

Craig Hicks Sentenced to Life for Killing Three Neighbors

by Hugh Fitzgerald



Craig Hicks is the unhinged man who killed three neighbors in a dispute over parking privileges at his apartment house in Chapel Hill in 2015. He has pleaded guilty to killing all three and just been sentenced to three consecutive life terms. Here are representative titles of media reports on his sentencing:

NPR: N Carolina man pleads guilty to killing 3 Muslim students

CNN: North Carolina man sentenced to life after pleading guilty to the 2015 murders of 3 Muslim college students

CBS: Four years later, North Carolina man pleads guilty to killing 3 Muslim students

NBC: Man Pleads Guilty to Killing 3 Muslim Students in NC

ABC: 'Cold-hearted malice:' Craig Hicks to spend life in prison for murder of 3 Muslim students in 2015

FOX NEWS: North Carolina man pleads guilty to killing 3 Muslim

students

Huffington Post: North Carolina Man Pleads Guilty To Killing 3 Muslim Students

Buzzfeed: The Chapel Hill Shooter Pleaded Guilty To Killing Three Muslim American Students In 2015

WRAI: Chapel Hill man gets 3 life sentences for gunning down Muslim neighbors

WFAE: Durham DA: No Death Penalty For 3 Muslim Deaths

There are many more – hundreds of stories – about his sentencing, and all of them proclaim that Craig Hicks killed “3 Muslims.” Anyone skimming these headlines, or reading the reports themselves, will of course assume that Hicks’s crime was the product of anti-Muslim hate. That has become the narrative. Almost no one challenges it. But that narrative is false.

Let’s go back to February 10th, 2016, when NPR ran a long piece about the murders of those three people – all Muslims – in Chapel Hill, North Carolina exactly one year before. The murderer was identified as Craig Hicks, who lived in the same apartment complex as the victims. Investigation of his Facebook page showed conclusively that Hicks leaned to the left in his political views, being especially fond of the Southern Poverty Law Center and the Huffington Post. He “liked” a group calling itself “Obama Backs Mosque Near Ground Zero: This Is America,” which naturally suggests he favored “a mosque near Ground Zero.” Hardly the sign of someone who is “anti-Islam.” And indeed, there is no record anywhere of Hicks ever mocking Islam on social media or making an anti-Islam remark anywhere else. But among the groups that he did like at Facebook were several dozen that were militantly anti-Christian: Jesus McChrist, Scary Bible Quotes of the Day, Silly Christians, Not Wasting My Sundays At Church, Arrest the Pope and Tax Religion, and a few dozen others of that ilk. He was obsessed with one religion, all right, and virulently hostile towards it, but that religion wasn’t Islam – it was

Christianity. He even wrote: "Knowing several dozen Muslims...I'd prefer them to most Christians." Does that sound like anti-Muslim bias?

But because the three people Craig Hicks killed were Muslims, at the time of the murders Muslims immediately swung into action, declaring that of course Hicks's motive could only have been a deep-seated hatred of Muslims. Nihad Award of CAIR was quick off the mark: "Based on the brutal nature of the crime, the past anti-religion [but they were all anti-Christian!] statements of the alleged perpetrator, the religious attire of two of the victims, and the rising anti-Muslim rhetoric in American society, we urge state and federal law enforcement authorities to quickly address speculation of a possible bias motive in this case." Linda Sarsour, the well-known Muslim activist, insisted that the murders sent "a message to other young people in the Muslim community that the fear [of anti-Muslim hate crime] is valid." There was much more in this vein from various Muslim groups and individuals. Yet none of them could point to a single anti-Muslim statement by Craig Hicks; no one could find that he ever even glanced at an anti-Islam website. He had had run-ins before with many people, of all kinds, at his housing complex, including those three Muslims, over two issues: noise, and parking spaces. Neighbors said he was clearly disturbed, complaining incessantly to others in the complex about both matters. **"I have seen and heard him be very unfriendly to a lot of people in this community," Samantha Maness, another resident of the Finley Forest development, told the New York Times. She said that Hicks displayed an "equal opportunity anger" and that he made "everyone feel uncomfortable and unsafe." Everyone, not just Muslims.**

He was emphatic about enforcing the complex's parking regulations and griped when he thought Maness made too much noise with friends. If Muslims were killed, could it really have been only a quarrel about parking spaces? Of course it

could. What everyone who came into contact with Craig Hicks knew was that he was a very angry man. He had lost his salesman's job years ago, was still unemployed but was studying, at the age of 46, to be a paralegal. He felt life had treated him unfairly. What made him very angry was not Islam, but the quality of life at his apartment house. And what enraged him – the neighbor from hell – were two matters: too much noise coming from other apartments, and the failure to observe the parking lot regulations, either by parking in the wrong spot, or by claiming more spots for an apartment's residents than they were entitled to. He may not have been able to control his environment at work, but he was determined to control the environment at home, by complaining about the least infraction by his neighbors.

