

# NEWS RELEASE

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Monmouth County Prosecutor's Office  
71 Monument Park  
Freehold, New Jersey 07728  
732/ 431-7160  
**Luis A. Valentin, Prosecutor**

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## **JERSEY CITY MAN SENTENCED TO LIFE PLUS 10 YEARS IN PRISON IN CONNECTION WITH MURDER OF ASBURY PARK MAN**

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On August 27, 2010, Antoine Dennis, 30, of Jersey City, N.J., was sentenced to a term of life imprisonment and a consecutive 10 year term with a 68 year, 9 month, 3 day period of parole ineligibility for his role in the December 31, 2005, shooting death of Saahron Jones, 27, at Mr. Jones' Asbury Park, N.J., apartment. The sentence follows a three week jury trial which was conducted in Monmouth County Superior Court in May and June of 2010.

On June 11, 2010, a Monmouth County jury found Dennis guilty of first degree Murder, first degree Felony Murder, first degree Armed Robbery, second degree Conspiracy to Commit Armed Robbery, second degree Possession of a Firearm for an Unlawful Purpose, third degree Unlawful Possession of a Handgun and second degree Certain Person Not to Have Weapons.

Following the conclusion of the testimonial phase of the trial, the jury was instructed to deliberate only as to the charges of Murder, Felony Murder, Armed Robbery, Conspiracy to Commit Armed Robbery, Possession of a Weapon for an Unlawful Purpose and Unlawful Possession of a Weapon. An essential element of the crime of Certain Person Not to Have Weapons, which prohibits previously-convicted defendants from possessing firearms, is that the defendant was previously convicted of a crime. As is standard practice in New Jersey, the jury was therefore not advised of the existence of the charge of Certain Person Not to Have Weapons or Antoine Dennis' prior convictions until after it returned a verdict on the first set of charges so that the jury could consider the first set of charges based solely upon the relevant evidence which was presented, without the possibility of being prejudiced by the fact that Dennis had previously been convicted of a crime. Only after returning a verdict on the first set of charges on June 11, 2010, was the jury advised for the first time of the existence of the Certain Persons Not To Have Weapons charge, and Dennis' prior criminal history. The jury also convicted Dennis of Certain Persons Not to Have Firearms.

The sentence was imposed by Monmouth County Superior Court Judge Anthony J. Mellaci, Jr., who also presided over the trial. Upon the return of the jury's verdict, Judge Mellaci revoked Dennis' \$2,500,000 bail and ordered that he be held without bail. In imposing sentence, Judge Mellaci granted the State's motion for an extended term of imprisonment. The State's motion was based upon Dennis' extensive prior criminal convictions.

Antoine Dennis was one of three individuals indicted in connection with the death of Mr. Jones. Angela D. Pizzarelli, 29, of West Keansburg, N.J., and Andre Dennis, 25, also of Jersey City, were also charged in the same indictment as Antoine Dennis with first degree Murder, first degree Felony Murder, second degree Conspiracy to Commit Armed Robbery, first degree Armed Robbery, second degree Possession of a Weapon for an Unlawful Purpose and third degree Unlawful Possession of a Weapon in connection with the incident. The indictment also charged Andre Dennis, the brother of Antoine Dennis, with second degree Certain Persons Not to Have Firearms.

Antoine Dennis was the third individual to be convicted in connection with the death of Mr. Jones. Pizzarelli was the first of the three individuals to proceed to trial. On January 23, 2009, a Monmouth County jury returned a guilty verdict against Pizzarelli on first degree Aggravated Manslaughter, first degree Felony Murder, first degree Armed Robbery, second degree Conspiracy to Commit Armed Robbery, second degree Possession of a Firearm for an Unlawful Purpose and third degree Unlawful Possession of a Handgun. On May 15, 2009, Pizzarelli was sentenced to a 45 year State Prison term by Judge Mellaci.

On April 28, 2009, a Monmouth County jury returned a guilty verdict against Andre Dennis on first degree Felony Murder, first degree Armed Robbery, second degree Conspiracy to Commit Armed Robbery, second degree Possession of a Firearm for an Unlawful Purpose and third degree Unlawful Possession of a Handgun. The next day, the same jury convicted Andre Dennis of second degree Certain Persons Not to Have Firearms. On June 5, 2009, Judge Mellaci sentenced Andre Dennis to a term of life imprisonment and a consecutive 10 year term with a 68 year, 9 month, 3 day period of parole ineligibility.

Under New Jersey law, a sentence of life imprisonment is deemed to be 75 years. The crime of Murder is subject to the No Early Release Act ("N.E.R.A."), which means that a defendant who receives a sentence of life imprisonment must serve 86% of 75 years, or 63 years, 9 months and 3 days before becoming eligible for release on parole.

Evidence presented during Antoine Dennis' trial revealed that on December 31, 2005, at approximately 10:00 p.m., the Asbury Park Police Department responded to Mr. Jones' residence in response to a "911" telephone call. Police found Mr. Jones lying face down on his living room floor with a single gunshot wound to the back of his head. Mr. Jones' hands were tied behind his back, and a pillow had been placed over the back of his head in an apparent attempt to muffle the sound of the gunshot. Emergency medical personnel attempted to resuscitate Mr. Jones without success. Mr. Jones was pronounced dead at 10:16 p.m. on December 31, 2005.

A joint investigation into Mr. Jones' death was immediately commenced by the Monmouth County Prosecutor's Office and the Asbury Park Police Department. The investigation, which was detailed during the trial, revealed that Pizzarelli and the Dennises agreed with each other that they would drive from Jersey City to Mr. Jones' Asbury Park

residence in order to rob the unsuspecting Jones, who was an acquaintance of Pizzarelli. During the course of the robbery, Mr. Jones' hands were tied behind his back, and he was forced to lay face down on the floor before he was shot once in the back of the head. Acting Chief Monmouth County Medical Examiner Dr. Frederick DiCarlo testified that an autopsy revealed that Mr. Jones died as a result of a single gunshot wound to the head.

Mr. Jones' then 17-year-old brother, who arrived at the apartment while the robbery was in progress, was also forced at gunpoint to lay face down during the robbery, and at the time his brother was shot.

The Hudson County Prosecutor's Office assisted in the investigation.

Monmouth County Prosecutor Luis A. Valentin stated, "The sentence of Antoine Dennis represents the culmination of the successful investigation and prosecution of the individuals who were responsible for the execution of Saahron Jones. Mr. Jones' family and the extended network of his friends, who attended Court every day of the three, separate, lengthy jury trials, are to be commended for their strength and perseverance during this process."

The case was assigned to Assistant Monmouth County Prosecutors Thomas C. Huth and Christopher J. Decker of the Monmouth County Prosecutor's Office's Major Crimes Bureau. Antoine S. Dennis was represented by James R. Kinarney, Esquire, of Freehold, N.J. Andre Dennis was represented by David P. Donnelly, Esquire, of Red Bank, N.J. Pizzarelli was represented by Lawrence Welle, Esquire, of Wall Township, N.J.

Released: August 27, 2010