

Guilty pleas in woman's death - Taylor case became racial battle when black teens were falsely accused in the murder of mother of six.

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DETROIT -- A **plea** bargain on Tuesday ended a convoluted, racially charged saga that began when a single mother was killed coming to the aid of her son last summer and stoked tensions when two black teens were falsely jailed for her murder.

JuJuan Willis, 22, and Michael Johnson, 19, both of Detroit, quietly pleaded **guilty** Tuesday to second-degree murder, assault with intent to murder and felony firearms charges **in** the July 30 fracas outside Coppertree Apartments **in** Taylor that ended with the shooting of the 38-year-old mother of six.

The agreement was bittersweet for supporters of Devin Plummer and Franklin Smith, whose charges **in** the killings led to protests against the Taylor Police.

Smith filed a \$5 million federal suit against the city **in** September, claiming the police "conduct was lazy, sloppy, deliberately indifferent, reckless and malicious."

"(This) shows you that despite all the rush to judgment, that justice could be done," said activist Adolph Mongo, who led protests for their freedom. "It doesn't take back the fact that two innocent young men's lives are changed forever." Police alleged Plummer was one of at least two to fire at Wendy Meinke. Smith was charged with driving the getaway car.

Ballistics tests showed no traces of gunpowder on Plummer the night of the shooting. Police insisted race wasn't a factor **in** the case, which one officer described as one of the most complicated **in** the city **in** decades. It featured multiple witnesses telling conflicting accounts of the large fight and more than one gunshot.

"It's a relief they caught the right guys," said Gwen Johnson, Franklin Smith's mother. "I'm glad justice has been served. It's been pretty difficult."

Mongo said the teens dropped out of college and are **in** counseling.

Despite a confession from Plummer, Wayne County Prosecutor Kym Worthy dropped the charges **in** mid-August when the evidence pointed **in** another direction.

"I am still at a loss as to why this man confessed. Even knowing that, we said something wasn't right," Worthy said Tuesday.

"People want to believe (things) other than the truth **in** this particular case. The Taylor Police did a good job as quickly as they could to exonerate those people. We have no interest **in** keeping anybody **in** jail that we cannot sustain a case against."

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