

Mitchell Brown's Take

September 1st 2012 is a date that is etched in the minds of citizens of Warrensburg, MO and the students of the University of Central Missouri. It was the date that Blaine Whitworth, UCM graduate and bar owner was shot and killed in his driveway. Shortly after his death, two suspects were apprehended—Ziyad Abid, a UCM international student from Saudi Arabia who has since been expelled, and Reginald Singletary. Singletary made the confession that he shot Whitworth at the request of Abid.

I distinctly remember the vibe on campus the following Monday. I remember seeing lots of distraught faces and an increased police presence. I was not close to any of the three men. I only once had a brief conversation with Whitworth, and I had no interaction with Abid or Singletary and didn't know who they were until the story broke.

I couldn't help but find the whole situation strange, as homicide in the small college town of Warrensburg, Mo. is an aberration. The last homicide here was in 2009. Given my curious nature, I couldn't help but follow the story in the local media, but my biggest question went unanswered—why? A common rumor floating around town was that Abid wanted to buy Bodie's from Whitworth.

The only documented statement coming from Singletary was a confession that he shot Whitworth “at the request of Abid in exchange for money.” That line has been repeated in the campus paper to the point of ad nauseum, yet still no possible motive was presented. Most of the local coverage was focused on the rudimentary logistics of the case, what the bond for the two individuals accused was to be set at, the location of the forthcoming trial, etc. etc. Many other stories were focused on the lives of Whitworth and Abid. It's almost as if the alleged shooter didn't exist or was portrayed as being a nominal detail of the unfolding narrative. Information on who he was, his background, or a possible motive wasn't presented in the Warrensburg media.

I found myself reading stories about the case and believing this was a clear cut, yet complicated, case of murder for hire.

Recent developments in the case have brought national attention. Abid's bond was set at 2 Million, and it was paid via the Saudi government, yet Abid was not released.

A recent AP article contains new details the local media had failed to report. According to the AP article in question, Singletary was fired from one of Whitworth's bars before the death of Whitworth. I remember reading in local media that Singletary had worked as a bouncer, but never reading anything about him being fired. Such a minor detail establishes a possible motive. Was this a case of a disgruntled employee?

In the AP article, it's written that while being interrogated, Singletary had said it was a Mafia connected hit, then he said it was a Kansas City gang that put him up to it, and then he said it was Abid. Changing his story makes Singletary's word come off as sketchy.

Why was this not brought up earlier in local media? It would have been easy to find out that Singletary was fired from one of Whitworth's bars just by interviewing bar patrons and those who worked at said establishment. The Digitalburg and the Muleskinner pride themselves on having a strong connection to the local “community,” so theoretically these outlets should be able to provide the most in-depth coverage of this story. It should be easier to dig up that which is in your own backyard.

Thomas Holbrook II's Take

I remember Abid's face. When I'm not doing a podcast with Steve and Mitchell, I'm working retail. The graveyard shift is inviting to some of the most unique individuals in Warrensburg, Missouri. He would often purchase roma tomatoes, bread from the bakery, and a few other items. When I had heard that there was a murder in Warrensburg, it brought back memories of how an individual on a bus traveling to UCM (then named CMSU) for an extracurricular seminar that was related to business technology had boldly declared that nobody gets jumped in Warrensburg.

I can't quite remember when, but I do know that a young woman was found dead in the trunk of somebody's car, thus negating what was said during the summer of summer of 2000.

The truth of the matter is that the concept of death in Warrensburg is not new to me, nor is it surprising. Whether the city council likes it or not, the city is becoming more metropolitan with each passing year. With a university bringing a diverse population to the city, conflicts are inevitable. Some of them are benign, and others turn out deadly.

The murder of Whitworth was no exception.

*In all honesty, Abid did not come off like the type who would want another harmed. Then again, anybody is potentially capable of having less than honorable intentions and executing dubious courses of action. As people read a scanned copy of an article printed in *The Muleskinner* below, it will become tragically apparent that the anti-Middle-Eastern sentiment that was the result of 9/11 is still with us today.*

After all, Abid is from Saudi Arabia, the same country that denies women many of the freedoms that we're all supposed to have here as citizens. Many horrible things happen in that country due to the differences in law among other factors, yet the fact that the United States has a working relationship with Saudi Arabia tends to go out the window when it comes to the death of a locally known individual.

It's easier to blame an outside entity for depriving an entrepreneur of an opportunity to leave their mark in a local city than the individual who actually pulled the trigger.