One Muslim who lived at the complex said that the first complaint he and his friends ever had from Hicks was over the level of noise they made while they were playing "Risk": "You were too loud, you woke up my wife." But Hicks made no slurs, at any time, against the resident Muslims. What exercised Hicks most of all were disputes over parking. Sometimes other residents would have more visitors than they had visitors' permits for; sometimes those visitors, or the residents themselves, parked in places not designated for them. All of this was fodder for the unhinged Hicks. But he was as incensed with non-Muslims over parking problems as he was with Muslims. He demonstrated that "equal opportunity anger" repeatedly.

Hicks' wife of seven years testified: **"I can say with absolute belief that this incident had nothing to do with religion of the victims, but it was related to a longstanding parking dispute that my husband had with the neighbors."** Not once during their marriage had Hicks ever mentioned any hatred of Muslims. But about parking spaces, he had plenty to say. The day after the killings, U.S. Attorney Ripley Rand was equally certain: "The events of yesterday are not part of a targeting campaign against Muslims in North Carolina....there was no

information this is part of an organized event against Muslims.”

None of this testimony has had the slightest dampening effect on the long campaign by Muslims to turn the Chapel Hill parking-lot killings into a “hate crime.” And it is startling how many people – including those who have been reporting on this story, from the day of the murders right through to the sentencing of Hicks to life imprisonment – still stubbornly insist on parroting the claims made by Muslim activists about a “hate crime,” when no one has been able to produce a shred of evidence to support this claim. It is inconceivable that, were Hicks anti-Muslim, he would not have mentioned this, ever, to his wife or to his non-Muslim neighbors. He never spoke, and he never wrote, an unkind thing about Islam or Muslims. He did, once, compare Christians unfavorably to Muslims. The prosecutor at trial, Santana Deberry, certainly searched high and low for such evidence of bias toward Muslims, but came up empty.

The NPR story in 2016 was focused on what, in the face of this “hate crime,” (as NPR has from its very first report insisted on calling it) proud Muslims were doing, such as becoming “visible and vocal” – wearing hijabs as an act of defiance (against all those presumed craigs-hicks emulators): “This [the murders] happened, but it [this “hate-crime”] can’t stop us from being who we are, from practicing our faith – because it [Islam] is beautiful, it’s [Islam] peaceful.” Thus Summer Hamad, who now finds it important to bravely become more “noticeably Muslim around her community...If I was doing something good like volunteering, which we do a lot, I “wanted people to know that we’re also Muslim” (and thus see how peaceful, giving, generous we are).

“In the year since the shootings,” noted NPR in 2016, “many local Muslims...have chosen to be more visible in their communities. They’ve become more proactive about sharing their faith, engaging with their communities, and trying to create a

collective embrace.” Omid Safi, a Duke professor of Islamic Studies, says that in reaction to the murders by Hicks, “We’ve opened our homes, we’ve opened our hearts, we’ve stood out: proud as Americans, proud as human beings, proud as Muslims.”

NPR offered a glowing endorsement in its 2016 report for Muslims bravely looking beyond “the hate-crime” (as it was now to be known) and taking it as a reason for coming together, creating a community center, conducting outreach so that the Infidels around them would see Muslims engaged in good works, and not be tempted to do what Muslims claim Hicks did to them “because they were Muslims.”

Instead, that report is full of news about what Muslims in North Carolina are now doing to:

- 1) “show that they are proud Muslims by wearing the hijab” (Summer and Marjad Hamad)
- 2) “promote and project the true image of Islam” (Mohammad Moussa)
- 3) “show people we are not different and that we have a lot in common” (Amena Said)

NPR is all for reporting on these activities by Muslims who are proud to promote the faith, by way of “answering” the “hate” of Craig Hicks. What NPR has never done is state truthfully what all the evidence, or lack of it shows. We have the testimonies of neighbors about his “equal opportunity anger,” and his wife’s insistence that he held no hate for anyone. We have reports about his parking-place obsession, and his previous encounters, including some with the three victims (none of whom reported that Hicks had ever made a single remark about their religion). Craig Hicks was an angry man, who was unemployed, having several years before lost his job as a salesman, and at the age of 46, he was studying at Durham Technical Community College to become a paralegal; he felt life had not treated him fairly, and he focussed his anger on residential noise and parking spaces, two things over

which he could exercise some control.

