U.S. DISTRICT COURT
EASTERN DISTRICT OF LOUISIANA
FILED AUG 26 2021
CAROL L. MICHEL
CLERK

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
EASTERN DISTRICT OF LOUISIANA

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA	*	**CRIMINAL NO. 20-128**
v.	*	**SECTION: "J"**
ANTOINE MERCHANT	*	

* * *

FACTUAL BASIS

The defendant, **ANTOINE MERCHANT** (hereinafter, the "defendant" or "**MERCHANT**"), has agreed to plead guilty as charged to Count 1 - Conspiracy to Alter Postal Money Orders, in violation of Title 18, United States Code, Sections 371 and 500, Counts 2 and 3 - Passing an Altered Postal Money Order in violation of Title 18, United States Code, Section 500 (fourth paragraph); and Count 4 - Receiving Stolen Government Property in violation of Title 18, United States Code, Section 641. This Factual Basis does not attempt to set forth all of the facts known to the United States at this time. The limited purpose of this Factual Basis is to demonstrate that there exists a sufficient legal basis for **MERCHANT's** guilty plea. The United States and **MERCHANT** do hereby stipulate and agree that the allegations in the Indictment and the following facts are true and correct and that, should this matter have proceeded to trial, the government would have proven them beyond a reasonable doubt, through the introduction of competent testimony and admissible tangible and documentary exhibits.

AUSA
Def. Counsel
Defendant A. M

The Office of Inspector General for the United States Postal Inspection Service (USPIS) was in charge of this investigation. The case against **MERCHANT** and ANTHONY SMALLS (SMALLS) began when the USPIS Inspector [redacted] received information that two Black males were attempting to cash fraudulently printed U.S. Postal money orders in the Baton Rouge area.

On October 29, 2019, Inspector [redacted] was contacted by the Prairieville Postmaster who advised that a Black male had stolen 58 U.S. Postal money orders from across the counter line in the Prairieville U.S. Post Office. After arriving at the Prairieville Post Office, Inspector [redacted] determined that this crime was related to another fraudulent U.S. Postal money order cashing that took place earlier in the day at the Scotlandville, Louisiana Post Office. Based upon interviews and surveillance video, Inspector [redacted] was able to identify the two Black males to six Baton Rouge and surrounding area U.S. Post Offices, where fraudulent U.S. Postal money orders had either been cashed or attempted to be cashed between October 28-29, 2019.

During an attempt to cash a U.S. Postal money order at the U.S. Post Office Commerce Park location (10380 Perkins Road, Baton Rouge, LA 70810), a U.S. Postal clerk observed a Black male enter a silver 2018 Ford Fiesta, bearing Louisiana license plate [redacted], after he abruptly left when he heard her speaking to her co-workers about being careful of cashing suspicious U.S. Postal money orders. Through the use of law enforcement databases, the Fiesta was located on October 30, 2019, at Auto Rental Etc. (1701 Airline Drive, Kenner, LA 70062) as the renter was attempting to exchange the Fiesta for another car. Louisiana State Police-Criminal Investigations Dept. (LSP-CID) was contacted, and detectives went to Auto Rental Etc. to detain the renter.

AUSA
Def. Counsel
Defendant A. M

The renter was identified as **MERCHANT**, and an additional subject in the vehicle was identified as SMALLS. Before arriving, Inspector [redacted] received descriptions of the two Black males that fit the descriptions of the two Black males being held by LSP-CID detectives.

LSP-CID then executed a state search warrant with the assistance of USPIS on the Fiesta. Inside, the original 58 blank U.S. Postal money orders stolen on October 29, 2019, from the Prairieville location were found. Additionally, 22 fraudulently printed U.S. Postal money orders that were stolen from a Post Office in New York were located, as well as five U.S. Postal money orders that were purchased with fraudulently printed U.S. Postal money orders. Law enforcement also found the addresses of four Louisiana U.S. Post Offices visited between October 29-30, 2019, clothing matching the description provided by several clerks, and an ID with a name ("R.J.") that matched the name on several of the fraudulently printed U.S. Postal money orders. Also, several receipts were found that showed the purchase of the legitimately printed U.S. Postal money orders by the fraudulently printed U.S. Postal money orders. **MERCHANT** and SMALLS were thereafter arrested by Jefferson Parish Sheriff's Office (JPSO) for illegal possession of stolen things and 22 counts of monetary abuse.

After the arrest, USPIS later determined that **MERCHANT** and SMALLS entered and attempted to make transactions at six post offices in New Orleans, five of which are on video. **MERCHANT** and SMALLS also visited numerous Baton Rouge and surrounding area post offices. **MERCHANT** and SMALLS initially declined to be interviewed after their arrest, but SMALLS has since given a voluntary and post *Miranda* statement to USPIS wherein he admitted to cashing and attempting to cash the fraudulent U.S. Postal money orders.

AUSA
Def. Counsel
Defendant

U.S. Post Office records show that on or about December 15, 2015, a number of blank U.S. Postal money orders were issued to the College Station Post Office in New York, New York, and thereafter stolen on an unknown date.

On October 28, 2019, **MERCHANT** and SMALLS traveled from New York, New York, to New Orleans with a number of the stolen College Station U.S. Postal money orders, which had been fraudulently assigned numeric and written denominations between $850.00 to $1,000.00. On the same day, **MERCHANT** rented the Fiesta from Auto Rental Etc. and a room at the Days Inn, both in Kenner.

On October 28, 2019, **MERCHANT** and SMALLS drove to a U.S. Post Office located in Kenner, Louisiana, where at approximately 2:25 p.m., SMALLS cashed a stolen College Station U.S. Postal money order ending in number [redacted] with an altered face amount of $850.00. This purchase is captured on video, and **MERCHANT** can be seen inside the Kenner Post Office.

Later that same day, **MERCHANT** and SMALLS drove to a U.S. Post Office located in Metairie, Louisiana, where at approximately 3:30 p.m., SMALLS cashed a stolen College Station U.S. Postal money order ending in number [redacted] with an altered face amount of $850.00. This purchase is captured on video and SMALLS was positively identified by a U.S. Postal clerk. **MERCHANT** can also be seen outside the Post Office. In both transactions, SMALLS used a New York driver's license as identification (the same "R.J." ID found in the rental car).

Admissible evidence that would be introduced at trial to prove the facts set forth above will be in the form of U.S. Postal records to show the original issuance of the blank U.S. Postal money orders at issue, photocopies/originals of the altered U.S. Postal money orders, surveillance video from the local Post Offices showing **MERCHANT** and SMALLS, evidence seized from the defendants' rental car, testimony from the U.S. Postal clerks who interacted with **MERCHANT**

AUSA
Def. Counsel
Defendant

and SMALLS and testimony from USPIS Inspector [redacted] on the loss amounts, the investigation and SMALLS' confession. The total loss to the government from the cashed U.S. Postal money orders is $5,675.00.

APPROVED AND AGREED:

EDWARD J. RIVERA
Assistant United States Attorney

8/18/21
Date

JAMES WILLIAMS
Attorney for Defendant

8/17/21
Date

ANTOINE MERCHANT
Defendant

8/17/2021
Date