

ESSEX COUNTY PROSECUTORS OFFICE PRESS RELEASE



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Subject: Jury Finds Final Schoolyard Murder Defendant Guilty
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Defendant(s): Gerardo Gomez

Acting Essex County Prosecutor Carolyn A. Murray announced today that an Essex County jury convicted Gerardo Gomez, 20, of Newark of three counts of murder and one count of attempted murder for his role the Aug. 4, 2007 triple murder at the Mount Vernon school yard in Newark.

Following a six-week trial before the Honorable Michael L. Ravin, J.S.C., the jury deliberated over three days before finding Gomez guilty of 15 of the 17 counts. In addition to multiple counts of murder, felony murder and one count of attempted murder, Gomez was found guilty of multiple counts of robbery and conspiracy to commit robbery. He was found not guilty of weapons charges.

On the night of August 4, 2007, which was Gomez 15th birthday, he joined the five other defendants, who prior to his trial either entered guilty pleas or were found guilty at trial, in the Mount Vernon Elementary School playground in the Ivy Hill section of Newark.

There the six defendants surrounded, robbed and shot the four Delaware State students who were hanging out there listening to music.

Three of the victims were taken down the stairs to a separate part of the school yard where they shot in the back of head. One victim, Iofemi Hightower, then 20, was also brutally assaulted with a machete. A fourth female victim was sexually assaulted, attacked with the machete, and shot in the head during the incident, but survived.

In addition to Hightower, the other murder victims were Terrance Aerial, 18, and Dashon Harvey, 20. The lone survivor, Natasha Aerial, now 24, testified during the trial.

Four of the six defendants were members of the MS-13 street gang.

“The people I really want praise are the police officers and crime scene investigators. They did a terrific job. This case is an example of a collaboration between the Essex County Prosecutor’s Office and the Newark Police Department at its best,” said Assistant Prosecutor Thomas McTigue, who tried the case with Assistant Prosecutor Romesh Sukhdeo.

Specifically, McTigue lauded the extraordinary police work done by ECPO Det. Kevin Green and Det. Michael Bozsolak and Newark Detective Lydell James.

Sentencing is tentatively scheduled for Jan. 8, 2013. Assistant Prosecutor Sukhdeo said the state will ask for multiple life sentences.

Acting Prosecutor Murray said, "The strength and courage demonstrated by Natasha Aerial and the surviving family members, through all their grief and pain, was simply remarkable. They have been through four lengthy trials and multiple court proceedings but they never wavered in their commitment to see that justice was done."

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