

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Suspect In 2018 Festival Village Murder Found Guilty; Sentencing Set For Sept. 6

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ST. CROIX -- Jurors empaneled for the murder trial of Angel Parrilla, Jr., were not convinced by his claim of self-defense and convicted him of murder, assault and weapons charges in connection with last year's killing during the Frederiksted Festival activities, the V.I. Department of Justice said Friday.

Following four days of testimony, the three men and nine women of the jury returned a unanimous verdict Thursday finding Parrilla, 23, of the Walter I.M. Hodge Housing Community, guilty of one count each of second-degree murder, unauthorized possession of a firearm during the commission of a crime of violence, first-degree assault, possession of ammunition, first-degree reckless endangerment and discharging or

aiming a firearm, stemming from the Jan. 6, 2018, shooting death of Curtis Phipps. Parrilla, who was granted pre-trial release into the charge of a third-party custodian and was placed under house arrest with electronic monitoring, was remanded into custody immediately after the jury announced its verdict.



Angel Parrilla, Jr. (Credit: VIPD)

In commenting on the outcome of the trial, Attorney General Denise George said, "I am pleased with the results. Justice has been served and I commend Assistant Attorneys General Eric Chancellor and Vanessa Hewitt-Quinland for their excellent performance."

At trial, the prosecution team of Assistant Attorneys General Chancellor and Quinland relied on the testimony of ten witnesses, including one eyewitness, to help prove its case. That eyewitness came forward a day after the shooting and identified Parrilla aka Cheeze as the shooting suspect, according to a probable cause fact sheet filed by Det. Sgt. Frankie Ortiz.

According to Det. Sgt. Ortiz, the eyewitness was at the Festival Village at the gambling table when a slim, Black man with a pointy nose, a long braid at the back of his head and

braids tied on top of his head, and who was wearing a black colored shirt and short pants, walked towards another Black man who was gambling. The two men were arguing when the man with the pointed nose lifted his shirt and showed the other man that he had a gun tucked into his waist. The two began wrestling for the gun, which fell to the ground. The man wearing the colored shirt picked up the gun, the other man lunged at him and they continued to wrestle for the weapon. The man wearing the black colored shirt punched the other man in the face and he staggered. Then, the man dressed in the black colored shirt aimed the gun and shot the other man, causing him to fall to the ground. The man wearing the black colored shirt approached the other man who was still on the ground and fired several more shots. The shooter then ran away from the area while attempting to conceal the gun inside his waistband. At the time of the shooting, the festival village was crowded with children and adults.

Parrilla also gave a statement to police. In his version of events, Parrilla said he was at the festival village and on more than one occasion, he went to the gambling table. He stood next to an individual who began looking at him and for no apparent reason, the individual grabbed on to him and they began to wrestle. During the tussle, a gun fell to the ground near them, Parrilla picked up the gun and used it to shoot the individual. Once it was done, Parrilla went home to sleep. After the shooting, Phipps was transported via ambulance to the hospital where he later died from his injuries. An autopsy on Phipps' body revealed that he died as a result of a single gunshot wound to the back, which struck both lungs. Parrilla was immediately taken into custody and charged with two counts of first-degree murder and one count each of unauthorized possession of a firearm during the commission of a crime of violence, first-degree assault, possession of ammunition, first-degree reckless endangerment and discharging or aiming a firearm, Det. Sgt. Ortiz wrote.

V.I. Superior Court Judge Harold Willocks has scheduled Parrilla's sentencing for Sept. 6.