According to NPR's 2016 report: "Chapel Hill police initially said the shootings were triggered by a parking dispute, but to many people around the world and in the community, it felt and looked like a hate crime. Hicks, who openly bashed religion on social media, confessed shortly after the act..."

Notice the meretriciousness in this two-sentence paragraph. By writing that "Chapel Hill police initially said the shootings were triggered by a parking dispute," NPR implies that they have since found new evidence that had led them to have reason to reconsider. But they didn't. All the evidence, whether gathered initially or later, including the testimony of Hicks' neighbors and his wife, and the social media evidence that subsequently turned up – or failed to – support and reinforce the notion that the murders were indeed "triggered by a parking dispute." Chapel Hill police believed this not just "initially." They believed it, right through the trial, and despite the letter the police chief wrote on June 12, after Hicks's sentencing, I think they believe it even now.

Note, too, how NPR cavalierly claims that Hicks "openly bashed religion on social media..." without specifying whether he bashed religion in general, or a particular one, and if a particular one, which one. An innocent reader would assume, given all that "hate-crime" talk, that it was Islam that Hicks "openly bashed." But when his Facebook page was studied, it turned out that when Hicks "bashed religion," it was always Christianity, never Islam, that he criticized. NPR deliberately misled its listeners by claiming he "bashed religion" and obliquely suggesting that it was "Islam" he "bashed." We know that isn't so. In the four years since the murder, despite the best efforts of the police and the prosecutor, no one has found a single critical statement by Hicks about Islam. Shouldn't this have been noted by conscientious reporters?

Here is a different sentence that might have been included in the stories about the investigation, trial, and sentencing of Craig Hicks:

“Chapel Hill police continue to believe that the shootings were triggered by a parking dispute, although many Muslims around the world and in Chapel Hill persist in claiming it was a hate crime. Hicks, who openly bashed Christianity at anti-Christian websites on social media, has apparently never written a single word against Islam or Muslims; in his previous encounters with the three people he killed, he never once alluded to their Muslim faith.”

The campaign by Muslims to rewrite Hicks’s history, to de-emphasize his obsessing over parking and noise and to claim, without the slightest evidence, that he was “anti-Muslim,” has succeeded. “It was a bias crime” has become the accepted narrative. On the day of his sentencing, **District Attorney Santana Deberry said:** “There was no plea offered to Craig Hicks today. There was no negotiation with him. **His hate of Islam drove him to kill three innocent people.** He gets no deals. He is now where he should be – relegated to a footnote in history.”

What “hate of Islam drove him to kill three innocent people”? This is what CAIR and Linda Sarsour and the victims’ relatives want the world to believe, but where is the evidence? Why was the prosecutor, Santana Deberry, unable to present a single negative statement by Craig Hicks, written or oral, about Islam? You can be sure that had there been any such remark, she would have quoted it at trial. But she didn’t. Resentment at his station in life caused Hicks to angrily obsess over noise and parking spaces. These were things that, by complaining to others, he could control. At his apartment complex he could be master of his situation, reading others the riot act if they took up more parking spaces than they were entitled to, or made too much noise.

The prosecutor described Hicks as a “professed atheist.” More accurately, he was virulently anti-Christian. He went to anti-Christian websites. Why does she not mention his anti-Christian views? Because it would have complicated her attempts to construct a narrative of an “anti-Muslim hate crime.”

There has not been any evidence presented, written or oral, of Hicks holding anti-Muslim views. All the prosecution could offer was the single statement of a psychologist whose views we are presumably to uncritically accept:

A licensed psychologist testified that the parking dispute had nothing to do with the murders. The psychologist said Hicks viewed the victims with bias and it was that bias that fueled his motive to seek out and intentionally kill the three Muslim students.

