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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
August 26, 2008

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**ARMED ROBBER SENTENCED TO 14 YEARS FOR PARTICIPATION
IN NEW YORK CITY ROBBERY SPREE**

MICHAEL J. GARCIA, the United States Attorney for the Southern District of New York announced that ANTHONY STEELE, a/k/a "Tone," a/k/a "Fat Boy," 25, of Brooklyn, was sentenced in Manhattan federal court to 14 years in prison for robbing multiple New York City businesses at gunpoint. STEELE pleaded guilty before United States District Judge JED S. RAKOFF on May 9, 2008, to conspiracy to commit six robberies affecting interstate commerce and to using a firearm to carry out that crime. In addition those six robberies, STEELE admitted to participating in twenty-two additional gunpoint robberies between July 2007 and November 2007. Evidence at the trial where STEELE's accomplice, ZACHARY BALLARD, was found guilty, established that:

In October 2007, STEELE and BALLARD robbed five New York City businesses at gunpoint. The robberies followed a specific pattern in which the defendants entered the businesses wearing hooded sweatshirts and baseball caps; demanded to talk to the store manager; and forced the store employees to open the safe and cash register. After taking the cash, the robbers ordered the employees to count to twenty and fled the scene.

In one instance, on October 14, 2007, which ultimately led to their arrest, STEELE and BALLARD robbed a Duane Reade located at 617 West 181st Street in Manhattan. Just after 8:00 a.m., BALLARD approached the store's manager, racked his gun, pointed it at the manager, and demanded to be taken to the safe. The robbers forced the manager and another employee into the store's office and kept them at gunpoint while they emptied the store's safe. However, video clips of STEELE and BALLARD leaving the Duane Reade following the robbery were made and a few weeks later, after local television news stations aired the clips, an anonymous tipster called NYPD's Crime Stoppers, leading to the robbers' identification.

In addition to the prison sentence, Judge RAKOFF ordered STEELE to serve 3 years of supervised release and to forfeit \$40,000.

BALLARD, 27, of Brooklyn was found guilty by a jury in Manhattan federal court on July 23, 2008, of three counts of robbery affecting interstate commerce, three counts of brandishing a firearm during those robberies, and one count of conspiracy to commit robbery affecting interstate commerce. BALLARD faces a mandatory minimum sentence of 57 years' imprisonment and a maximum sentence of life. BALLARD is scheduled to be sentenced by Judge RAKOFF on November 12, 2008.

Mr. GARCIA praised the outstanding efforts of the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms, and Explosives and the New York City Police Department.

Assistant United States Attorneys BENJAMIN A. NAFTALIS and REBECCA MONCK RICIGLIANO are in charge of the prosecution.

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