

# A Decision At VW Then Suicide

PRESS

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By JERRY BYRD  
And EDWINA RANKIN

The men hugged each other as long-lost brothers, the clean-cut conservative and the bearded so-called radical. Finally together after months of suspicion and loathing.

Charles Penn, 31, and all of 6-foot-5, hugged his clean-shaven and smaller Volkswagen co-worker, William Brock, Friday afternoon while three other men in the law offices of Robert O. Lampl looked on.

Until a week ago the two men had been at philosophical odds. Penn, his personal and professional life rent by death threats, wanting to do something; Brock, a former Equal Employment Opportunity coordinator and a believer in negotiation, insisting they wait.



**WILLIAM B. BROCK**  
Joined VW suit on eve of suicide.

Brock had finally relented. Friday afternoon he informed his attorneys he would join in the \$70 million class action suit alleging racial discrimination filed in U.S. District Court against the Volkswagen of America Inc. plant in New Stanton, Westmoreland County.

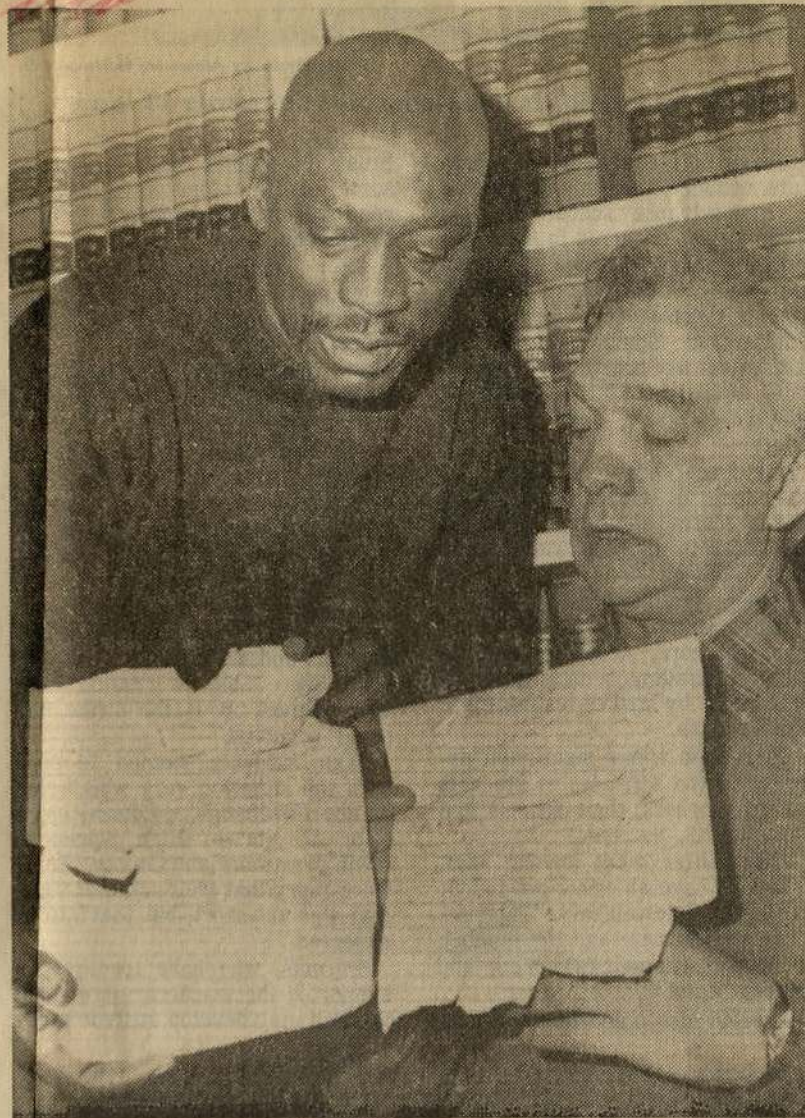
Friday night Brock shot himself in the head. He died yesterday morning in Washington Hospital, Washington County. Washington County Coroner Farrell Jackson ruled the death a suicide.

