

# Virgin Islands Voodoo Slaughter

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*By Barry Bowe*



Our story begins on the island of St. Thomas on March 2, 1988, but the history of the island began nearly 500 years earlier when Christopher Columbus discovered it on his Second Voyage to the New World in 1493. But Columbus found the island unimpressive and he sailed on until he landed on Puerto Rico.

For the next 200 years St. Thomas remained uninhabited. However its sheltered bays became the base of operations for the real pirates of the Caribbean, privateers like Sir Francis Drake who laid in wait for merchant vessels sailing between Europe and the New World.

Then in 1671 King Christian V of Denmark chartered the Danish West India Company to take possession of St. Thomas and to establish fifty sugar plantations. On August 30, 1671, two ships with a crew of 116 men and 61 convicts set sail for St. Thomas and landed on February 26, 1672. Following the king's directives the settlers built a fort, laid out a road, and established fifty plantations. But that was pretty much all the development that took place over the next 100 years.

## Voodoo Slaughter

In 1815 St. Thomas became a free port and its capital city of Charlotte Amalie transformed itself into the commercial hub of the Caribbean by importing and exporting most of the goods traveling back and forth between Europe and the New World.

In 1914, with most of Europe embroiled in World War I, the U.S. adopted a policy of non-intervention. But on May 17, 1915, a German U-boat torpedoed the British ocean liner RMS Lusitania off the coast of Ireland. The ship sunk in 18 minutes and lost 1,198 passengers. That sinking turned international opinion against Germany and opened the eyes of public opinion. From that point on the feral government in Washington feared that unrestricted submarine warfare, much like the pirates of yore, posed a serious threat to both the Panama Canal and the U.S. Mainland.

President Woodrow Wilson authorized the payment of \$25-million to Denmark to purchase St. Thomas, along with the sister-islands of St. John and St. Croix. On March 31, 1917, the American flag was raised over the three U.S. Virgins, and the islands remained under the rule of the U.S. Navy until 1931 when they became an official territory.

During the 1950s air and sea travel increased and St. Thomas became a tropical paradise destination. By 1988 two million tourists and vacationers visited the island every year. Some returned home but others traded in hustle and bustle in exchange for the lure of beauty and tranquility, and they never left.

Two such people were Genevieve Lewis and Steve Cornish.

Just before 7 a.m. Genevieve Lewis, age 53, walked out of her white and pastel home in the hills overlooking the port of Red Hook on the easternmost tip of the island. Born on the French island of Saint Pierre and Miquelon, off the coast of Newfoundland, she lived there for the first 26 years of her life. But she visited St. Thomas in 1961 and decided to stay. She got a job managing a beach club and four years later she met a fishing boat captain, fell in love, and married him. The marriage produced two daughters, one studying in Paris and the other working as a theatrical stylist on Broadway.

She suffered a cranial aneurysm 18 months earlier that nearly took her life. Still recuperating, she took a walk every morning on Vessup Bay Beach as part of her

## Voodoo Slaughter

long-term recovery program. A few minutes after seven she reached the beach by car, parked, and started walking along the sand with her Newfoundland retriever named Baudelaire.

About that same time Steve Cornish, age 29 and a native of Lansing, Michigan, started walking along a dirt pathway that lead away from Cabrita Point to Vessup Bay Beach. Three years earlier he visited an uncle who lived on St. Thomas, fell in love with windsurfing and decided to stay. He soon became an excellent windsurfer and competed and won several competitions. He lived in the Smith Bay section of the island a few miles from Red Hook but visited his uncle the night before and spent the night there. His uncle lived in an upscale neighborhood on Cabrita Point close to Red Hook.

Steve Cornish rarely walked across Vessup Bay Beach, but he was running late for work and decided to take a short cut across the beach. A landscaper on his way to work, he was carrying a pair of pruning shears as he walked.



Vessup Bay Beach is mostly undeveloped and lined with palm trees and sea grape trees, century plants and assorted cacti, and it's bordered by thick, jungle-like undergrowth. The beach itself is a long stretch of sand and perfect for taking

## Voodoo Slaughter

leisurely strolls. The waters are clam and nice for swimming but often inundated with sea grass that comes floating ashore.

At 7:22 a phone rang at police headquarters in Charlotte Amalie. An officer answered and heard a female caller say, "I just saw a man on Vessup Bay Beach hacking away at a body with a machete." The officer immediately passed the information along to Capt. Raymond Hyndman and the captain dispatched officers to the scene.

