



*United States Attorney  
Southern District of New York*

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**HIRED HITMAN SENTENCED TO LIFE IMPRISONMENT  
FOR DRUG MURDER; HEAVY SENTENCES FOR CO-CONSPIRATORS  
CLOSE THE BOOK ON A VIOLENT BRONX CRACK GANG**

MICHAEL J. GARCIA, the United States Attorney for the Southern District of New York, announced that ANTOINE STEWART, a/k/a "Damoo," was sentenced today by United States District Judge LORETTA A. PRESKA to life plus 10 years in prison without parole for the murder of William Ragland, a/k/a "Illy-Rock," who was shot to death on July 11, 2002, in the John Adams Houses, a public housing project in the Bronx, New York. STEWART was convicted by a federal jury on February 10, 2006 on charges of murder in aid of racketeering, murder in aid of narcotics trafficking, and narcotics conspiracy, as well as various firearms offenses.

According to the proof at trial, Ragland was the leader of a crack gang based in the John Adams Houses. STEWART was hired to murder Ragland by members of a rival crack gang based across Westchester Avenue in the adjacent St. Mary's Houses ("the Westchester Avenue Crew"). STEWART, who was himself dealing crack in 2002 at the Murphy Consolidation, another housing project near Crotona Park in the Bronx, was promised a down payment of \$500 for the murder, and was given a revolver to carry out the shooting. STEWART then shot Ragland four times at close range. STEWART, the lone gunman, escaped on foot. According to witness testimony, STEWART met with members of the Westchester Avenue Crew shortly after Ragland was killed to receive an initial payment and was later further compensated with heroin. At the time of the murder, there were no arrests or suspects.

Following the federal investigation and prosecution of thirteen members of the Westchester Avenue Crew on narcotics and firearms charges, however, one of the members became a cooperating witness and admitted to his role in the murder of Ragland. According to the proof at trial, the witness introduced STEWART to the leaders of the Westchester Avenue Crew -- Gamaliel

Gonzalez and Kenneth Garner -- who then hired STEWART to commit the contract murder.

All thirteen indicted members of the Westchester Avenue Crew have pleaded guilty to charges that include racketeering, narcotics trafficking, and firearms offenses. Kenneth Garner has also pleaded guilty to the murder of Ragland, as has Derrick Johnson, another gang member who helped to deliver the murder weapon to STEWART.

The Westchester Avenue Crew was also responsible for the shooting death of its leader Gamaliel Gonzalez on October 2, 2002, and several members -- including Alexis Arzola -- have since been convicted of his murder. Other sentences previously imposed by Judge PRESKA on senior members of the Westchester Avenue Crew who pleaded guilty to charges arising from the Crew's activities include the following:

<u>Defendant</u>	<u>Sentence</u>
Kenneth Garner	35 years
Alexis Arzola	30 years
Derick Johnson	24 years
Melvin DeJesus	22 years

In addition, Gabriel Torres, another leader of the Westchester Avenue Crew, pleaded guilty to the murder of Gamaliel Gonzalez as well as the murder of Raymond Serrano during a botched home invasion robbery. Torres is awaiting sentencing.

Mr. GARCIA praised the investigative efforts of the Drug Enforcement Administration.

Mr. GARCIA stated: "The sentences imposed on Antoine Stewart and the members of the Westchester Avenue Crew bring to a close this drug gang's reign of violence that plagued the residents of the surrounding neighborhoods. The determined efforts of the DEA have brought Stewart and his co-conspirators to justice for the murders they committed to keep their grip on the crack trade in this corner of the South Bronx."

Assistant United States Attorney HARRY A. CHERNOFF is in charge of the prosecution.

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