

After re-Trial, New Bedford murder defendant sentenced to life in prison

A 44-year-old Pawtucket, RI man was sentenced to life in prison this morning after being convicted last week of the brutal April 2014 murder of 29-year-old Justin Downey in New Bedford, Bristol County District Attorney Thomas M. Quinn III announced.

Sayyid Coggins was convicted by a jury of his peers of First Degree Murder and Arson after a seven-day trial in Fall River Superior Court.

The defendant had previously gone to trial on the same charges in December 2016, but that trial ended in a mistrial after a juror was untruthful with the court and refused to take part in deliberations.

In the early morning hours of April 15th, 2014, Justin Downey died a horrible death. His skull was fractured. His face and head were cut and bruised, and his nose was broken. The broken nose caused blood to seep back into his sinuses. A small piece of cloth was put into his mouth, causing him to have difficulty breathing. His wrists and his ankles were bound together with duct tape. His body was wedged between his bed and the bedroom wall. As the blood from his broken nose seeped into his nasal passages, and as the gag in his throat/mouth obstructed his breathing, Justin Downey was smothered and eventually died of asphyxia. Later the room was set on fire right next to where his body was found. Firefighters discovered Justin Downey's dead body in his bedroom buried beneath the fire debris.

Justin Downey grew up in Fairhaven and lived with his grandparents. In the months leading up to April 2014, the

victim inherited more than \$100,000 from his grandparents. The victim used some of that money to try to grow marijuana. The marijuana was in an upstairs rooms at the victim's rented house at 55 Rounds St. in New Bedford.

The defendant was friends with the victim for many years through family connections. Throughout March 2014 the defendant and the victim tried to grow marijuana together. But as they got towards April, the marijuana plants weren't growing well, and were not ready for cultivation and sale. The victim and the defendant then came up with an alternate plan, which centered around the victim giving the defendant \$15,000 to buy drugs for the defendant to then resell in smaller amounts with the hope of making a substantial profit. Evidence presented at trial, however, proved that instead of enacting their plan, the defendant spent a large portion of the money gambling at Twin Rivers Casino.

By the time of the murder, the defendant and the victim had fallen out with one another due to the defendant's actions and unwillingness to repay the victim the \$15,000.

On the night of April 14, 2014, the defendant entered into Downey's home, killed him and took several marijuana plants. An expensive watch the victim owned, along with a lockbox believed to contain a large sum of cash was also missing when the victim's body was discovered. After killing the victim, the defendant lit the bedroom on fire and fled.

The defendant was tracked to Stone Mountain, Georgia, where he was eventually taken into custody on April 24th.

The case was prosecuted by Assistant District Attorney Dennis Collins and Co-First Assistant District Attorney Karen O'Sullivan. The lifetime prison sentence with no possibility of parole was imposed this morning by Judge Raffi Yessayan.

"I want to thank the jury for holding the defendant accountable for this brutal murder. The facts of the case are

extremely disturbing and were compounded by the defendant's flight to Georgia to avoid prosecution.,” District Attorney Quinn said. “I want to commend the prosecution team for persevering through two separate trials. The family of the victim has been through a difficult ordeal. I hope they can find some solace un the fact that the defendant stands convicted by the jury.”