worn by the driver.	The occupants later give statements. Their car and conduct are relevant to the reported rock-throwing incident preceding the police pursuit.	Confirmed
Approx. 4:35 p.m.	A group of Black youths is near the northwest corner of Eighth Avenue and Twenty-Sixth Street North. Rocks are thrown toward the teenagers' automobile; several accounts say the car is struck.	Officer and civilian statements support that rocks were thrown, but the surviving accounts do not uniformly establish which individual threw each rock.	Reported / incomplete
Immediately afterward	When the youths see the police car, they scatter. Two run north on Twenty-Sixth Street and then west into Eighth Alley North. Johnnie Robinson is later identified as one of the two.	This movement is described consistently in the principal officer accounts.	Confirmed
During pursuit	Cheek drives Car 45 through or beside the filling-station area and north along the sidewalk toward Eighth Alley. The alley is too narrow for the patrol car to turn into it.	Officer statements describe a rapid approach over a rough surface followed by braking or sliding at the alley entrance.	Confirmed
At alley entrance	Car 45 brakes or slides to a stop as the two youths continue west in the alley.	The vehicle's movement at the instant of the shotgun discharge later becomes important to differing accounts of whether the firing was intentional or accidental.	Confirmed / disputed

2. Shooting, Emergency Response, Death, and Immediate Forensic Findings

Date / time	Movements and event	Investigative, forensic, or legal significance	Record status
Immediately before gunfire	Parker says he calls for the fleeing youths to stop. Cheek also recalls hearing Parker order them to stop.	The file does not establish whether Johnnie Robinson heard or understood the command.	Reported
Approx. 4:40 p.m.	Parker fires a 12-gauge shotgun from the left rear area of Car 45 toward the fleeing youths. Parker states that he aimed at the ground near their feet.	That Parker fired the shot that struck Johnnie Robinson is established in BPD, coroner, FBI, and later DOJ records. The intended point of aim is based principally on Parker's account.	Confirmed / intent disputed
At the moment of discharge	Haynie recalls Parker with the shotgun out the window and sees Johnnie Robinson stumble as Parker fires. Chadwick recalls the car hitting a rough spot or bump and describes the gun as having "went off."	The surviving accounts support materially different descriptions of the relationship between the car's motion and Parker's act of firing.	Disputed
At the moment of discharge	The surviving accounts conflict over the number of shotgun blasts. Chadwick recalls one; Cheek says he remembers two. Later witnesses William Gunn and Ernest Jones also report hearing two shots.	The file does not contain a surviving case-specific firearms record that resolves the one-shot versus two-shot discrepancy.	Disputed
At the moment of discharge	BPD reporting places the fleeing youths about 100 feet from Parker when he fired. A 2010 DOJ summary describes Parker as estimating approximately 200 feet.	The shooter-to-victim distance remains internally inconsistent in the surviving record.	Disputed
Immediately after	Johnnie Robinson stumbles and falls in Eighth Alley. Cheek recalls that Johnnie Robinson attempted to rise and run again before remaining down. The second youth continues away behind a building.	The second youth's complete contemporaneous account is not apparent in the surviving file.	Reported / incomplete
Within approx. 5-10 min.	An ambulance is called immediately after the shooting and arrives, according to officer statements, within approximately five to ten minutes.	No ambulance run sheet or exact dispatch and arrival record was located in the surviving file.	Reported / incomplete
4:55 p.m.	Johnnie Robinson is dead on arrival at Hillman Hospital. Some contemporary newspaper accounts instead use "University Hospital" and report approximately 4:50 p.m.	The coroner's September 26 certification supplies the 4:55 p.m. Hillman Hospital entry; contemporary reporting varies in hospital name and time.	Confirmed / reporting variation
Evening	Examination documents a buckshot wound to the back below and left of the right shoulder blade, a pellet wound through the left elbow from the rear, and a graze to the left upper arm. Investigators believed the back wound was fatal.	BPD investigators attributed the fatal injury to buckshot and believed the back pellet passed through the heart or a major blood vessel.	Confirmed / forensic limited

Date / time	Movements and event	Investigative, forensic, or legal significance	Record status
Evening	Parker reports that the shotgun carried mixed ammunition, including No. 8 birdshot and buckshot.	The exact shell fired, ammunition inventory, evidence receipt, and complete chain of custody are not established by the surviving materials reviewed.	Reported / incomplete

