

MAN CLEARED IN 3 SLAYINGS PLEADS GUILTY TO LESSER CHARGE

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In a surprise move, onetime drug lord **Frank** (**Frank Nitti**) **Usher** pleaded guilty Friday to being an accessory after the fact to the 1979 beheadings of three of his associates.

Usher 's plea just before final arguments came the day after Recorder's Court Judge David Kerwin ordered **Usher** acquitted of murder charges, continuing the trial on the reduced charge of being an accessory. **Usher** has been serving a life sentence since his conviction in 1980.

Kerwin ruled that **Usher** was the target of the hired killers in the case, and not, as the prosecution contended, the "string-puller and manipulator."

In his plea, **Usher** admitted driving James (Red) Freeman and Robert (Lefty) Partee away from the Federated Democratic Club where the victims were killed. **Usher** did not admit playing any role in cutting off the heads and hands of the victims, Joann Clark, Willie McJoy and Willie Perry Jackson.

According to testimony, Freeman and Partee were hired by Adolph (Doc Holliday) Powell, a drug dealer who owned the private social club, to wipe out the **Usher** drug faction.

Usher , according to testimony, was held at gunpoint while his associates were killed. How he managed to survive remains a topic of debate.

Partee was convicted of the slayings. Acquitted were Freeman and Powell, who later was killed amid speculation that he'd become a police informant.

In 1987, Kerwin ordered a new trial for **Usher** , citing faulty jury instructions and other errors in the 1980 conviction.

Because the accessory charge carries a five-year maximum sentence, **Usher** 's time served has satisfied the penalty, though he could be fined \$10,000.

Usher faces additional prison time on an unrelated 16-year federal drug sentence.

Kerwin, after a private meeting with jurors, said they reinforced his decision to dismiss the murder charge.

"They had more questions than the evidence could answer," Kerwin said. "They had plenty of theories and lots of speculation -- but as I ruled, that is not evidence to convict anyone of anything."

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