He left behind a letter alleging that plant officials had threatened to disclose a sexual harassment complaint against him if he failed to stall the court action planned by the Volkswagen Black Caucus, for which he acted as spokesman.

Tom McDonald, director of public affairs for Volkswagen of America in Troy, Mich., said "I can categorically say . . . that there is absolutely no truth to the report that members of the corporation in any way whatsoever tried to influence Mr. Brock in regard to the lawsuit.

"We would in no way authorize our attorneys or (other Volkswagen

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Press Photo by Donald J. Stetzer

**VOLKSWAGEN'S 'VEILED THREAT'** backfired and only drove William Brock to join a discrimination suit against the company, said a statement written by the VW executive, then torn up before he fatally shot himself Friday. Prepared for a Press reporter, it was pieced together yesterday by adviser James Ashton, right, and Nate Smith, a long-time friend.



# VW Decision, Then Suicide

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employees) to infer that any such action be taken on Mr. Brock's part whatsoever.

"This is a very, very sensitive area, and tragic happenings of (Friday) night and (Saturday) morning just compound the sensitivity."

Chet Bahn, a spokesman at the company's New Stanton plant, said the company extends "our deep sympathy to (Brock's) family and his many friends." **JA 9'83**

At Brock's home last night, his wife and family said Brock talked frequently about the sexual harassment complaint and the company's threats.

"He told me he would ask her (the alleged victim) in front of witnesses whether he had ever made any sexual advances toward her. In a room full of people she would deny it. She admitted these (charges) are lies. This is what he told me she said," Mrs. Brock said.

"Then, they (company officials) would call him aside and say if you go down to the lawyer's office and join the lawsuit we are going to bring this up. They were blackmailing him. That is the way he told it to me."

In a two-hour interview Friday afternoon, Brock talked excitedly of his agonizing decision to participate in the suit, of how he had battled "to tears" the group's decision to file on Jan. 4.

He and Penn, a Volkswagen production supervisor, left Lampl's Downtown office at 6:30 p.m., heading for a restaurant.

When he got back to his home in Washington, Brock was "acting upset," Fredda Nelson, Brock's mother-in-law, said her daughter, Renae, had told her. "When he came home he just wanted to talk, talk, talk. And he rambled a lot."

The couple's three children were making a lot of noise, so Brock's

yesterday, said in part:

**PRESS**  
"The ... threat along with the offer of crumbs has caused (me) to join the suit as well as start legal proceedings against VW and (the woman) or any other pawn willing to falsify the facts for expediency."

Schatzman said "He was a person who was no dummy ... an extremely intelligent man. We'd get a chance to talk briefly about how things were going at VW. He was always optimistic about what he could do." **JA 9'83**

"He would never openly say the company was screwing up. He always talked in symbols."

After Brock's reunion with Penn Friday, the men talked about their experiences at Volkswagen and why, after more than a year of negotiations that appeared to be bearing fruit, a lawsuit was filed.

Penn pulled a picture from a large folder filled with hate literature he said was found at the plant. The picture was of a bomb — that turned out to be fake — which nonetheless chilled both him and his family. **PRESS**

The "bomb" was found in his desk drawer at work in November. Later, a telephone caller said "Hey, nigger, next time it'll be a real one."

The FBI is pursuing an "active investigation of an incident at the plant directed against a black male" in November. A spokesman would not be more specific yesterday. Penn said he had contacted the agency.

"We have posters, plastic Ku Klux Klan crosses, hangman's nooses," said Ashton. "It's amazing the company let all this go on."

Brock, who formerly was Equal Employment Opportunity coordinator at the plant, had been trying to help resolve grievances between black salaried and hourly workers and management.

The talks produced optimistic

at Penn, she said, were just that until the layoffs started.

