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1981 SURVEY OF NEW YORK PRACTICE

DEVELOPMENTS IN NEW YORK LAW

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The Supreme Court's initial pronouncement of the exclusionary rule concerning evidence obtained in violation of a defendant's fifth amendment rights suggested that such evidence would be inadmissible at trial for all purposes. Subsequently, in *Harris v.*
New York, the Supreme Court qualified its position by holding that statements made in the absence of Miranda warnings may be used to impeach the credibility of a witness provided "the trustworthiness of the evidence satisfies legal standards." The extent to which the trustworthiness proviso of Harris limits the availability of illegally obtained evidence for impeachment purposes has been uncertain. Recently, in People v. Washington, the Court of Appeals held that the trustworthiness requirement did not bar the admission of prior inconsistent statements where, at a pretrial suppression hearing, the court had determined that the defendant had neither been given the required Miranda warnings nor had made the statements in issue.

In Washington, the police went to the defendant's apartment to investigate a report of a man with a gun. After being admitted by the defendant's wife, they found the defendant asleep on the
living room couch with a gun protruding from his pocket. A police officer removed the gun and arrested him. At a pretrial suppression hearing, the arresting officer testified that the defendant, after being advised of his Miranda rights, had made two inconsistent statements as to how he had obtained the gun. The defendant's counsel noted, however, that the alleged statements were not included in the report of the arresting officer or mentioned by him at the preliminary hearing. This, he contended, led to the conclusion that the statements attributed to the defendant had been fabricated by the arresting officer. The hearing judge suppressed the statements, ruling that the People had not established beyond a reasonable doubt that Miranda warnings

191 Id.
192 Id.

193 The defendant sought a pretrial suppression hearing on the issue of whether the oral statements were "made in violation of [his] Constitutional rights." 68 App. Div. 2d 90, 92, 416 N.Y.S.2d 626, 628 (2d Dep't 1979). The method previously used by the New York courts to determine the admissibility of confessions and other extrajudicial statements was declared unconstitutional in Jackson v. Denno, 378 U.S. 368 (1964). Under that procedure, when a question of voluntariness was presented the trial court ordinarily submitted the issue to the jury. Where there was no dispute as to the relevant facts, however, the judge decided the issue of voluntariness. See People v. Doran, 246 N.Y. 409, 159 N.E. 379 (1927); People v. Randazzio, 194 N.Y. 147, 87 N.E. 112 (1909). If the jury found the confession to be involuntary, it was instructed to disregard it entirely. Although this procedure was upheld in Stein v. People, 346 U.S. 156 (1953), the Supreme Court subsequently found it to be violative of defendants' fourteenth amendment rights. Jackson v. Denno, 378 U.S. 368, 391 (1964).

In People v. Huntley, 15 N.Y.2d 72, 204 N.E.2d 179, 255 N.Y.S.2d 838 (1965), the Court of Appeals adopted a new procedure which provided for the separate hearing to resolve questions of voluntariness. Id. at 77, 204 N.E.2d at 182-83, 255 N.Y.S.2d at 842-43; see CPL § 710.30 (McKinney Supp. 1980-1981). At the Huntley hearing, the prosecution bears the burden of establishing the voluntariness of statements beyond a reasonable doubt. The defendant may be impeached if he testifies but he may not be cross-examined on the merits of the case unless his statements on direct examination make the questions relevant. See W. Richardson, Evidence § 550 (10th ed. Prince 1973). If the voluntariness of the defendant's statements is not established beyond a reasonable doubt then the statements must be suppressed. See People v. Huntley, 15 N.Y.2d at 78, 204 N.E.2d at 183, 255 N.Y.S.2d at 842. Conversely, if the statements are shown to have been voluntary they will be admissible at trial. The defendant still may submit the issue of voluntariness to the jury at trial. Because the defendant, in effect, has two opportunities to have his confession discounted on the ground of involuntariness, this procedure has come to be known as the "humane rule." W. Richardson, supra, at § 550.

194 51 N.Y.2d at 218, 413 N.E.2d at 1161, 433 N.Y.S.2d at 746. According to the arresting officer, the defendant initially stated that he had found the gun but later asserted that his wife had planted the gun on him. Id.

