

THREE MEN PLEAD GUILTY TO FEDERAL HATE CRIMES FOR BRUTAL MURDER OF AFRICAN AMERICAN MAN

The three men who committed the grisly, senseless murder depicted in this video just plead guilty to Federal hate crimes.

The Justice Department announced today that Deryl Paul Dedmon, 19, John Aaron Rice, 19, and Dylan Wade Butler, 20, all from Brandon, Miss., pleaded guilty today in U.S. District Court in Jackson to federal hate crime charges in connection with an assault culminating in the death of James Craig Anderson, an African-American man, in the summer of 2011.

Dedmon, Rice and Butler were each charged with one count of conspiracy and one count of violating the Matthew Shepard and James Byrd, Jr. Hate Crimes Prevention Act, for their roles in the death-resulting assault of Anderson, 47, of Jackson, Miss. Dedmon, Rice and Butler entered guilty pleas to both counts. The maximum penalty for these charges is life in prison and a \$250,000 fine.

“We hope that today’s guilty pleas provide some closure to the victim’s family and to the grievously wounded community that has mourned Mr. Anderson’s death,” said Thomas E. Perez, Assistant Attorney General for the Civil Rights Division. “Today’s historic pleas mark the first time that the

Matthew Shepard and James Byrd, Jr. Hate Crimes Prevention Act has been used in a case where the defendants' actions resulted in a victim's death. The Department of Justice will vigorously pursue those who commit racially motivated assaults and will use every tool at our disposal to ensure that those who commit such acts are brought to justice. And I note that our investigation in this matter is ongoing."

While Anderson's murder attracted a great deal of attention, the string of assaults Dedmon and his conspirators committed did not.

Today in court, Dedmon, Rice and Butler admitted that beginning in the spring of 2011, they and others conspired with one another to harass and assault African-Americans in and around west Jackson. On numerous occasions, the co-conspirators used dangerous weapons, including beer bottles, sling shots and motor vehicles, to cause, and attempt to cause, bodily injury to African-Americans. They would specifically target African-Americans they believed to be homeless or under the influence of alcohol because they believed that such individuals would be less likely to report an assault. The co-conspirators would often boast about these racially motivated assaults.

Dedmon also plead guilty to state charges yesterday.

The case is an interesting ~~first~~ second use of Federal hate crimes legislation (NPR describes the first case in which it was used here). It is a perfect example of a hate crime. This murder is every bit as ugly as those of Matthew Shepard and James Byrd, for whom the Federal hate crime law was named.

But it's not a case where local prosecutors were unwilling to prosecute. Though they were unable to charge Dedmon for capital murder, because the killers did not rob Anderson.

Dedmon was indicted for capital murder, which in Mississippi carries a sentence of death or life in prison without parole, but District Attorney Robert Shuler Smith said prosecutors couldn't have gotten a conviction. For capital murder, there must be an underlying offense, which had been robbery. Smith said that the investigation revealed that the group did not take Anderson's wallet, as investigators first believed.

He plead guilty to murder and a hate crime.

Incidentally, Anderson's family has asked that Dedmon not be executed; they don't believe in capital punishment. His sister said this at the state hearing.

"We, the Anderson family, are praying for racial reconciliation not just in Mississippi but all over this land and country. We are praying for the defendant, Dedmon, and his family that they find peace."

May the Anderson family, at least, find peace.
May Mississippi find peace.