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## Report Information from ProQuest

September 10 2015 19:36

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**Members of L.A. Drug Ring Get Prison Terms; Court: Penalties for six crack cocaine traffickers range from 11 to 27 years. A seventh defendant, who cooperated with prosecutors, gets a lesser sentence.**

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**Abstract (Abstract):** Six members of a Southern California drug ring that distributed crack cocaine from Los Angeles to cities around the country, including Seattle, Denver, Milwaukee, Cleveland and Atlanta, were sentenced to long prison terms by a Los Angeles federal judge Tuesday. A seventh defendant, who provided some assistance to prosecutors, received a considerably shorter sentence.

[Quentin] Stephen and [Donald] Dennis pleaded guilty earlier to three counts of conspiracy to distribute crack cocaine. Stephen also pleaded guilty to three counts of possession of cocaine and crack cocaine with the intent to distribute it. Dennis also pleaded guilty to two counts of possession.

Four other defendants also got stiff sentences. Derrick Slaughter, 30, and Larry Neal, 31, both of Los Angeles, each received a 21-year, 10-month term. Horace Slaughter, 31, of Los Angeles, got 13 years, four months, and Terrance Cooper, 32, of Walnut, got 11 years, eight months. They all had pleaded guilty to conspiracy to distribute cocaine base.

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**Full text:** Six members of a Southern California drug ring that distributed crack cocaine from Los Angeles to cities around the country, including Seattle, Denver, Milwaukee, Cleveland and Atlanta, were sentenced to long prison terms by a Los Angeles federal judge Tuesday. A seventh defendant, who provided some assistance to prosecutors, received a considerably shorter sentence.

U.S. District Judge W. Matthew Byrne Jr. meted out a 27-year term to Quentin Stephen, 32, of Walnut, and a 21-year, 10-month term to Donald Dennis, 31, of Burbank, the two leaders of the crack distribution network. Stephen and Dennis pleaded guilty earlier to three counts of conspiracy to distribute crack cocaine. Stephen also pleaded guilty to three counts of possession of cocaine and crack cocaine with the intent to distribute it. Dennis also pleaded guilty to two counts of possession.

Four other defendants also got stiff sentences. Derrick Slaughter, 30, and Larry Neal, 31, both of Los Angeles, each received a 21-year, 10-month term. Horace Slaughter, 31, of Los Angeles, got 13 years, four months, and Terrance Cooper, 32, of Walnut, got 11 years, eight months. They all had pleaded guilty to conspiracy to distribute cocaine base.

All of the defendants had prior criminal records, some of them extensive. Judge Byrne spurned pleas from defense lawyers that he give shorter terms than federal sentencing guidelines called for.

Richard M. Steingard, Stephen's attorney, said he probably would appeal the sentence and that he definitely would appeal Byrne's ruling that an order permitting wiretaps, which played a key role in the case, had been properly issued.

Before pronouncing the sentences, Byrne noted that he had asked each of the defendants why they had gotten involved in drug dealing and that most of them responded that "they wanted more money. That's one of the tragic fallouts of the narcotics problem. The money is substantial. The money presents a substantial temptation."

Byrne lamented that the possibility of substantial punishments did not seem to come to the attention of people thinking about getting involved in drug dealing. He suggested that it might be a good idea for the government to use some of the money it recovered in drug cases "to put up billboards to let people know they're facing 30 years, 40 years, life . . ." as a potential deterrent.

U.S. Atty. Nora M. Manella said she was pleased with the outcome. "This case is proof of law enforcement's ability to disrupt a nationwide crack distribution network," she said.

"The Greater Los Angeles area is the central receiving and transshipment center for narcotics coming across the Southwest border. If we don't catch them here, it's more difficult to catch them once it's gotten into the stream of commerce nationwide."

Assistant U.S. Attys. Jeffrey Johnson and Rob Villeza, who prosecuted the case, said in a formal statement that during the course of a lengthy investigation, the FBI seized about 12.5 kilograms of crack cocaine and 8 kilograms of cocaine powder, along with more than \$100,000 in drug proceeds.

Manella said the government is considering whether to appeal Byrne's decision to depart substantially from the guidelines in issuing a six-year sentence to Jessica Robbins, 23, of Corona, who was tried and convicted of conspiracy and possession of narcotics with intent to distribute them.

The judge said she was "the least culpable" of the defendants, "but not a minor player" because of her role in transporting drugs. He noted that she had been involved in three other minor crimes and that she "wanted to play with the big people," a reference to the drug ring's leaders.

But Byrne stressed that when Robinson was caught, she agreed to cooperate with the government and complete a delivery, putting herself at "considerable risk." Byrne said the government had reneged on its agreement with Robinson about the recommendation it would make for her to get a lesser sentence than the federal guidelines called for.

The judge said he believed that under the circumstances he had the ability to depart considerably from the guidelines. Manella disagreed with the judge's statement that the government had backed out on its bargain with Robinson. She also said, "We believe the Congress did not give the court authority to depart" from the mandatory minimum sentence.

Robinson, who clearly was hoping for even a shorter sentence than Byrne issued, left the courtroom sobbing. Her attorney, Yolanda Barrera, said that even though she was pleased that Byrne departed from the guidelines, "I don't think 72 months is warranted. She's a very young, inexperienced girl; she was manipulated."

Byrne delayed sentencing defendant Victor Evans, 33, of Walnut, who pleaded guilty to conspiracy, because he has become ill. One other defendant, Renee Stephens, 32, of Long Beach, remains a fugitive.

Credit: TIMES LEGAL AFFAIRS WRITER

**Publication title:** Los Angeles Times (pre-1997 Fulltext)

**Pages:** 1

**Number of pages:** 0

**Publication year:** 1996

**Publication date:** Sep 12, 1996

**Year:** 1996

**Section:** Metro; PART-B; Metro Desk

**Publisher:** Tribune Publishing Company LLC

**Place of publication:** Los Angeles, Calif.

**Country of publication:** United States

**Publication subject:** General Interest Periodicals--United States

**ISSN:** 04583035

**Source type:** Newspapers

**Language of publication:** English

**Document type:** NEWSPAPER

**ProQuest document ID:** 293383519

**Document URL:** <http://search.proquest.com/docview/293383519?accountid=14509>

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**Last updated:** 2011-08-11

**Database:** Los Angeles Times

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