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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

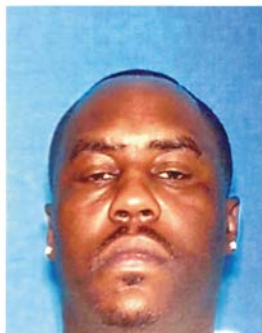
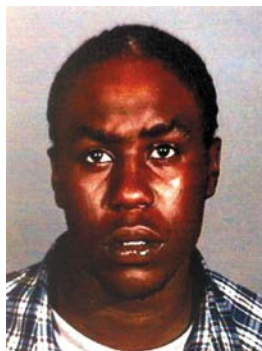
Approved by __CJZ____

Re: Conviction on 18- year cold case murder of McDonald's employee

Cedric Sutton

2001

2016



Darnell Wheat

2001

2016



Kern County District Attorney Cynthia Zimmer and Kern County Sheriff Donny Youngblood announced a significant conviction today in a homicide case that occurred 18 years ago in Rosamond, California.

On March 13, 2019, a Kern County jury found both Cedric Sutton and Darnell Wheat guilty of all charges, which included First Degree Murder with special circumstances, attempted murder, and kidnapping to commit robbery.

The case involved the August 2001 murder of 37-year-old Maria Cruz Pina, who worked at a McDonald's restaurant in Rosamond. On August 11, 2001, Maria and a female coworker arrived at work just before 5:00 a.m. to open the restaurant. When the two women approached and unlocked the door to

the restaurant, they were assaulted by Sutton and Wheat. Both women were grabbed and forced into the business office of the restaurant.

Both Sutton and Wheat brandished firearms and Maria was ordered to shut off the alarm and open the safe. When Maria could not successfully open the safe, they shot Maria in the head with a sawed-off shotgun, killing her instantly.

Both Sutton and Wheat left the office of the business, but quickly returned, pointed a handgun at the surviving coworker, and tried to kill her as well. The handgun malfunctioned, failing to fire. The suspects fled the business.

The Kern County Sheriff's Department investigated the murder. On the day of the homicide, citizen volunteers from Kern County Search and Rescue found articles of clothing discarded by the killers on the freeway along their escape route. However, there were no leads in the case.

In 2012 a citizen called Secret Witness and implicated Sutton and Wheat in the murder. The Sheriff's Department submitted the clothing discarded in 2001 to the Kern Regional Crime Lab. New DNA techniques in analysis and interpretation used by Crime Lab in 2013 enabled scientists to locate DNA profiles of Sutton and Wheat on the clothing. Further investigation by the Sheriff's Department led to the discovery of the murder weapons that had been seized by the Las Vegas Police Department just nine days after the murder and had been kept by the police in Nevada for over 16 years.

The jury further determined that the crimes were committed in association with the "11-8 East Coast Crips," one of the most violent Crip gangs in Los Angeles.

The defendants were arrested in September of 2016 after an Indictment by the Kern County Grand Jury.

The trial that lasted nearly four months began in November of 2018 was prosecuted by District Attorney Cynthia Zimmer and Deputy District Attorney Christine Antonios. Kern County Sheriff's Sergeant John Coleman was the lead investigator in the case.

District Attorney Zimmer stated: "The successful prosecution of a cold case murder is an important reminder that we must never stop working to seek justice for those affected by violent crimes. We remain committed to using new technology to shed new light on murder cases and bringing killers to justice."

Sheriff Youngblood stated: "I cannot understate the importance of citizen tips to help solve crimes. Sometimes one tip that puts detectives on the right path can be the difference between a killer being captured or going free."

The defendants will be sentenced on April 8, 2019 by trial Judge John Lua and are facing life in prison without the possibility of parole.