That psychologist is Samuel Sommer, who is head of the Diversity & Intergroup Relations Lab at Tufts University, and is “interested in issues related to stereotyping, prejudice, and group diversity.” Discovering hidden bias is part of his remit. He apparently offered no direct evidence from Hicks himself, no statement that Hicks made about Muslims or Islam, to support his claim. He might, more modestly, have testified that in his opinion “anti-Muslim bias played a part” or even “played a major part.” But his claim that the parking dispute had nothing to do with the murders astonishes. Nothing to do? By all accounts from those who knew him – Hicks’s wife, his apartment neighbors with whom he had had run-ins – he obsessed over parking spaces, and was quick to confront those he believed had been violating the regulations, taking up more spaces than they were entitled to, or parking in the wrong space. Hicks had a long record of getting into such disputes over parking with many people at the complex. Hicks himself never wavered, from when he turned himself in on the day of the murder, that the killings were a product of his extreme

anger, a parking dispute that got way out of hand. The psychologist states, but again offers no evidence, that Hicks “viewed the victims with bias.” Why should we accept this when others have said Hicks was always displaying his “equal opportunity anger” and when no evidence, in word or deed, of that anti-Muslim bias prior to the killings has ever been produced?

No doubt in his meetings with Hicks, the psychologist tried to probe, tried to get him to say something anti-Muslim on tape, but failed – otherwise such a remark would have been quoted by the prosecutor. Instead, this “licensed psychologist” testified that “the parking dispute had nothing to do with the murders” and that “Hicks viewed the victims with bias.” The psychologist offered no evidence for either remark. It was a conclusion arrived at not on the basis of evidence, but on the psychologist’s desire to please the prosecutor and the relatives of the victims, who all along have been dead set on making everyone see these murders solely as an anti-Muslim hate crime and have managed, unfortunately, to impose their false narrative on the American public.

There have been a handful of dissenters. At the website friendlyatheist.pantheos.com, Hemant Mehta concludes his report on Hicks’s sentencing thus: “The families are upset that hate crime charges weren’t brought against Hicks, but that still appears to be the right call, at least legally. Criticizing religion isn’t hate on its own, and **all the available evidence in this case suggested that the victims’ faith wasn’t the cause of Hicks’ rage.**” And Mehta might have added that Hicks never criticized Islam; Christianity, however, was the frequent target of his ire.

After the sentencing, relatives of the victims in the court continued to repeat the “anti-Muslim bias” narrative:

Yusif Mohammad Abu-Salha, brother to Yusor and Razan, addressed the court after his father, calling Hicks “a

coward, a small man, a monster, a failure."

"You executed my sisters and best friend in cold blood, out of pure hatred," Abu-Salha said while staring at Hicks.

*"**You hated them for being Muslim.** Deah was much larger than you, he did not fear you.*

There is no evidence that Craig Hicks hated Deah, Yusor, and Razan "for being Muslim." In fact, he not have hated them at all. His sudden upsurge of murderous fury is not the same thing as steadfast hate. When he came to their apartment to complain about their using too many parking spaces, Barakat responded that they were using no more spaces than condo rules allow. Hicks then said – as recorded on Barakat's cell phone – "You're going to be disrespectful towards me, I'm going to be disrespectful ...". At that point he pulled a gun from his waist and fired several times. If it were a hate crime, wouldn't one expect Hicks to say something derogatory about Muslims, such as "I'm tired of arguing with you Muslims" or "why don't you go back where you came from" or any slight acknowledgement that their being Muslims had fed his rage. At that very moment, however, **all Hicks said was "You're going be disrespectful towards me. I'm going to be disrespectful [right back]."**

Deah Barakat's sister also spoke in court, explaining there is "no true justice as long as Deah, Yusor and Razan are robbed of their lives."

"I still can't process looking down into Deah's casket, lips blue, front tooth chipped from a bullet and giving him the last kiss on his cold, ice forehead," Barakat said.

"In our current political climate, it is not only acceptable but indeed advantageous to demonize Muslims"

"Let's call this what it is – a terrorist attack," Barakat

added.

These charges are both false and grotesque. Who's been demonizing Muslims? If he means the so-called "Muslim ban" by Trump, he knows perfectly well that two of the seven countries affected by that ban are non-Muslim, that the reason for inclusion under the ban was the inability of certain countries to adequately monitor the terrorist threat from their own citizens; finally, 95% of the world's Muslims remain unaffected by the ban. Where is it "advantageous" to "demonize" Muslims? Examples, please. What is really going on is that organized Muslims have managed to demonize sober islamocritics as "islamophobes" and "racists." Hicks did not ever "demonize Muslims." He never once criticized any Muslim for being a Muslim. He never criticized the ideology of Islam.

Even more outrageous is Barakat's charge that the killing of three people because of a long-running parking dispute was a "terrorist attack" targeting Muslims. Was Craig Hicks intent on 'terrorizing' these or any other Muslims? No. Did he seek to "strike terror" in the hearts of Muslims the way Muslims, following Qur'anic verses (e.g., 8:12, 8:60, 47:4) are commanded to do with Infidels? No, he only wanted his neighbors, including the three who happened to be Muslims, to simply follow the parking regulations of the apartment complex and to keep noises from their apartments down. Was he unusually obsessive about these two matters? Yes. Did his final explosion – his uncontrollable rage – constitute a "terrorist attack"? No.

