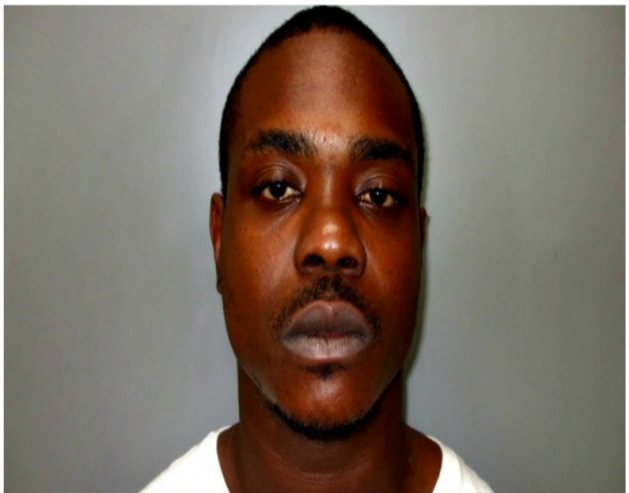
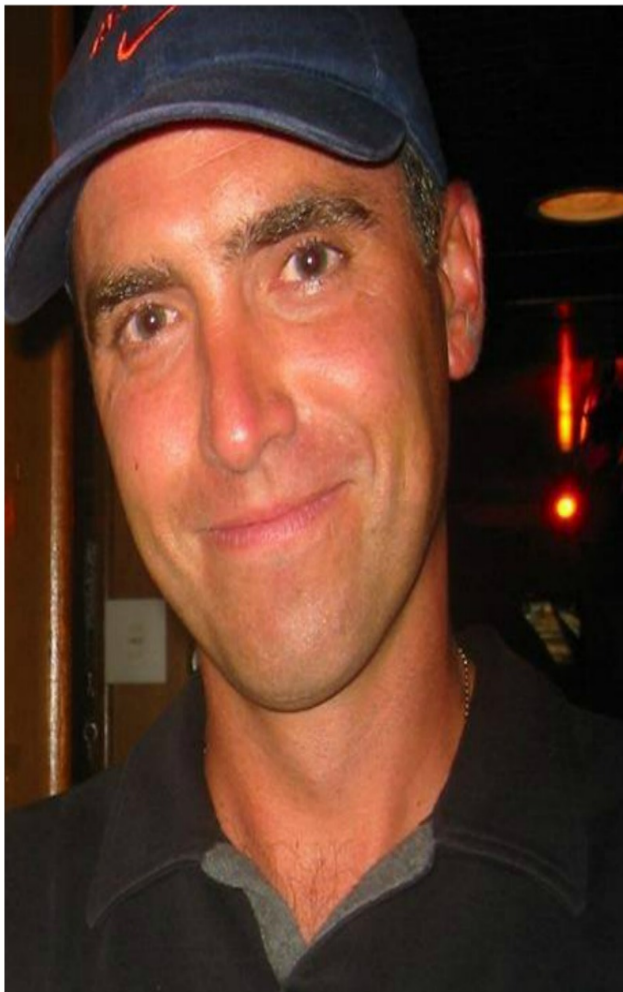


The Virgin Islands Consortium

Man Involved In Murder That Drew Heavy Attention From U.S. Media Pleads Guilty In Superior Court

