

CRIME & COURTS

‘They changed’: Former Charlotte gang members to go free after 31 years in prison

BY MICHAEL GORDON

JUNE 07, 2021 06:30 AM, UPDATED JUNE 07, 2021 08:59 AM



A federal judge granted freedom to Charlotte gang members Orrin Jackson, brother Cecil and others after decades in prison on crack, drug-related violence charges. *GETTY IMAGES/ISTOCKPHOTO*

Listen to our daily briefing:



Subscribe: [Apple Podcasts](#) | [Spotify](#) | [Amazon Alexa](#) | [Google Assistant](#) | [More options](#)

As 20-somethings, they went to prison — all leaders or members of a violent Charlotte crack-cocaine gang that preyed on vulnerable neighborhoods and ruthlessly protected its turf.

In the coming days, brothers Orrin and Cecil Jackson, their cousin Eric Whitener and former gang colleague Gary Davis — now in their 50s — will all walk free, thanks to a federal judge.

TOP ARTICLES

Levine Museum details plans to sell uptown home as part of major changes

In his order last Wednesday, U.S. District Judge Max Cogburn described the four as changed men. Equally important: The laws have changed, too, the judge wrote.

READ NEXT

CORONAVIRUS

A daughter's plea as pandemic hits NC prisons: 'My father was not sentenced to die'

\$2 for 2 months

Subscribe for unlimited access to our website, app, eEdition and more.

CLAIM OFFER

All four defendants were prosecuted in the 1990s on drug trafficking and firearms charges that sent them away to prison for as long as life plus 145 years.

The extraordinary punishments meted out were a government counterpunch in an era in which crack and drug-related violence devastated urban neighborhoods nationwide. Today, the sentencing laws from that period are viewed by many as a punitive and discriminatory overreach that penalized Black drug dealers far more harshly than whites.

Either way, after years of sentencing reforms, the prison terms the four Charlotte men received would not be possible today. A 2020 appeals court ruling opened the door for them and other inmates from that era to use their sentences as the required “extraordinary and compelling” grounds to seek court relief.

In the Charlotte cases, all four men have served 31 years. Time enough, Cogburn ruled.

In succinct language the judge applied to several of the former Charlotte gang members, Cogburn said this about Orrin Jackson: “... There is simply no additional benefit to be achieved by incarcerating (him) for 38 more years.”

Afternoon Observer

Everything you need to know about the day's news in Charlotte, direct to your inbox Monday-Friday.

SIGN UP

This site is protected by reCAPTCHA and the Google [Privacy Policy](#) and [Terms of Service](#) apply.

Mecklenburg County commissioner Pat Cotham, who spoke before Cogburn last month on the inmates’ behalf, said the judge’s words are grounds for a celebration.

“Good for them for making good on the opportunities they had in prison,” said Cotham, long active in programs that help former inmates reenter society.

worked to become a better father. I am thrilled.”

FROM CRACK TO ‘MORAL CONSCIENCE’

Court documents in the decades-long case file feature ample details from the defendants’ young and violent lives — how Cecil Jackson, the gang leader, pulled the trigger or had a hand in at least seven shootings; how Whitener once put a gun to a woman’s head to force her to allow the gang to sell crack from her home.

“To be clear, this is not a case where someone was wrongfully accused and convicted. Nor does it involve an unfair sentence,” Cogburn wrote in each of his four opinions. “(Each defendant) was part of a violent street gang that distributed drugs, shot people, intimidate citizens, and tried to bribe a juror. They went to trial and showed no remorse.”

Today, the court record offers an addendum — how each of the four took part in dozens of prison educational or vocational programs or helped other inmates earn GEDs or interceded with potentially suicidal fellow prisoners.

In an emotional May 12 hearing before Cogburn — which the judge noted in his ruling — former inmates testified how the prison mentoring of the Jacksons and Whitener had changed their lives.

In his own filings to the judge, Orrin Jackson, who was 20 when he arrested and would have been 90 on his scheduled day of release, said he wants to use what he’s learned in prison to work with at-risk kids.

In a letter to Cogburn, Butner federal prison chaplain Oliver Muhammad described Orrin Jackson’s “ever-growing moral conscience” and his natural abilities as a teacher and motivational speaker.

Jackson's attorney, Matt Pruden of Charlotte, broke the good news to his client Wednesday at the Mecklenburg jail, where Jackson has shared a prison pod with his brother and cousin since their federal court hearing last month in Charlotte before Coghurn.

"You could just sense the relief and happiness," Pruden said. "He was so young at the time, just turning 20 ... Now they've become the wise older men of the prison system."

"He wanted to change," Pruden said of Orrin Jackson. "This ruling rewards him for that. It shows a lot of people who went down the wrong path and made mistakes, costly mistakes, that if you're willing to make the necessary changes, you'll get another chance."

Under the judge's order, Orrin Jackson's second chance begins in the next few days. Pruden said his client's social calendar already filling up.

"He told me, 'I'm going to take you out to lunch.'"

RELATED STORIES FROM CHARLOTTE OBSERVER

CRIME

After 30 years, have 3 NC crack gang members repaid their debt? A judge to decide.

