



## U.S. Department of Justice

### *United States Attorney Eastern District of Arkansas*

---

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

January 18, 2008

CONTACT: Jane W. Duke  
United States Attorney  
501-340-2600

---

### **HIRED KILLER FOR DRUG CONSPIRACY SENTENCED**

**Little Rock, Arkansas** - Jane W. Duke, United States Attorney for the Eastern District of Arkansas, announced today that Vertis Clay, a/k/a "Sinister Wayz," was sentenced to 50 years imprisonment for his involvement in a drug conspiracy and use of a firearm in relation to the conspiracy. A federal jury had already sentenced Clay to life imprisonment without the possibility of release for committing related first degree murder.

On October 24, 2007, a federal jury convicted Clay of conspiracy to distribute and possess marijuana, conspiracy to use a firearm during a drug trafficking offense, and committing the first degree murder of Darryl Johnson with a firearm during a drug trafficking offense. Once a federal criminal defendant has been convicted, ordinarily judges instead of juries determine the sentence. However, if a federal jury unanimously finds a person guilty of a capital crime, it must then determine by separate proceeding whether to sentence the defendant to life in prison or to death by lethal injection. On October 31, 2007, the jury determined that Clay should be sentenced to life in prison without the possibility of release.

Today, the Honorable William R. (Bill) Wilson sentenced Clay to the maximum statutory sentence for conspiracy to distribute marijuana, which is 40 years, plus a consecutive 10 year sentence for using a firearm during the conspiracy. The sentences on these two convictions will run concurrent to the jury's life imprisonment sentence on the first degree murder conviction. Judge Wilson agreed with prosecutors that Clay posed a serious danger to the public and lengthy incarceration on the drug and gun charges was necessary.

During both the trial and the sentencing phase, prosecutors focused on the especially heinous, cruel, and depraved manner in which this murder occurred; the fact that the murder was committed for pecuniary gain; and that Clay committed the murder after substantial planning and premeditation. The evidence established that Clay and his associate, Darryl Walker, were hired and paid by co-defendant Calvin Stovall to rob and murder Johnson. The jurors heard Walker describe in his testimony how he and Clay brutally murdered Johnson on July 20, 2003 in

Johnson's Pine Bluff, Arkansas home. Prior to Johnson's death, he was shot in the leg, bound and blindfolded, threatened with a hot iron, sodomized with a broomstick, and repeatedly cut with a knife. A state medical examiner testified that Johnson's throat had also been slit. However, the 38-year-old Johnson was ultimately killed by Clay when Clay shot him in the back of the head at close range.

Walker previously pleaded guilty to murdering Johnson and testified against Clay at his trial. On November 19, 2007, Walker received a sentence of 24 years imprisonment for his participation in the offense.

"This sentence ensures that Vertis Clay will never regain his liberty; he will die in a federal prison. In a case as brutal as this, no lesser penalty would have been acceptable," Duke stated. She added, "Hopefully, knowing Vertis Clay's fate will provide comfort and closure to Darryl Johnson's family."

This case was the result of an extensive four year Organized Crime and Drug Enforcement Task Force (OCDETF) investigation by the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) and Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE). Investigation of the drug trafficking organization has resulted in the conviction of 24 individuals in five separate cases. In addition to DEA and ICE, other federal, state, and local law enforcement agencies have assisted in this case, including: The Internal Revenue Service Criminal Investigation Division (IRS CID), The Arkansas State Police, The Arkansas Highway Police, The Pine Bluff Police Department, The Sherwood Police Department, The Little Rock Police Department, and The Hazen Police Department. The case was prosecuted by Assistant United States Attorneys Anne Gardner and Joe Volpe.

# # #