Sirens started blaring as police cars converged on Vessup Bay Beach and it didn't take long for police officers to find the body of a white female lying in the sand – dismembered, eviscerated, and decapitated. But the head was nowhere in sight. Close by they also found the dismembered body of a large black dog.

A woman came right up to one of the officers and said she was walking along the edge of the water when she came face to face with a naked man carrying a machete. Out of fear, she avoided him by circling around him, and then kept walking along the beach until she came across a woman's headless body lying in the sand. Ironically, she was a neighbor of Genevieve Lewis but never recognized the mutilated remains of her neighbor. She then fled the scene until the officers started arriving. Despite the trauma she was experiencing she provided a detailed description of the naked man.

She described him as being a black man with a dark complexion, medium height and build, somewhere in his thirties, with wild-looking dreadlocks, a scraggly beard, and missing front teeth.

Capt. Celestino White arrived at the scene and secured the beach, then established a dragnet around the surrounding area. The captain acted fast because the suspect obviously escaped on foot and could be hiding in the underbrush rimming the beach, or perhaps he'd fled into the water and slipped aboard one of the dozens of sailboats or motorboats anchored just offshore. The worst case projected the killer as making it to Red Hook and then taking a two-dollar ferry ride to the island of St. John. If he got that far he could easily disappear somewhere in the twenty square miles of the mountainous, undeveloped, and mostly uninhabited island. Even worse, for a few

## Voodoo Slaughter

dollars more he could take a down-island ferry to the islands of Tortola or Virgin Gorda and escape from U.S. jurisdiction entirely.

To be on the safe side Captain White alerted the Coast Guard, called for a helicopter, and alerted authorities on St. John and the surrounding British Virgin Islands to advise them to be on the lookout for the fugitive.

While forensic technicians were taking measurements and snapping pictures, officers were questioning the onlookers who were quickly converging on the area. That's when an officer found the body of a white male 500 feet up the beach at the edge of a dirt path that lead from Cabrita Point to Vessup Bay Beach.

Suddenly they were looking at a double homicide.

At the same time, Genevieve Lewis' husband arrived for work at a nearby marina and heard the commotion. He asked bystanders if they knew what was happening and someone mentioned some sort of incident on Vessup Bay Beach. Knowing that his wife had driven to that beach to walk Baudelaire, he drove over to investigate, but the police denied him access. So he returned to the marina, boarded his 21-foot diesel inboard, and approached the beach from the water. He set the anchor and waded ashore.

"I saw my car splattered with blood," he said later. "That's when I knew that I lost my best friend."

This time officers allowed him access to the beach. In a state of unreal shock and astonishment he looked at the headless body of the white female and identified his wife's engagement ring, wedding ring, and wristwatch.

At that same time Steve Cornish's uncle heard the commotion, walked toward the beach and identified his nephew as the dead white male.

Eyewitnesses kept showing up and providing the investigators with vital information. One female said she saw a naked black man walking along the beach and "tapping a machete against his leg." Her description of the suspect matched the earlier one they'd gotten.

A boater anchored thirty yards offshore said he heard screaming, grabbed his camera and started taking pictures. He watched the killer cut off the woman's head,

## Voodoo Slaughter

one of her legs, and one of her arms. Then he watched the killer disembowel her in a “careful and methodical” manner.

A second boater described watching the killer strip off his clothes after he killed the woman and then “he took a big piece of cement and started smashing what was left of the torso.” He crushed the woman’s skull, then calmly walked into the water and started washing off her blood.

A female resident who lived close to the beach heard blood-curdling screams and came over to investigate. She saw the killer come out of the water and pick up a machete, then continue down the beach until he encountered a white male about to enter the beach. She watched him viciously slash the victim and sadistically mutilate the body.

Every eyewitness gave an almost identical description of the suspect. Several officers thought it rang a bell and sounded like a man familiar to the St. Thomas Police Department. On an island the size of St. Thomas most officers are quite familiar with habitual offenders. The man they were looking for was a 34-year-old native of St. Kitts who migrated to St. Thomas six years earlier. He worked as a bartender for a short while but remained unemployed for most of his residence on St. Thomas. He ran afoul of the law on several occasions, had a history of drug abuse and erratic behavior, and his condition worsened four years earlier when his wife bore another man’s child and ran off to live with the other man.

The name of the man they were looking for was St. Clair Daniel.

Three years earlier officers arrested him at the airport when he tried to board a plane bound for St. Kitts without a ticket. An altercation ensued and an officer had to shoot him in the leg to subdue him.

