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IN THE COURT OF APPEAL OF THE STATE OF CALIFORNIA

SECOND APPELLATE DISTRICT

DIVISION FOUR

THE PEOPLE,

Plaintiff and Respondent,

v.

LEO LLOYD ADAMS,

Defendant and Appellant.

B252187

(Los Angeles County
Super. Ct. No. TA103351)

APPEAL from a judgment of the Superior Court of Los Angeles County,
Larry P. Fidler, Judge. Affirmed.

Stephen Temko, under appointment by the Court of Appeal, for Defendant and
Appellant.

Kamala D. Harris, Attorney General, Lance E. Winters, Assistant Attorney
General, Scott A. Taryle and Steven E. Mercer, Deputy Attorneys General, for Plaintiff
and Respondent.

Leo Lloyd Adams appeals from a judgment entered after his jury conviction of two counts of first degree murder and three counts of attempted murder, as an aider and abettor, with gang and firearm enhancements. He contends the trial court erred in not instructing the jury about voluntary manslaughter, based on imperfect defense of another. He also contends defense counsel was ineffective for not advising him of his right to testify. We disagree and affirm.

FACTUAL AND PROCEDURAL SUMMARY

In 2008, the Grape Street Crips gang was at war with the East Coast Crips gang. On September 23, 2008, Debruce Smith, a member of the 89 East Coast Crips, was at the Compton train station with his girlfriend, Jacqueline Spinks, and his best friend, Terry Dozier. Two individuals drove up to Smith and told him that there was a “grapester” behind them and that one of them “got into it with him, but he ain’t nothing.”

Richard Roberson was a member of the Grape Street Crips. As he walked past Smith, Smith recognized him as the “grapester” in question. Smith caught up with Roberson and the two appeared to argue. Roberson then walked past Spinks, talking on his cell phone. She overheard him mention the name Beezy or Breezy and say, “I got into it with a coaster.” When Spinks asked Smith what had happened, he, too, answered, “I got into it with him.” Spinks asked Smith to leave, but he refused, stating, “He wanted to call his people, I’m going to call mine.” He nevertheless agreed to “walk away,” and they started walking back.

When Smith’s cousin, Tinnar Wilson, joined them, Smith was pacing on the platform. Roberson was standing nearby with two other individuals and was talking on his cell phone. Smith identified Roberson as a member of an enemy gang and told Wilson, “This young cat right here is trippin.” As Smith headed off the platform, Roberson ran after him and made derogatory statements about Smith and his gang. Wilson offered to “fade,” or fistfight, Roberson. Roberson responded, “When my homies get here, there ain’t going to be no fading.” Smith was on parole and did not want to fight, but he again refused to leave the area.

At some point, a black Tahoe pulled up to the station, and three women and appellant's codefendant Ronald Brim got out. Minutes later, appellant, a member of the 118th Street Watts Crips Gang whose nickname was "Beezy," arrived in a champagne-colored car. Roberson was overheard saying, "It's going down," and telling Brim, "There goes those niggas there." Brim reached in through the front passenger window of appellant's car and pulled out an automatic rifle. He said, "You bitch ass ain't going to do nothing," cocked the rifle, and fired at least 12 shots. Smith and Dozier were shot as they were running away and died at the scene. Three bystanders at the crowded station were wounded.

The black Tahoe and a gold-colored car were captured by surveillance video at the train station. Brim was arrested for drunk driving, and an officer identified his Tahoe as the one involved in the shooting. Spinks and another bystander identified Roberson in a six-pack photographic lineup. Appellant was arrested in 2010. He owned a gold Pontiac similar to the champagne-colored car involved in the shooting. Cell phone records indicated that phones registered to Brim and appellant were used near the train station at the time of the shooting and travelled away from the area afterwards. A call from a phone registered to Brim was placed to appellant's phone immediately before the shooting.