195 Id.
196 Id.
were given or that the statements were made.\textsuperscript{197} The trial judge subsequently ruled that the suppressed statements could be used for impeachment purposes.\textsuperscript{198} Testifying on his own behalf, the defendant denied any knowledge of how the gun had come into his possession and that he had made any statement to the police.\textsuperscript{199} When called in rebuttal, the arresting officer testified that the defendant had indeed made conflicting statements as to how he had obtained the gun.\textsuperscript{200} The defendant was found guilty of criminal possession of a weapon in the third degree.\textsuperscript{201} His conviction was affirmed by the Appellate Division, Second Department.\textsuperscript{202}

On appeal, a unanimous Court of Appeals affirmed.\textsuperscript{203} Writing for the Court, Judge Wachtler initially rejected the prosecution's contention that trustworthiness was synonymous with voluntariness.\textsuperscript{204} The Court observed that statements obtained through the use of involuntary means are inadmissible for all purposes not because of their inherent unreliability but rather because “the methods used to extract them offend the Constitution.”\textsuperscript{205} Judge Wachtler similarly refused to accept the defendant’s contention that the hearing court’s factual findings rendered the alleged statements inadmissible for impeachment purposes. The \textit{Washington} Court reasoned that common-law rules of evidence do not require a court to determine whether prior inconsistent statements were actually made before permitting their use as an impeachment device.\textsuperscript{206} A contrary holding, according to Judge Wachtler, would broaden the scope of suppression hearings and invade the jury’s role as the arbiter of purely factual questions.\textsuperscript{207} Moreover, the Court noted that

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  \item \textsuperscript{197} \textit{Id.} at 219, 413 N.E.2d at 1161, 433 N.Y.S.2d at 746.
  \item \textsuperscript{198} \textit{Id.}
  \item \textsuperscript{199} \textit{Id.} at 219, 413 N.E.2d at 1161, 433 N.Y.S.2d at 747.
  \item \textsuperscript{200} \textit{Id.}
  \item \textsuperscript{201} \textit{Id.}
  \item \textsuperscript{203} \textit{Id.} at 223, 413 N.E.2d at 1163, 433 N.Y.S.2d at 749.
  \item \textsuperscript{204} \textit{Id.} at 220, 413 N.E.2d at 1162, 433 N.Y.S.2d at 747.
  \item \textsuperscript{205} \textit{Id.}
  \item \textsuperscript{206} \textit{Id.} at 221, 413 N.E.2d at 1162, 433 N.Y.S.2d at 748. Judge Wachtler conceded that a suppression judge may find it necessary, in some cases, to determine whether a defendant actually made a disputed statement. He noted, however, that this is a collateral finding which is necessary to measure the credibility of a police officer’s testimony that he had advised the defendant of his rights. \textit{Id.} at 221 n.1, 413 N.E.2d at 1162 n.1., 433 N.Y.S.2d at 748 n.1.
  \item \textsuperscript{207} \textit{Id.} at 222, 413 N.E.2d at 1163, 433 N.Y.S.2d at 749. Judge Wachtler suggested that the net effect of a contrary holding would be a recognition of fabrication as an independent
although an involuntarily obtained confession may be improperly relied upon by the jury if admitted for impeachment purposes, the same risk is unlikely to be present where the jury finds that the statements themselves were fabricated by the police. 208 Finally, Judge Wachtler concluded that nothing in Harris mandated any change in the standards governing the use of prior inconsistent statements or in the scope of the exclusionary rule. 209

It is submitted that the Court of Appeals’ refusal to equate trustworthiness with voluntariness is consistent with recent decisions which indicate the existence of an independent constitutional ground for the exclusion of involuntary statements. 210 When statements are not found to be voluntary, the question of trustworthiness becomes irrelevant. 211 Moreover, since the limited purpose of

basis for exclusion. Id. (citing Harris v. New York, 401 U.S. 222 (1971)).
208 51 N.Y.2d at 222, 413 N.E.2d at 1163, 433 N.Y.S.2d at 748-49.
209 Id.
210 See, e.g., New Jersey v. Portash, 440 U.S. 450 (1979); Mincey v. Arizona, 437 U.S. 385 (1978); Jackson v. Denno, 378 U.S. 368 (1964); Rogers v. Richmond, 365 U.S. 534 (1961). In Rogers, the Court stated that involuntary confessions are inadmissible “not because such confessions are unlikely to be true but because the methods used to extract them offend the Constitution.” Id. at 540-41.

The term voluntary has not remained static in meaning. Initially, this term was limited to physical coercion. See, e.g., White v. Texas, 310 U.S. 530 (1940); Brown v. Mississippi, 297 U.S. 278 (1936). Later, however, psychological coercion came to be included in the concept. See, e.g., Leyra v. Denno, 347 U.S. 556 (1954); Watts v. Indiana, 338 U.S. 49 (1949); Chambers v. Florida, 309 U.S. 227 (1940).


Miranda v. Arizona, 384 U.S. 436 (1966), recognized the impracticability of the voluntariness test because the secretive nature of a custodial interrogation made it difficult to determine the circumstances under which a statement was made. The Miranda Court reasoned that the compulsion inherent in custodial interrogation can be dispelled only if the defendant is given proper warnings. Id. at 45-58. Thus, under Miranda, voluntariness equated with an intelligent waiver of one’s rights.

