

The New York Times

THURSDAY SEPTEMBER 21, 2006

One of 2 Suspects Pleads Guilty in Murder-Robbery of a Reporter

BY JOHN FILES

One of the two men accused of killing a retired reporter for The New York Times pleaded guilty Wednesday to charges of murder and robbery.

As part of a plea agreement, the man, Michael C. Hamlin, 24, agreed to testify against his cousin Percy Jordan Jr., 42, who is scheduled to go on trial next month in the killing of the reporter, David E. Rosenbaum, last January. Prosecutors said they would not seek a prison term in excess of sentencing guidelines, which include a maximum of 60 years.

Mr. Hamlin pleaded guilty to charges of second-degree murder, conspiracy to commit robbery and robbery. He said that on the night of Jan. 6, he stole Mr. Rosenbaum's wallet and that Mr. Jordan struck Mr. Rosenbaum on the head with a metal pipe; they divided his money and credit cards and used the cards at stores including a pharmacy, gas station and grocery.

Mr. Rosenbaum, who was found lying semiconscious on a sidewalk near his home that night, died two days later. The authorities attributed the cause of death to blunt force trauma to his head, neck and body.

Judge Erik P. Christian of Superior Court ordered a sentencing hearing for Dec. 19. Lawyers for Mr. Hamlin said he had accepted responsibility for his role in attacking Mr. Rosenbaum, who was 63 and had worked for The Times for more than 37 years as a reporter and an editor and had planned to continue contributing articles in retirement.

One of Mr. Hamlin's lawyers, Stephen V. Mercer, said he was "essentially a young man who had been led astray," adding, "He had a good job, a strong family and was a high school graduate."

Mr. Hamlin graduated from Anacostia Senior High School here and was a truck driver. During court proceedings on Wednesday, his mother shouted, "Love you, Michael!"

Another of Mr. Hamlin's lawyers, Steven D. Kupferberg, said, "From the outset, this was a tragedy of cataclysmic dimensions."

Mr. Hamlin's lawyers said he began to cooperate with the police shortly after the attack, when he walked into a police station and asked why his picture was being shown on local television news reports. The surveillance photograph had been taken at a store where one of Mr. Rosenbaum's credit cards was used.

Marcus Rosenbaum, the victim's brother and a Washington resident, said it was important that Mr. Hamlin take responsibility for his role in the attack. "He did a horrible thing," Mr. Rosenbaum said. "He has taken responsibility for it. And he will be punished for it."

He added, "We think that he should spend a good long time in prison." ■

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