3. Same-Day BPD and Coroner Investigation

Date / time	Movements and event	Investigative, forensic, or legal significance	Record status
5:40 p.m.	Parker is interviewed in the BPD Homicide Office at City Hall by Detectives C. L. Pierce and M. E. Gullion in the presence of Coroner J. O. Butler.	Parker admits firing the shotgun, says he aimed at the ground near the youths' feet, and describes the youths as fleeing after rock throwing.	Confirmed
6:05 p.m.	Officer P. C. Cheek, the driver of Car 45, gives a statement.	Cheek describes the pursuit, braking at the alley, hearing Parker's shotgun, seeing Johnnie Robinson stagger, and remembering two shots.	Confirmed
6:15 p.m.	Officer W. D. Haynie gives a statement.	Haynie says Parker had the gun out the window and that Johnnie Robinson stumbled just as Parker fired while Cheek was braking.	Confirmed
6:20 p.m.	Officer J. E. Chadwick gives a statement.	Chadwick says the patrol car hit a rough spot as it reached the alley and the gun "went off"; he recalls one shot and did not see who actually pulled the trigger.	Confirmed
7:00 p.m.	Janice Montgomery, age 16, one of the white teenagers in the Ford, is interviewed.	She recalls hearing a rock strike but says she did not see it hit the car. She did not witness the actual shooting.	Confirmed
Evening	The remaining teenage occupants of the Ford are brought to police headquarters and statements are obtained.	BPD reporting says the teenagers confirmed rocks were thrown at their car, but they had crossed Eighth Avenue before the shooting and did not witness it.	Confirmed / incomplete
Evening	Martha Robinson identifies Johnnie Robinson as her son at the hospital. The body is sent to Smith & Gaston Funeral Home, where photographs are taken by Coroner Butler and Detective Gullion.	These actions connect the hospital, coroner, and post-death documentation. A complete photographic log is not apparent in the surviving file.	Confirmed / incomplete

4. Coroner Review and State Grand-Jury Disposition

Date / time	Movements and event	Investigative, forensic, or legal significance	Record status
Sept. 16, 1963	Birmingham City Council members publicly request a full disclosure of the deaths of Johnnie Robinson and Virgil Ware; contemporary reporting states that Mayor Albert Boutwell supports the request.	This is a contemporary public-accountability response rather than an investigative finding.	Reported
Sept. 20, 1963	Contemporary reporting states that Chief Jamie Moore considers the shooting investigation still open and has received a written report from homicide detectives.	The news account confirms continuing public investigation but does not substitute for the underlying BPD records.	Reported
Sept. 26, 1963	Coroner J. O. Butler certifies that Johnnie Robinson died from injuries caused by shotgun pellets fired by Parker while Johnnie Robinson was fleeing the scene of the rock-throwing and racial disturbance.	The coroner notes testimony supporting both an accidental discharge as the patrol car slid to a stop and a discharge while Parker was performing police duties.	Confirmed
Sept. 26, 1963	Butler declines to issue a coroner's verdict at that time and asks Solicitor Emmett Perry to place the case on the grand-jury docket.	The coroner record expressly transfers the unresolved matter for grand-jury consideration.	Confirmed
During Oct. 1963	The Jefferson County Circuit Court grand jury considers the case against Parker.	A later FBI report records Chief Moore's statement that the case was presented during October 1963. The surviving file does not include the state grand-jury witness list, exhibits, testimony, minutes, or instructions.	Confirmed / incomplete
By Oct. 11, 1963	A newspaper reports that the state grand jury has returned a no-bill as to Parker.	A later FBI report also records the state no-bill. A no-bill means that no indictment was returned; it is not a trial verdict.	Reported
After state no-bill	Chief Moore later tells the FBI that BPD considers the matter closed.	The FBI records this as Moore's position during its supplemental civil-rights inquiry.	Confirmed