This year he’d been arrested twice since New Year’s Day. On January 22nd officers arrested him for assaulting an unarmed man with a pickax. Unable to post a \$5,000 bail he went to jail. But he was released twelve days later because the arrest had been mishandled.

On February 15, just sixteen days earlier, officers arrested him on a misdemeanor charge of indecent exposure for parading around naked at a local shopping center. Upon his arrest, doctors treated him and detected one of the highest levels of the

## Voodoo Slaughter

hallucinogenic drug PCP ever recorded in the Virgin Islands. They committed him to St. Thomas Hospital for treatment of drug abuse. But a week later, on February 22, he was released from the hospital and began treatment as an outpatient.

So the mystery was gone but not the suspense. The police knew they were looking for St. Clair Daniel but had to find him and arrest him, and then try him and get a conviction while his attorneys most likely would use the insanity defense in an attempt to get him off.

While one pair of officers was watching the ferry dock at Red Hook and another pair was watching the airport, dozens of officers were beginning a manhunt starting at the scene of the crimes and expanding outward.

“Over here,” one officer yelled when he found the decapitated head of Genevieve Lewis in thick undergrowth a few feet of the beach. Another officer found a bloody machete under a giant century plant. They now believed the suspect was unarmed but still considered him to be dangerous.

Another officer heard a rustling noise and drew his gun, but it was an iguana darting out of the bush and dashing away. But it was no false alarm minutes later when they heard footsteps coming from some nearby bushes and soon saw a naked, gap-toothed man stepping toward them with his hands in the air and his body splattered with dried bloodspots.

“Take it easy on me,” he said.



## Voodoo Slaughter

With the suspect's permission, officers transported him to police headquarters, read him his rights and interrogated him for five hours. At the same time other officers were taxiing witnesses back and forth from the scene, taking their sworn statements and having them attempt to identify the suspect in lineups. Three witnesses said he resembled the victim but they weren't 100 percent sure he was the man they saw. But seven witnesses positively identified him.

In the meantime St. Clair Daniel signed a confession stating that he thought Genevieve Lewis's dog was going to attack him, so he chopped at the dog with his machete. Then thinking that Genevieve Lewis would retaliate by taking out a gun and shooting him, he slashed at her and killed her. In regard to Steve Cornish, he said he thought he was a police officer coming to arrest him, so he killed him, too.

At 4:45 p.m. – less than ten hours after the grisly machete murders in paradise – the police arrested St. Clair Daniel and arraigned him in the district court in Charlotte Amalie. Wearing gray surgical scrubs, his hands and feet shackled, St. Clair Daniel appeared before Magistrate Geoffrey Bernard and heard the charges against – two counts of first-degree murder, two counts of mayhem, and one count of carrying a dangerous weapon.

Under the advice of the public defender assigned to his case, St. Clair Daniel pleaded not guilty to all charges.

Never before had the Virgin Islands seem such grisly murders. Never before had the police rounded up so many eyewitnesses so fast. Never before had the prosecution been afforded the luxury of having eyewitnesses take photographs of the killer methodically murdering his victims. And never before had the Virgin Islands seen such an open-and-shut murder case.

Ten months passed.

On Thursday, January 12, 1989, the defendant arrived for court wearing a red-and-blue track suit, a tan T-shirt, and blue sneakers. At this point and throughout most of the trial, the defendant hung his head low and refrained from speaking.

With Judge David V. O'Brien presiding, public defender Thomas McKelvin entered a plea of innocent to all charges by reason of insanity.



## Voodoo Slaughter

“The defendant,” prosecutor Mark Bonner began his opening remarks, “exercised the ability to control his conduct. He hurt the victims as a consequence of his own desires and passions. He knew what he was doing. He was rational. He was criminally responsible, and psychologists and psychiatrists are going to swear to those facts.”

The public defender began the defense by sneaking voodoo into the equation.

“When is it rational for a man to kill two people,” the defense lawyer said, “and supposedly hide the murder weapon and his clothes, and then walk around naked? He cut up the bodies because he didn’t want their jumbies (ghosts) coming back to haunt him.” The lawyer smiled a whacky smile at the jury and said, “What’s rational about that? No, the murders did not have to happen. But they happened because the system failed St. Clair Daniel by not treating his long-term mental illness. This man has a history of aberrant behavior connected to a psychosis. He was mentally ill on the day he committed these murders, and these crimes were a product thereof.”

