



U.S. Department of Justice

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EVENT: Sentenced

Defendant: Robert McDonel

DEFENDANTS SENTENCED IN ROBBERY OF AUTO PARTS STORES

Two Detroit residents were sentenced yesterday to 107 years and 62 years imprisonment respectively for charges involving Hobbs Act robbery and possession of a firearm in furtherance of a crime of violence, United States Attorney Stephen J. Murphy announced today. Mr. Murphy was joined in the announcement by Special Agent in Charge Andrew Arena, Federal Bureau of Investigation.

Robert McDonel, 20, of Detroit, was sentenced to 107 years imprisonment by United States District Judge David M. Lawson. Co-defendant Frederick Atkins, 42, of Detroit, was sentenced to 62 years imprisonment.

On March 31, 2008, A jury found McDonel guilty of all counts: five counts of Hobbs Act Robbery involving three Autozone stores, a Murray's auto parts store, and the clothing store Simply Fashions; and five counts of possession of a firearm in furtherance of a crime of violence. Atkins was found guilty of all counts: three counts of Hobbs Act Robbery and three counts of possession of a firearm in furtherance of a crime of violence. The charges arose following a joint investigation by members of the FBI's Violent Crimes Task Force and the Detroit Police Robbery Squad. Moments before the robberies occurred, an accomplice would

enter the store, conduct pre-robbery surveillance, and then notify his armed accomplice. During the robberies, the masked robber would enter the stores, point a gun at a store employee, demand to be taken to the safe, and depart the store with the contents of the safe and cash registers.

The robberies were solved after Detroit Police officers, while conducting extra patrols of auto parts stores in their districts, observed McDonel standing outside a Murray's wearing: a mask and latex gloves, the identical clothing worn during the robbery of an Autozone one week before, while armed with a handgun-all in preparation to rob the Murray's store.

United States Attorney Murphy said, "The length of these sentences sends a message to those who would terrify our streets with their violent crimes. As a result of committing these armed robberies these two defendants will possibly spend their lives in prison -- for a few thousand dollars. I commend the work of the Violent Crime Task Force, specifically, the FBI and the Detroit Police Department."

FBI Special Agent in Charge Arena said, ""This case exemplifies how the cooperative effort between federal task forces and local law enforcement agencies can culminate in severe penalties for egregious violent crimes."

McDonel has a prior criminal history which includes a prior felony conviction for Carrying a Concealed Weapon. Co-defendant Atkins has a prior criminal history which includes prior felony convictions for Burglary, Carrying a Concealed Weapon, Breaking and Entering, an Robbery Armed. Two other Co-defendants, Johnnie Cromer and Maurice Woodley, previously pled guilty before trial and received imprisonment sentences of twenty years and four years respectively. The lengthy nature of the sentences are due to the gun charge convictions which carry mandatory consecutive sentencing. Seven years imprisonment is required upon conviction of the first gun charge and then a consecutive twenty-five years imprisonment for each additional gun charge.

The case was the result of multi-agency cooperation between the FBI's Violent Crimes Task Force and the Detroit Police Robbery Squad. The FBI's Violent Crimes Task Force is comprised of Agents from the FBI, Drug Enforcement Administration, Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives, and officers from the Michigan State Police, Wayne County Sheriff's Office and the Detroit Police Department. The case was prosecuted by Assistant United States Attorneys Terrence R. Haugabook and Eaton Curtis.