"Since the publicity started this week, people are starting to talk about it. They're saying VW is going to quit making rabbits and start making jungle bunnies."

Family members reported that Brock said the sexual harassment was never formalized but the company threatened to take that action if he joined the lawsuit.

His wife said he had told her about a number of problems blacks were having at Volkswagen and "he just couldn't see why the blacks had to go through all of this just to be treated right."

Brock's brother-in-law, Tykie Dorsey, a former Volkswagen employee, said blacks were treated so badly at the plant that even whites who associated with them were given a hard time.

The family members attributed Brock's death to the way the company had treated him and not simply to the sexual harassment accusation.

Brock's sister, Haisela Dorsey, said, "It will all come out in time," referring to the class action lawsuit.

She said the company "used this sexual harassment to try to control him. He loved his family deeply. He loved his children. He never had any desire for anyone at Volkswagen. That was tool they used to defame him."

As an elementary and high school student, he tested as a genius, according to his family.

Brock formerly had operated a custodial service in Washington, called Reliable Custodian Inc. Until his death, he had done performance management for businesses in Washington and also conducted performance management seminars at the Beaver Campus of the Pennsylvania State University.

Brock's



wife promised him they would talk later if he'd go upstairs.

"The next thing (Rena) knew, was that she heard a shot," said Mrs. Nelson.

Brock, 31, had been a Volkswagen employee since 1977. He was recently elected president of the Washington County NAACP and was an assistant personnel manager at the plant.

Brock's handwritten statement was recovered yesterday from a wastebasket in Lampl's office. He had planned to give it to a reporter Friday, but Lampl and Brock's friend and adviser, Nate Smith, convinced him to tear it up, Smith said.

"It was just too damaging and it might have been misunderstood," said James Ashton, also involved in the case.

His acquaintances said Brock feared the damage from the alleged sexual harassment grievance — which he said is unfounded — would destroy his family and his credibility inside the plant and out.

Homewood District Justice Dennis Schatzman, who had known Brock for 17 years, called the sexual harassment charge "unbelievable."

Brock's fear the harassment grievance would hurt him and his family, coupled with an earnest desire to solve black grievances internally, prevented him from initially joining in the lawsuit filed by 10 present and former black VW employees.

Brock continued to insist upon negotiations in a half-dozen sometimes tearful and often confrontational meetings with others involved in the suit.

"We tried to allow the organization the opportunity to resolve the problems internally," Brock said Friday.

"As long as we thought there was an ounce of hope ...

"At the last minute, we discovered the (New Stanton) people were so different in their approach than the corporate people. The local people were just trying to trick us."

pieced together

news releases one day, denials and pessimism the next as, Brock said, the company tried to play one black faction against the other.

"They'd tell me they were going to make monumental changes, then I'd report what they said, then they'd say I misrepresented their position. They were trying to make it appear I was out for myself."

"I'm certain now the company had ill intent," Brock said Friday.

Still, the "internal negotiations" may have continued, had it not been for an incident at a cocktail party late last year.

A government official, after several drinks, leaked an alleged plan to rid the plant of Black Caucus members one by one. Shortly afterward, two blacks were reprimanded on the same day. One was reprimanded for using a bathroom that was not in his section, Ashton said.

"There was a lot of agonizing over filing that suit, but it was a protective device to keep them from systematically eliminating those who had been branded troublemakers by a member of the government."

A white plant worker, who asked she not be identified, said the suit was filed to protect black workers at a time when many whites were being laid off.

The employee, who knows both Brock and Penn, said neither had firm grounds on which to sue. Discrimination against blacks is not as serious a problem at the 4,400-employee plant as the suit makes it out to be, she said.

"There are lots of black women, too, and lots of blacks in high positions in the company. One (black) guy was a general superintendent, but he had a heart attack and had to quit. There are others in high positions, but there are only so many high positions to go around. These guys (in the lawsuit) are doing all they can to keep from being laid off, that's all."

Most of the racial pranks aimed

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