The public defender strung together a series of family members and medical experts who swore that St. Clair Daniel was insane.

“He’s stone-mother crazy,” said one relative.

“He said, ‘I’m Lucifer,’” another testified. “‘I’m the one who was tossed down from heaven.’ He told me that his missing teeth were the mark of the beast. He told me if I didn’t believe him, I must read Revelations.”

“He came to my house,” said a third relative, “and swore that a man was chasing him. ‘See him there. He’s coming to kill me.’ He locked the door so that the imaginary man couldn’t intrude. I was so scared. Oh, my Lord, he is crazy.”

Then came the expert witnesses for the defense.

A local doctor treated the defendant after he was arrested. He testified that St. Clair Daniel told him he killed Genevieve Lewis because he thought she was pregnant and was afraid the seed would come back to haunt him. So he disemboweled her to remove the seed. He said, “Jah gave me permission because a serpent’s inside me and eating away at my heart.”

Next came the heavy hitter for the defense.

## Voodoo Slaughter

Dr. Phillip Resnick was an associate professor of psychiatry at Case Western Medical School in Cleveland, Ohio, and an expert in forensic psychiatry. He spent nearly a full day stating that St. Clair Daniel was paranoid schizophrenic. “He is irrational,” he explained, “suspicious, and distrustful of others. He may believe he is Jesus Christ, but he can still understand a television program. He misperceived events and translated innocent meetings into sinister encounters. He had been diagnosed as paranoid schizophrenic years ago and it is not a curable condition.”

Next came a psychiatrist from Coral Springs, Florida. He said that St. Clair Daniel’s case history revealed signs of suffering from an increasingly severe psychosis. He said St. Clair Daniel started exhibiting the signs almost ten years earlier and described his posture throughout the trial as “almost catatonic and consistent with schizophrenia.”

And then it was time for the prosecution’s experts.

First came a psychiatrist who practiced in the Virgin Islands and Puerto Rico. His specialty was transcultural psychiatry, and he labeled the defendant’s mutilation and decapitation of the two victims as “pure voodooism”

“It’s a beautiful and very tough religion,” he explained, “with active branches throughout the Caribbean, especially in hotbeds such as Nevis, Anguilla, and Saint Kitts. Voodoo followers fear becoming zombies. They believe that the body of someone who just died an unnatural death immediately threatened the living, whether or not they were responsible for the person’s death. They believe the *petite von ange* (small angel) hovers over the body for seven days, during which time the *corts cadabre* (body) is capable of zombifying. To prevent this from happening the head must be cut off and destroyed. So he was just following the rituals of voodoo. He’s not crazy.”

A psychiatrist from Missouri testified that St. Clair Daniel “does have some mental problems. But in my opinion the murders were not the consequence of mental illness. I think he knew right from wrong. His actions after each murder were consistent with that interpretation. He washed off the blood and then attempted to run away to avoid apprehension.”

## Voodoo Slaughter

Last up was a clinical psychologist from Atlanta. He examined St. Clair Daniel after he was arrested and administered the Rorschach test with a series of ten cards with random inkblots. The defendant identified each one as representing female genitalia. “I found no evidence of psychotic delusions. I’m not trying to tell you that Mister Daniel is completely normal. He does have some problems, but he manifests his deep-seated problems when he uses drugs.”

The prosecutor then gave his closing remarks.

“St. Clair Daniel intended to kill these people and he thought about it before he did it. He wasn’t a machine or a robot being driven by mental illness. There are mentally ill people who are good citizens and good neighbors, and there are mentally ill people who are criminals. The murder of Genevieve Lewis wasn’t the result of a mental disorder. It’s the result of the evil in his own heart. It was a cultural belief, not a sign of insanity. In regard to Doctor Resnick’s diagnosis of Mister Daniel, if you look far and wide you can find a psychiatrist who’ll say anything.”

The defense then summed up its case by stating that St. Clair Daniel suffered from delusions. He saw innocent behavior and misconstrued it. He attacked Genevieve Lewis because he thought she was going for her gun to retaliate for his attack on her dog – which is an absolutely irrational belief. But according to the prosecution, all of a sudden St. Clair Daniel is sane. That’s exactly what the government is trying to ram down your throat.”

The trial was over except for the verdict.

The jury deliberated for two days.

At 4:30 p.m. on Thursday, January 19, 1989, the jury ruled that in regard to the death of Steve Cornish, St. Clair Daniel was innocent by reason of insanity.

