

ESSEX COUNTY PROSECUTORS OFFICE PRESS RELEASE



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Subject: Man Sentenced to 26 Years for Killing NJIT Student
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Defendant(s): Nafee Cotman, Taquan Harris

Feb. 7, 2019

Man Sentenced to 26 Years for Killing NJIT Student

Newark – Acting Essex County Prosecutor Theodore N. Stephens, II, announced today that Taquan Harris, 24, of Newark was sentenced to 26 years in New Jersey State Prison for the fatal shooting of New Jersey Institute of Technology student Joseph Micalizzi, 23, of Freehold.

The Honorable Ronald D. Wigler, presiding Criminal Division Judge, also sentenced co-defendant Nafee Cotman, 21, of Newark to 12 years for his role in the fatal robbery.

Assistant Prosecutor Eric Plant, who handled the case, said Under the No Early Release Act, both Harris and Cotman must serve 85 percent of their respective sentences before becoming eligible for parole. Both have already been in jail for over 1,000 days.

“Plea agreements are rarely completely satisfying for family members of the victims of violent crime, but we believe this was an appropriate resolution of this case. We hope that the sentencing today will allow the Micalizzi family to continue to focus on honoring the cherished memory of their son. He was an extraordinary young man, witnessed by the fact that more than 1,400 people attended his wake. He made an impact.”

Micalizzi, a mechanical engineering student, was fatally shot when Harris and Cotman broke into the Tau Kappa Epsilon fraternity house on Martin Luther King Boulevard on May 2, 2016 at 3:15 a.m. to rob students.

The two defendants went to the third floor where Micalizzi and his roommate were studying. During a confrontation and struggle, Micalizzi was shot three times by Harris.

Back in October 2018, jury selection was completed. The trial was ready to open when Harris and Cotman decided to enter guilty pleas. Prior to sentencing today, Harris sought to withdraw his plea but Judge Wigler rejected the motion, saying Harris had knowingly and voluntarily entered the guilty plea.

The guilty plea came two years after an Essex County grand jury indicted Cotman and Harris on murder, felony murder, robbery, burglary, unlawful possession of a weapon and possession of a weapon for an unlawful purpose.

Under the terms of the plea agreement Harris pled guilty to aggravated manslaughter and illegal possession of a weapon. The murder count was dismissed.

Cotman pled guilty to one count of first-degree armed robbery. All other charges were dismissed.

Prior to this case, Harris had one juvenile case which resulted in him being put in a diversionary program. As an adult he was arrested six times but was never convicted.

Cotman had 10 cases as a juvenile and was arrested on five occasions as an adult but had no adult convictions.

Essex County Prosecutor's Office Newark, NJ