The prosecutor was nonetheless determined to see anti-Muslim bias where there was none – it's what the relatives wanted, it's what CAIR and Linda Sarsour wanted, it's what all right-thinking people wanted us to believe, it's the narrative the mainstream media from the beginning accepted and disseminated, of an anti-Muslim crime. Even if the prosecutor determined that there was "not enough evidence" – in fact, there was none

– of a “hate crime,” she continued to talk about this as a “bias crime.” Her mind was made up long ago, and nothing would change it.

He was emphatic about enforcing the complex’s parking regulations and griped when he thought [a neighbor] made too much noise with friends.

One hopes, now that the sentencing phase is over, some will begin to question the specious narrative first spun by Muslims from CAIR and by the victims’ relatives, and then by the prosecutor (aided and abetted by that “licensed psychologist”), a narrative which insists this was a bias crime even if “there was not enough evidence to charge Hicks” with it. How many of us realize that despite these assertions of a hate crime, it was not a question of there being “not enough evidence” to support that charge, but, rather, that there was not a shred of evidence to support the charge that Craig Hicks harbored anti-Muslim views?

Hicks’ wife Karen said that her husband was an angry man, but not prejudiced.

“This incident had nothing to do with religion or victims’ faith, but instead had to do with the longstanding parking disputes that my husband had with the neighbors,” she said. “He often champions on his Facebook page for the rights of many individuals. Same sex marriages, abortion, race, he just believes that everyone is equal. Doesn’t matter what you look like or who you are or what you believe.”

Imad Ahmad, Barakat’s former roommate, said the victims had faced Hicks’ anger before.

“He would come over to the door, knock on the door and then have a gun on his hip saying, ‘You guys need to not park here,’” Ahmad told the Associated Press. “He did it again after [Yusor and Deah] got married.”

Note that Hicks didn't address them, or single them out, as Muslims. They were simply "guys": "you guys need to not park here."

Early on, Chapel Hill police said that they hadn't ruled out the idea that the shooting was "hate-motivated," but they strongly doubted it, and during the investigation they insisted an ongoing parking dispute fueled Hicks's wrath.

Some Muslims in Chapel Hill as well as the victims' family and friends refused to accept that as the motive. Dr. Mohammad Abu-Salha, the slain sisters' father, called for a federal probe into what he says "has hate crime written all over it."

A day after the sentences were handed down, the Chief of Police of Chapel Hill released a letter, the first paragraph of which seemed to suggest that yes, the police now agreed that Hicks's attack did involve bias:

*A Statement from Chapel Hill Police Chief Chris Blue
Post Date:06/12/2019 5:31 PM*

*From Chapel Hill Police Chief and Executive Director for
Community Safety Chris Blue:*

"What we all know now and what I wish we had said four years ago is that the murders of Deah, Yusor, and Razan were about more than simply a parking dispute. The man who committed these murders undoubtedly did so with a hateful heart, and the murders represented the taking of three promising lives by someone who clearly chose not to see the humanity and the goodness in them. To the Abu-Salha and Barakat families, we extend our sincere regret that any part of our message all those years ago added to the pain you experienced through the loss of Our Three Winners. And, to the Muslim members of our community, know that you are heard, seen, and valued.

I suspect this letter was written under pressure from both the

District Attorney and the relatives of the three people killed. At the time of the killing, the police had said there was no evidence that it was anything other than “a parking dispute.” That was true then, and it remains true today. But Chief Chris Blue now says that was wrong; “I wish we had said four years ago...that the murders of Deah, Yusor, and Razan were about more than simply a parking dispute. The man who committed these murders undoubtedly did so with a hateful heart...” But Chief Blue offers no new evidence for his claim that the murders were “about more than...a parking dispute.” And he does not deny that the parking dispute did have something to do with the killings, thus flatly contradicting the psychologist’s assertion that a parking dispute had “nothing” to do with them. Chief Blue offers no evidence that Hicks carried out his crimes with “a hateful heart.” The only thing that is new is that the narrative created by Muslims, that this was a bias crime, is now being accepted by the Police Chief, who must surely have been pushed to accept that narrative. This should please CAIR, that senses it is winning and may now call for a federal investigation into what will apparently be known as the Chapel Hill “anti-Muslim hate crime murders.”

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