Even the most skeptical among us were believing that it was indeed a murder for hire case. When the veil of drama is pulled away for a moment, some things became apparent:

- 1. Why did the local media not discuss the fact that Singletary himself was terminated a week before he shot Whitworth?*
- 2. Where did the rumors of Abid wanting to buy one of the bars Whitworth owned and of him loaning Whitworth money come from? More importantly, as a foreign exchange student, why would Abid have any interest in owning a local business when his dream according to the AP article was to be a commercial pilot in his home country, especially since owning a Warrensburg-based business would have entrenched him in the community?*

Item #1 is a hard question that has to be asked of *The Muleskinner*, *digitalBurg*, and the *Daily Star Journal*. As for item #2, the video from [FOX4KC](#) may shed some light on where some of the rumors came from. Though Whitworth and Abid were friends on Facebook, the [AP](#) article has a statement from Abid's lawyers saying that they had no interaction with one another. I have plenty of people on my friends list that I don't talk to.

Having mutual friends on a social networking site doesn't tell the full story, yet it can lead to so much speculation.

At the moment, there is a lack of voices in terms of media in Warrensburg, Missouri. I believe that is the reason that certain details in the story were missed in addition to our own prejudices. In many areas, less competition means less quality. There needs to be more competition in a city that continues to expand, so that media coverage of events can improve.

The Saudi side of things

by COURTNEY MUNS
for The Muleskinner

Coming back to Warrensburg for another school year, no one expected to lose the precious life of Blaine Whitworth; a close friend to many and a well-known business man within the community.

Although I wasn't personally connected to Blaine, I felt the grief that many people close to me endured as they suffered the loss of a special person, however, I couldn't help but wonder what the Saudi Arabian UCM students felt from the other side.

I was curious if they felt judged or discriminated against merely based upon their ties to Ziyad ethnically. I was sure most of the Saudi's wanted to flee Warrensburg as soon as possible, constantly feeling eyes on them everywhere they went, until I talked to Yusuf Alabdullatif, a Saudi Arabian native who currently studies at UCM.

"If we were in the Dark Ages I may have felt discriminated against but no, not now," he told me.

Yusuf has been studying at UCM since August 2011, and plans to stay here all four years. He talked about how his friends never associated with Ziyad, but more so with Blaine, referring to Blaine as a 'respectable man.'

"I never had a good feeling when I saw Ziyad; I never got good vibes. I never personally met him, but I didn't want to. He wasn't a social guy with the Saudi's," he said.

I believe him. I can say I didn't get good vibes when I saw Ziyad around campus last year. I wasn't sold, though; that Yusuf didn't feel discriminated against. So I pried a little more.

"Within the first week of the incident I was looked at differently, but that's understandable. There was something that put me off, though. After they got Ziyad in jail, before the memorial for Blaine, the administration gathered the Saudi Arabians in a meeting and talked to us about the incident and wanted us to know they're here for us, offering counseling services on campus. Then they told us not to go to the memorial, even if they knew Blaine for 'our safety'. Then, I felt discriminated against because some of us were friends with Blaine."

This threw me off a little bit, too. Although it's hard for people to be open minded to a minority after someone committed such an act like Ziyad, what about the other Saudi's who never associated with Ziyad? What about the Saudi's that were legitimately friends

with Blaine? It was truly unfair to those who wanted to pay their respects with the rest of the community.

I became a little more interested in Yusuf's friendship circle, but he told me he friends didn't feel discriminated against, either.

"New comers (Saudi Arabians) this year were kind of afraid because they didn't get to meet any Americans because they just got here a month ago. Some people are kind of insecure about things," he told me in regards to new Saudi's just arriving around the time of the murder.

Yusuf says he and his friends still feel comfortable here. He says he was friends with Americans prior to the situation; so personally, this hasn't been too big of a problem for him.

When I asked about Ziyad's consequences, Yusuf said he thinks Ziyad should stay in prison here, because he committed the crime here.

"If he were to be released and return to Saudi Arabia, he would still be in prison. Life is very sacred to us, for religious and personal reasons. Who are we to touch something like that?"

As far as Ziyad's motives go, Yusuf says it is all a mystery.

I think that Yusuf told what he felt and what he knew best, but I do still believe there are Saudis who do feel discriminated against. I hope that in this day and age, people will still be kind to them, recognizing they aren't the culprit in the situation. I'm not excusing Ziyad's crime by any means, but only trying to pave the way for more tolerance for the innocent.