Appellant, Roberson, and Brim were charged in a consolidated information with two counts of first degree murder (Pen. Code, § 187, subd. (a)) and three counts of willful, deliberate and premeditated attempted murder (*Id.*, §§ 664, 187, subd. (a)), with gang, multiple murder, and firearm enhancement allegations (*Id.*, §§ 186.22, subd. (b)(1)(C), 190.2, subd. (a)(3), 12022.53, subd. (d)).¹ Appellant's defense at trial was that on September 23, 2008, he had been at work between 7:00 a.m. and 7:00 p.m. and could not have been at the Compton train station at about 6:30 p.m. when the shooting occurred.

¹ In a separate count, Brim was charged with possession of a firearm by a felon. He and appellant were tried before the same jury. Brim received the death penalty. Roberson, who was a minor at the time of the shooting, was tried separately.

The jury convicted appellant as charged, found the murders to be in the first degree, the attempted murders to be willful, deliberate, and premeditated, and the special allegations to be true. The trial court denied appellant's motion for a new trial and sentenced him to two life sentences without the possibility of parole, three life sentences with the possibility of parole, and an additional 125 years.

This appeal followed.

DISCUSSION

I

Appellant argues that the court erred in not instructing the jury, sua sponte, on voluntary manslaughter based on imperfect defense of another. His theory is that he rushed to the scene to aid Roberson, who had called for help.

Even in the absence of a request, the trial court must instruct on lesser included offenses whenever there is substantial evidence that the lesser, but not the greater, offense was committed. (*People v. Breverman* (1998) 19 Cal.4th 142, 154.) Voluntary manslaughter based on imperfect self-defense or defense of another is a lesser offense included in the crime of murder. (*People v. Randle* (2005) 35 Cal.4th 987, 997, overruled on a different ground in *People v. Chun* (2009) 45 Cal.4th 1172, 1201; *People v. Barton* (1995) 12 Cal.4th 186, 201.) We independently review whether the trial court erroneously failed to instruct on a lesser included offense. (*People v. Avila* (2009) 46 Cal.4th 680, 705.)

Initially, we disagree with respondent's suggestion that an aider and abettor is not entitled to rely on imperfect self-defense or defense of another. As respondent recognizes, in the aider and abettor context, the mens rea of each participant in a crime "float[s] free" and is independent of that of any other participant. (*People v. McCoy* (2001) 25 Cal.4th 1111, 1119.) Thus, an aider and abettor may be guilty of a greater or lesser homicide-related offense than the perpetrator. (*Id.* at p. 1122; *People v. Nero* (2010) 181 Cal.App.4th 504, 507.) It follows that an aider and abettor may rely on the doctrine of imperfect self-defense or defense of another to mitigate the mens rea by

negating the malice element of murder. (See *People v. Randle, supra*, 35 Cal.4th at pp. 994–995.)

The doctrine of imperfect defense of another requires that the defendant must have had “an actual but unreasonable belief he must defend another from imminent danger of death or great bodily injury.” (*People v. Randle, supra*, 35 Cal.4th at p. 997.) For an instruction based on this doctrine, there must be substantial evidence from which the jury could find the defendant actually had the requisite belief. (Cf. *People v. Oropeza* (2007) 151 Cal.App.4th 73, 82 [imperfect self-defense].) When a defendant does not testify or make out-of-court statements, substantial evidence of his or her state of mind may be found in the testimony of other witnesses. (*Ibid.*)

Here, no witness testified appellant rushed to help Roberson because he actually believed him to be in imminent danger of death or great bodily injury. There was no evidence that the confrontation between Roberson and Smith was escalating to a fight at the time Roberson made the phone call. Nor is there evidence Smith or anyone else was armed and threatening Roberson. To the contrary, Wilson testified that Smith did not want to fight. There is no evidence that when Roberson said he “got into it” with Smith, he meant that he and Smith had gotten into a physical altercation or that he needed help because he was in danger. Spinks repeatedly used the phrase “got into it” to mean “argue.”

The evidence indicates Roberson sought to escalate what was essentially a verbal confrontation to gun warfare. That is how Wilson understood Roberson’s statement that when his “homies” got to the station, there would be no fist fighting. Smith’s statement that Roberson was “trippin,” and the fact that Smith, too, considered calling his “homies” also indicate Roberson was overreacting and attempting to escalate the conflict rather than asking for help because he was in immediate danger. Notably, there is no evidence that Smith actually called for reinforcements or that Roberson sought help because he feared an escalation of the conflict by Smith.