Crime / **Published On March 08, 2019 09:23 AM /**

Ernice Gilbert **March 08, 2019**

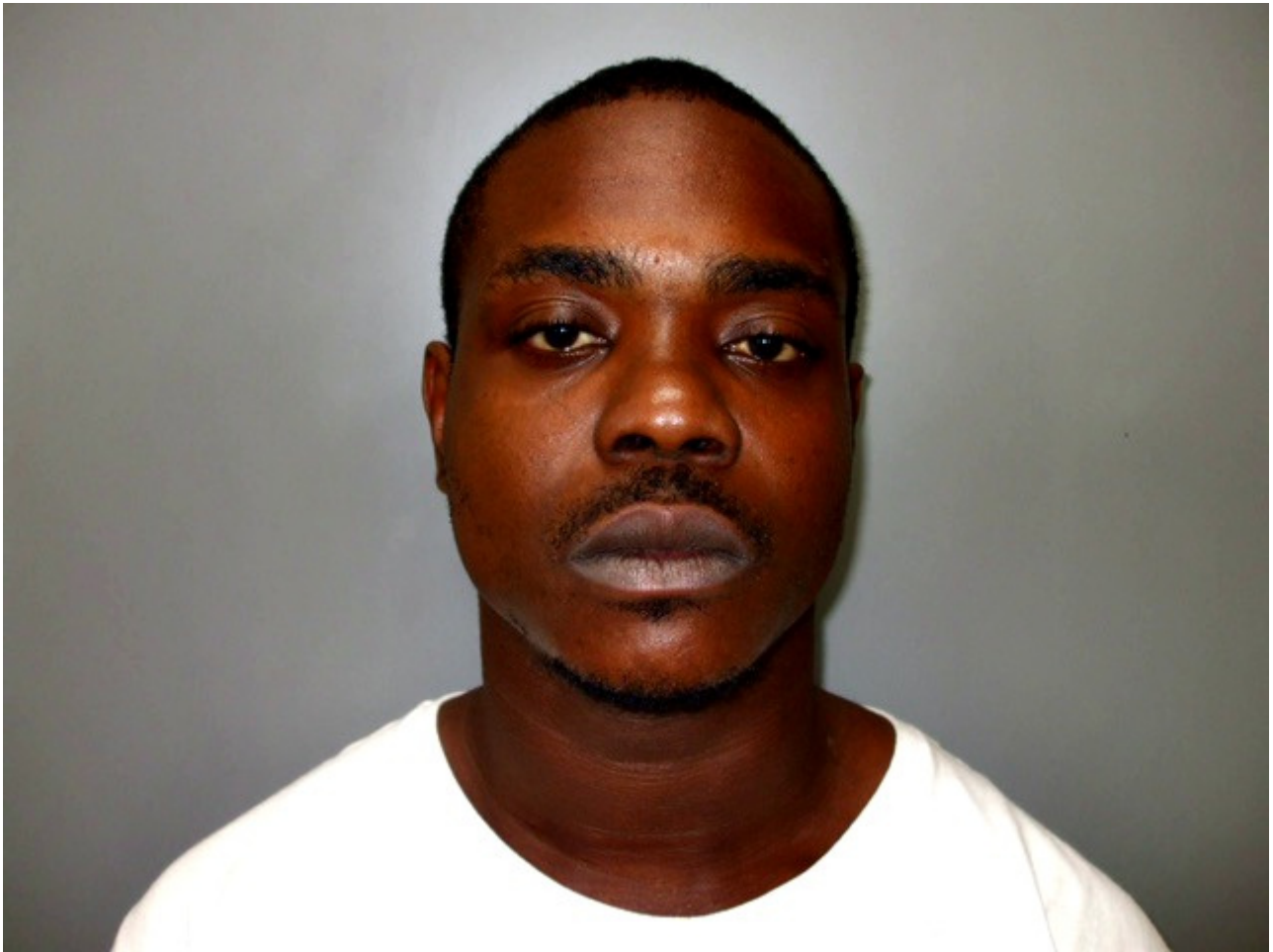


ST. THOMAS -- A St. Thomas man involved in a 2014 murder case that drew heavy attention from media outlets from the U.S. mainland, on Wednesday appeared before the Superior Court of the Virgin Islands for a change in plea in the matter.

According to Dept. of Justice Public Media Officer Corliss Smithen, Mekel Blash appeared before V.I. Superior Court Judge Denise Francois for a change of plea hearing in connection with the Jan. 18, 2014 murder of James Malfetti.

In the closed plea, Mr. Blash pleaded guilty to second-degree murder, and prosecutors recommended a 15-year prison sentence. He was immediately remanded into custody to

begin serving his sentence, Ms. Smithen said.



Mugshot of Mekel Blash, provided by the VIPD

Backstory

Mr. Blash was arrested on Friday, April 17, 2015 in connection with the murder of James Malfetti, who was found dead in his apartment located in Boatman Road, St. John, with multiple stab wounds to his neck.

The victim, originally from Scotch Plains, NJ, had lived on St. John for about a year. The case drew heavy attention from [media outlets in the U.S.](#) with an angle that suggested the VIPD shared connivance in Mr. Malfetti's murder.

In a statement issued on February 12, 2014, former VIPD Commissioner Rodney Querrard told CBS News that the investigation into Mr. Malfetti's death was ongoing and that the VIPD had "taken all necessary steps from the day the victim was found, to process evidence at the crime scene."

Mr. Blash, now 31, was charged with first-degree murder, second-degree murder, first-degree assault, third-degree assault, use of a dangerous weapon during the commission of a crime of violence, grand larceny and first-degree burglary, at the time of his arrest.

Todd Phoenix, a private investigator hired by Mr. Malfetti's family, told CBS that Mr. Malfetti, who was a tech consultant, was renting a guest house on an estate overlooking the Caribbean waters that surround St. John when the incident occurred. That was the

night the main home on the estate, occupied by the property owners, was burglarized.

Mr. Phoenix told CBS the property owners slept through the burglary and police weren't called until the next morning.

"Police came out to investigate the burglary and never went to Jimmy's house to check on him or anything of that nature," Mr. Phoenix said. "...Jimmy's house is in essence next door to the main residence – literally 20 to 30 yards away."

It wasn't until the following morning, January 19, that Mr. Malfetti's body was found by the property owner and a land caretaker who went to check on him, according to Mr. Phoenix.

"It was also a burglary – the screen on the south side of the residence was broken, Jimmy's iPhone was taken, his 46-inch T.V., and Jimmy had been killed," Mr. Phoenix said, according to CBS.

The private investigator attributed the lack of an arrest in the case at the time to the lack of a thorough investigation by the Virgin Islands Police Department (VIPD).

"There was no forensic processing at the scene of the burglary, they never went to check on the other residents... they didn't collect the bloody sheets as evidence," Mr. Phoenix told CBS of the V.I.P.D. "There's a story to be told here about the lack of safety and ineptness of local law enforcement."