

***South End* Editor Not Guilty**

Fifth Estate Collective

1969

John Watson, editor of the WSU student newspaper, was acquitted March 7 of charges that he assaulted Joe Weaver, of WJBK-TV.

Watson had been charged with striking the TV-2 "commentator" on Feb. 10 when Weaver attempted to interview Watson at the South End office. (See "TV-2 Interview—POW!," FE #73, February 20-March 5, 1969.)

The issues in the two day trial held in Records' Court revolved around who had struck the first blow. Weaver testified that Watson had grabbed him from behind, forced him to the ground and struck him repeatedly.

Very nice, but apparently very unconvincing to the six-man jury. Testimony was brought out by defense attorney Ken Cockrel that Weaver had struck the first blow. Also, Weaver is five inches taller than Watson and outweighs him by at least 70 pounds.

Defense witnesses Maureen Hallett and Cheryl McCall of the *South End* and Peggy Cronin of *Scope Magazine* testified that it was Weaver who struck the first blow after becoming angered at the fact that Watson refused to be interviewed and had put his hand over the camera which was stuck in his face by the TV-2 cameraman.

Also at issue was the fact that Weaver and his crew had provoked the incident after being repeatedly told to leave the *South End* office by Watson. Weaver at one point threatened to have a "sit-in" unless Watson relented and consented to an interview.

Attorney Cockrel cinched the acquittal with a brilliant closing argument that left Weaver ashen-faced and biting his nails. Besides hitting at the paucity of the prosecution's case, Cockrel lit into the racism of TV-2 and Weaver.

He also raked the police and the prosecutor's office over the coals for the discriminatory manner in which they launched the case against the black revolutionary.

The detective in charge admitted on the stand that he had sought no witnesses in the case other than Weaver before requesting a warrant against Watson. The detective testified he had not bothered to talk to others present at the scene of the incident even though the *South End* office is only one block from the Woodward police station.

The jury, evidently completely convinced of Watson's innocence, deliberated only 22 minutes before returning the not guilty verdict.

A smiling John Watson left the courtroom surrounded by a large group of his brothers and sisters.

TV-2 had no comment.

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