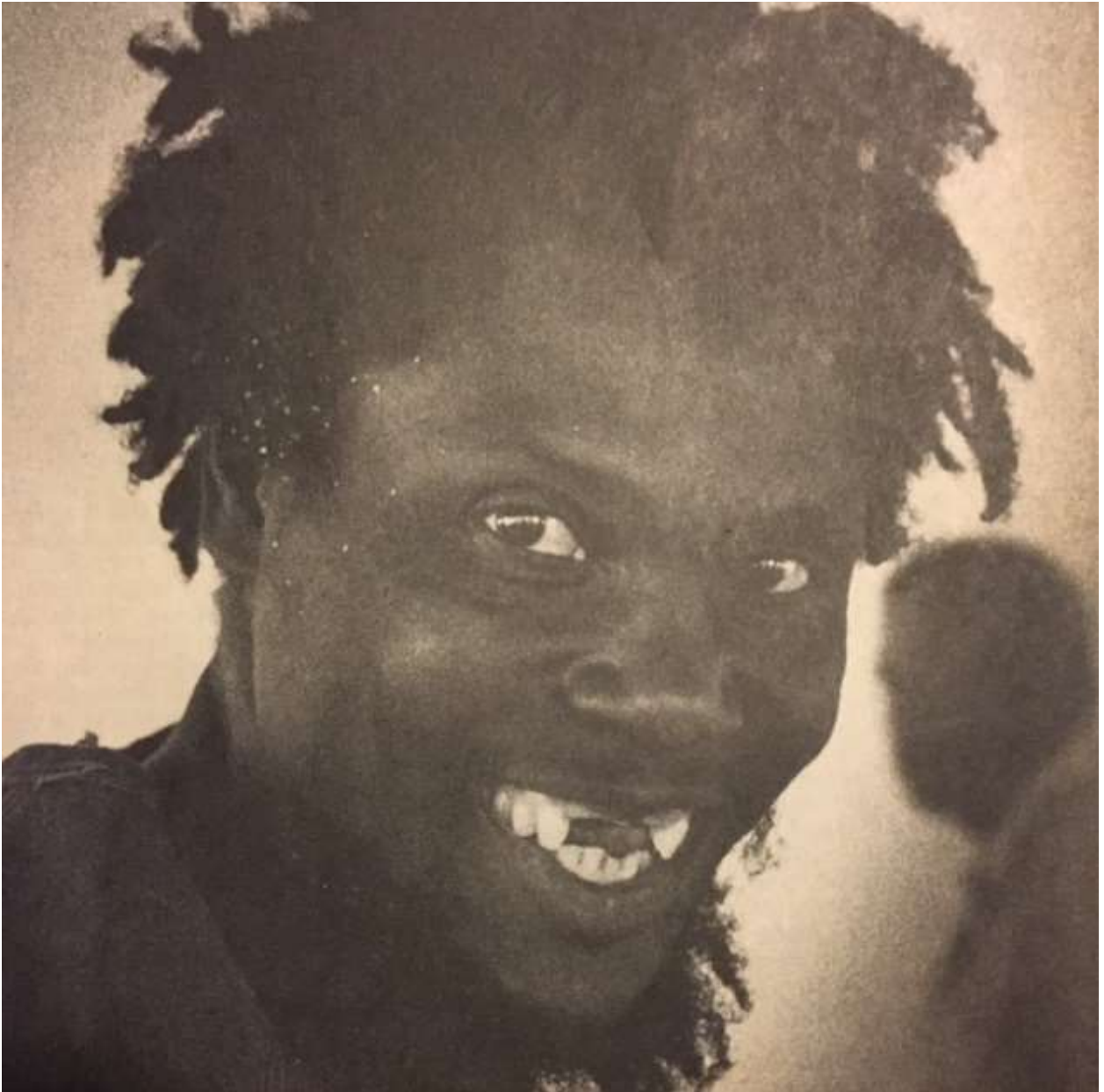
That verdict sent chills throughout the courtroom. Was he going to get away with murder?

But in regard to the death of Genevieve Lewis, the jury ruled that St. Clair Daniel was guilty of murder in the first degree. They reasoned that he knew what he was doing when he killed her, but he was suffering from a delusion when he saw the pruning shears in the hands of Steve Cornish and believed he was under attack.

## Voodoo Slaughter

The decisions sent St. Clair Daniel to prison for the rest of his life, with no chance of parole, while also providing long-term treatment for his mental problems.

## The End



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