5. FBI Civil-Rights Inquiry and Federal Grand-Jury Disposition

Date / time	Movements and event	Investigative, forensic, or legal significance	Record status
Oct. 1963	FBI civil-rights reporting is active in the Parker/Johnnie Robinson matter. An October 17 airtel refers to an FBI report dated October 9 and transmits a letterhead memorandum, including a copy for the U.S. Attorney.	The surviving materials establish federal inquiry by October 1963, but the precise opening date of the original 1963 inquiry is not established in the reviewed record.	Confirmed / incomplete
Nov. 12, 1963	Chief Jamie Moore is advised of the nature of an additional FBI inquiry in the matter.	The FBI describes its work as a limited investigation.	Confirmed
Nov. 15, 1963	An FBI report identifies earlier-referenced companions "William Garner" and "Ernest Lee" as William Gunn and Ernest Jones. Both say they separated from Johnnie Robinson and the McCall boys after seeing the police car and did not proceed to the shooting location.	The report corrects witness identification and clarifies that Gunn and Jones did not witness the shooting itself.	Confirmed
Nov. 15, 1963	Gunn and Jones report hearing two shots. Jones believes the shots came from the police car as it slid to a stop approximately one-half block from his location.	Their recollections reinforce the unresolved conflict with officer accounts that describe one shot.	Confirmed / disputed
Nov. 1963	Chief Moore tells the FBI that the local grand jury returned a no-bill and that BPD considers the matter closed. The FBI report states that Moore declined to provide copies of statements executed by Parker or the other officers.	The surviving case file nevertheless contains BPD officer statements; the FBI report documents the limitation encountered in its 1963 inquiry.	Confirmed
Aug. 17, 1964	The FBI reports that the U.S. Attorney in Birmingham has advised that the facts will be presented to a federal grand jury on August 24.	This begins the documented federal grand-jury disposition sequence.	Confirmed
Week of Aug. 24, 1964	The facts are presented to a federal grand jury in Birmingham.	The surviving file does not contain the federal grand-jury witness list, exhibits, testimony, instructions, or deliberative record.	Confirmed / incomplete
Aug. 28, 1964	The federal grand jury makes its final return and returns a no-bill in the matter. Clerk William E. Davis confirms the return to the FBI on August 31.	No federal indictment is returned. The FBI documents the disposition in its September 2 closing report. A no-bill is not a trial verdict.	Confirmed

6. Cold-Case Reopening and DOJ Closure

Date / time	Movements and event	Investigative, forensic, or legal significance	Record status
Apr. 9, 1977	Jack Parker dies.	The 2010 DOJ closing memorandum states that Parker's official death certificate is contained in the file.	Confirmed
Apr. 16, 2007	The FBI opens a new investigation into the circumstances of Johnnie Robinson's death based on media coverage and the Department of Justice civil-rights-era Cold Case initiative.	The renewed investigation obtains the complete BPD report and Jefferson County coroner report identified in the DOJ closing memorandum.	Confirmed
2007-2010	The FBI reviews the historical record. The 2010 DOJ memorandum states that neither the FBI nor BPD found evidence implicating anyone other than Parker in the shooting and that no other officers were directly involved in the shooting.	This is an agency conclusion recorded in the federal closure memorandum, not a new adjudication of the historical facts.	Confirmed / agency conclusion
2007-2010	Federal prosecutors evaluate possible criminal civil-rights charges and other federal statutes.	The DOJ concludes that pre-1994 civil-rights limitations rules and the constitutional prohibition against retroactive enlargement of the limitations period prevent prosecution on the historic civil-rights theory; the facts do not support an alternative federal charge.	Confirmed
2007-2010	The FBI and DOJ also determine that Parker is deceased and that there is no other prosecutable subject.	AUSA Frank Salter of the Northern District of Alabama concurs in the recommendation to close the matter.	Confirmed
Apr. 28, 2010	The Department of Justice Civil Rights Division issues a Notice to Close File in the Johnnie Robinson matter.	The notice recommends closure for lack of prosecutive merit under the available federal law and evidence.	Confirmed

Principal Chronology Gaps

The following records would materially improve the chronology or permit firmer conclusions:

• Original BPD radio, dispatch, and complete Car 45 assignment logs	• Exact source and timing of any radio complaints about rock throwing immediately before the encounter
• Ambulance run sheet and exact emergency-response times	• A reconciled shooter-to-victim distance supported by contemporaneous measurements
• Complete crime-scene photographs, photo log, measurements, and reconstruction	• Documentation reconciling the one-shot and two-shot accounts
• Shotgun evidence receipt, serial-number record, shell inventory, and full chain of custody	• Documentation distinguishing any case-specific ballistic work from generic training/reference material in the file
• A case-specific firearms or ballistics examination resolving the shot count and ammunition fired	• Complete coroner photographic records and identification of all post-mortem photographs
• Complete readable post-mortem/autopsy narrative and emergency medical record	• Exact date and complete record of the October 1963 state grand-jury return
• State grand-jury docket, witness list, exhibits, instructions, minutes, or transcript	• The FBI report dated October 9, 1963, and any complete underlying exhibits not otherwise preserved
• Complete October-November 1963 FBI investigative attachments and interview materials	• Complete documentation of the scope and results of the original 1963-1964 federal inquiry
• Federal grand-jury witness list, exhibits, instructions, minutes, or transcript from August 1964	• Any contemporaneous statement by a neutral eyewitness who directly observed the shotgun discharge
• A fully preserved statement from the second youth running with Johnnie Robinson at the time of the shooting	• Additional records that could reconcile the accidental-discharge account with Parker's stated intentional warning shot

Editorial status: This document remains “Working” until the shot-count, firing-distance, discharge-circumstance, medical/forensic, and grand-jury documentation gaps are resolved or formally documented as unavailable.