211 See, e.g., New Jersey v. Portash, 440 U.S. 460, 459 (1979); Mincey v. Arizona, 437 U.S. 385, 398 (1978). In Portash, the Supreme Court held that a testifying defendant may not be impeached through the use of reliable grand jury testimony. Id. at 459-60. The Court reasoned that “[t]he Fifth and Fourteenth Amendments provide a privilege against com-
a pretrial suppression hearing is to determine the voluntariness of a confession, a claim by the accused denying the utterance of the challenged statement should not, in itself, invoke an application of the trustworthiness standard.212

Notwithstanding the proper resolution of these issues, it is suggested that the Washington Court failed to adequately define the scope of the trustworthiness proviso in cases where the suppressed statements are deemed to have been made voluntarily. Although the Court implied that trustworthiness is related to common-law limitations on the admissibility of prior inconsistent statements, it did not attempt to delineate the exact nature of these standards nor did it apply them to the defendant’s claim of fabricated evidence. Since the sole criterion in Harris restricting the use of uncoerced statements for impeachment purposes involves a determination of trustworthiness, clear guidance is critical. While trustworthiness has not been expressly rejected as a factor affecting the admissibility of voluntary statements or confessions, it is submitted that the Washington Court, in effect, has sanctioned a finding of voluntariness as the key determination.214

See note 193 supra. By limiting the scope of the pretrial suppression hearings to issues of coercion, see Lee v. Mississippi, 332 U.S. 742, 744-45 (1948), the Supreme Court necessarily refused to include the issue of fabrication within the voluntariness concept. People v. Washington, 68 App. Div. 2d at 98, 416 N.Y.S.2d at 631 (2d Dep’t 1979, aff’d, 51 N.Y.2d 214, 413 N.E.2d 1164, 433 N.Y.S.2d 745 (1980). Consequently, the fact that the defendant had denied making a statement is a prerequisite to submission to the jury. W. Richardson, supra note 193, at § 502.

3 J. WIGMORE, EVIDENCE § 822, at 333. This rationale was subjected to severe criticism, id., due to its rejection by the Supreme Court in Jackson v. Denno, 378 U.S. 368, 376-77 (1964) and Rogers v. Richmond, 365 U.S. 534, 540-41 (1961). 3 J. WIGMORE, supra, § 822 at 334. Thus, it is suggested that the Washington Court’s reference to “common-law limitations” on the admissibility of prior inconsistent statements has further clouded the trustworthiness issue.

214 In a case subsequent to Harris, the Supreme Court held that a previous conviction
deed, the lack of post-*Harris* authority precluding the use of illegally obtained evidence on the basis of trustworthiness indicates that its significance is rather limited. Though the trustworthiness proviso may be available as a bridge between the impeachment process and the constitutional mandate to protect the accused, its parameters remain undefined after *Washington*. Thus, the Court of Appeals perpetuates rather than clarifies the uncertainty engendered by *Harris* regarding legal standards of trustworthiness.

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Publisher may be held liable for republication of libel when grossly irresponsible acts were committed in course of original publication

The liability of a corporate media employer who publishes a libel against a private person is founded upon imputation to the employer of its employees' grossly irresponsible conduct. It at trial in which the defendant's constitutional right to counsel had been violated could not be used to impeach his credibility as a witness when he testified on his own behalf in a separate and unrelated criminal trial. *Loper v. Beto*, 405 U.S. 473 (1972). Although the "trustworthiness" of such a conviction would appear to be in issue, the *Loper* Court did not address that issue in reaching its result. This omission in *Loper*, as well as the vagueness in *Harris* and *Washington*, suggest that perhaps the term "trustworthiness" has not yet been clearly defined because the courts are trying to protect the rights of defendants while attempting to insure that the most reliable evidence is introduced. See generally Nokes, *An Introduction to Evidence* 294 (3d ed. 1962). Indeed, it appears that the degree of police misconduct, rather than the trustworthiness of the statements, is the crucial factor in the determination of admissibility. Id.

Libel has been defined as a defamatory writing containing "words which tend to expose one to public hatred, shame, obloquy, contumely, odium, contempt, ridicule, aversion, ostracism, degradation or disgrace, or to induce an evil opinion of one in the minds of right-thinking persons, and to deprive one of their confidence and friendly intercourse in society." Kimmerle v. New York Evening Journal, Inc., 262 N.Y. 99, 102, 186 N.E. 217, 218 (1933). Complete defenses to an accusation of libel include truth, Dolcin Corp. v. Reader's Digest Ass'n, 7 App. Div. 2d 449, 454, 183 N.Y.S.2d 342, 347 (1st Dep't 1959), and privilege. See W. Prosser, *Handbook of the Law of Torts* § 114 at 776 (4th ed. 1971). Retraction and introduction of evidence tending to establish the plaintiff's preexisting bad reputation, although not complete defenses, can serve to mitigate damages. Id. at 799-801. For a brief discussion of the history of libel law see *Curtis Publishing Co. v. Butts*, 388 U.S. 130, 151-53 (1967).