MAY 12, 2021 6:00 AM

CORONAVIRUS

A daughter's plea as pandemic hits NC prisons: 'My father was not sentenced to die'

NOVEMBER 27, 2020 10:30 AM



MICHAEL GORDON

704-358-5095

Michael Gordon has been the Observer's legal affairs writer since 2013. He has been an editor and reporter at the paper since 1992, occasionally writing about schools, religion, politics and sports. He spent two summers as "Bikin Mike," filing stories as he pedaled across the Carolinas.

PROMOTED CONTENT



Legal Steroid Turning Men Into Beasts Even With No Exercise

ATOMIC SHRED



Thin Hair? New Hair Repair Formula Leaves Doctors Shocked

GROW N FLOW



Try This Secret Natural Mole & Skin Tag Remover Now (It's Genius)

DERMICELL



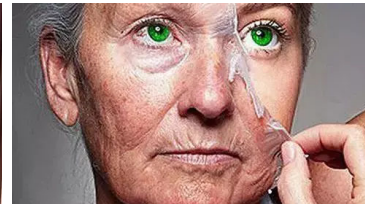
Drink 1 Cup Before Bed, Watch Your Body Fat Melt Like Crazy!

KETO



Woman In North Carolina Lost 29 Lbs In A Month Using 1 Simple Trick

KETO



74-Year-Old Grandma Shocks Doctors: Forget Botox, Do This

LUMOSTAT

COMMENTS

2 Comments

Sort by **Newest**



Add a comment...



Gregg Stahl

Judicial overreach.

Like · Reply · 5d



Tayybu Jo Tayybu Jo

I essentially make about \$6,000-\$8,000 every month on the web. It's sufficient to serenely supplant my old employments pay, particularly considering I just work around 10-13 hours every week from home. I was stunned how simple it was after I attempted it duplicate underneath web...

↓↓↓ COPY THIS WEBSITE ↓↓↓

HERE→→→→→ Wwww.Works56.Com^ .

Don't Copy this →^← With website Thanks



READ NEXT

CRIME & COURTS

De-escalation tactics help resolve recent spate of armed standoffs, CMPD says

BY JONATHAN LIMEHOUSE

JUNE 15, 2021 06:57 PM



SWAT team called to four instances of barricaded individuals, police say.

KEEP READING →

TRENDING STORIES

This North Carolina city ranks among best in nation to find a job, new report finds

UPDATED 6 HOURS 6 MINUTES AGO

German company announces new \$8 million North American headquarters in Charlotte area

JUNE 15, 2021 2:16 PM

Charlotte's Bojangles details new expansion plans as it continues to cross the country

UPDATED 6 HOURS 3 MINUTES AGO

Sleep apnea and ventilator machines recalled by Philips over health risks. What to know

UPDATED JUNE 15, 2021 09:24 AM

Where's the best cheeseburger in NC? Near Charlotte, according to this national site.

JUNE 15, 2021 11:04 AM

\$2 for 2 months

#ReadLocal

Subscribe for unlimited access to our website, app, eEdition and more.

CLAIM OFFER



CRIME & COURTS

Convicted SC sex offender sent child porn using Kik messenger, York County cops say



LOCAL

Call to northeast Charlotte home leads CMPD to man fatally shot multiple times



CRIME & COURTS

Driver accused in shootout in Pineville last month arrested in Pennsylvania

We use cookies and similar technologies. By continuing to use this website, you consent to our [Terms of Service](#) and our [Privacy Policy](#).

ACCEPT COOKIES



CRIME & COURTS

Driver charged with DUI in SUV crash near Chester that injured 4 child passengers

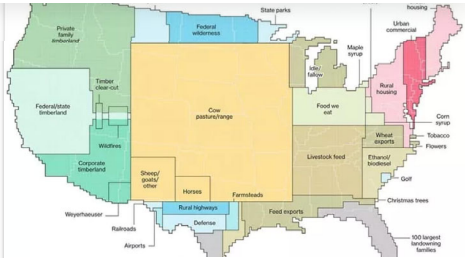
UPDATED JUNE 14, 2021 01:42 PM



CRIME & COURTS

Man shot, several properties damaged in shooting on residential street in York, SC

UPDATED JUNE 14, 2021 01:40 PM



SPONSORED CONTENT

You Won't Be Able to Recognize the US in These Maps That Made Us Say "Whoa" [↗](#)

BY RANKER

Take Us With You

Real-time updates and all local stories you want right in the palm of your hand.



CHARLOTTE OBSERVER APP →

VIEW NEWSLETTERS →

SUBSCRIPTIONS

Start a Subscription

Customer Service

eEdition

Vacation Hold

Pay Your Bill

LEARN MORE

About Us

Contact Us

Newsletters

News in Education

Photo Store

Archives

ADVERTISING

Information

Place a Classified

We use cookies and similar technologies. By continuing to use this website, you consent to our [Terms of Service](#) and our [Privacy Policy](#).

ACCEPT COOKIES

[COPYRIGHT](#)

[PRIVACY POLICY](#)

[TERMS OF SERVICE](#)

We use cookies and similar technologies. By continuing to use this website, you consent to our **Terms of Service** and our **Privacy Policy**.

ACCEPT COOKIES