Since there is no direct evidence of appellant’s state of mind and the circumstantial evidence indicates Roberson did not seek help because he was in

immediate danger of death or great bodily injury, it would be speculative to conclude that appellant was under an actual belief that he needed to bring an assault weapon to the train station in order to defend Roberson from such danger. The trial court was not required to present a speculative theory the jury could not reasonably find to exist. (*People v. Oropeza, supra*, 151 Cal.App.4th at p. 78.) No instructional error occurred.

II

Appellant complains of ineffective assistance of counsel because trial counsel did not advise him of his right to testify and did not seek clarification whether appellant's prior conviction of possession of an assault weapon could be used for impeachment. The decision whether to testify "is made by the defendant after consultation with counsel. [Citations.]" (*People v. Carter* (2005) 36 Cal.4th 1114, 1198.) To establish a denial of the right to effective assistance of counsel, a defendant must show that his or her counsel's performance was deficient and that there was a reasonable probability of a more favorable result but for the deficiency. (*Strickland v. Washington* (1984) 466 U.S. 668, 687, 691–694; *People v. Frye* (1998) 18 Cal.4th 894, 979.)

Appellant raised the claim of ineffective assistance of counsel in his motion for a new trial. In a declaration supporting the motion, appellant stated he wanted to testify but his trial attorney advised him not to because he would be impeached with his prior conviction for possessing an assault weapon. According to appellant, counsel did not advise that the ultimate decision whether to testify was appellant's. During the hearing on the motion, counsel testified that, in his long career as a criminal defense attorney, his usual practice had been to advise his clients of their absolute right to testify; even though he did not specifically recall having done so in appellant's case, counsel saw no reason why he would have deviated from that practice. The trial court found counsel to be credible and the timing of appellant's claim to be suspect as it was "hard to believe" appellant would not have raised the issue earlier if he really wanted to testify.

Defendant would have us redetermine issues of credibility, but we may not interfere with the trial court's reasonable factual determinations at the hearing on the motion for a new trial, as they are supported by substantial evidence. (*People v. Delgado*

(1993) 5 Cal.4th 312, 329; *People v. Rabanales* (2008) 168 Cal.App.4th 494, 509.) It was reasonable for the trial court to infer that, in this case, trial counsel followed his usual practice of advising his clients of their right to testify. (See *People v. Lewis* (1999) 74 Cal.App.4th 662, 668 [usual practice testimony supports inference of act in conformity on particular occasion].) It also was reasonable for the trial court to discredit appellant's post-trial claim that his attorney prevented him from testifying. "When the record fails to disclose a timely and adequate demand to testify, 'a defendant may not await the outcome of the trial and then seek reversal based on his claim that despite expressing to counsel his desire to testify, he was deprived of that opportunity.' [Citations.]" (*People v. Alcala* (1992) 4 Cal.4th 742, 805–806.)

Contrary to appellant's representation on appeal, counsel recalled advising appellant before trial of his right to a hearing on whether his possession of assault weapon conviction could be used to impeach him. By the time the defense presented its case, there was clear authority that possession of an assault weapon was a crime of moral turpitude that could be used for impeachment. (*People v. Gabriel* (2012) 206 Cal.App.4th 450, 457–458.)

The trial court's conclusion that counsel's performance was not deficient is supported by substantial evidence, as is its conclusion that appellant's testimony would not have made a more favorable result reasonably probable. Appellant was able to present his alibi defense through his co-workers and employment records, and his testimony that he was at work at the time of the shooting would have been cumulative. Appellant's claim that he could have convinced the jury he loaned his phone out is suspect since it would have been impeached with his prior inconsistent statement to the investigating officer. We find no ineffective assistance of counsel under the circumstances.

DISPOSITION

The judgment is affirmed.

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EPSTEIN, P.J.

We concur:

WILLHITE, J.

MANELLA, J.