

Jackie Lacey
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NEWS RELEASE

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Palmdale Man Convicted of Racially Motivated Murder

A 39-year-old former white supremacist was found guilty today of the racially motivated murder of an African-American man 17 years ago, the Los Angeles County District Attorney's Office announced today.

The jury deliberated about five hours before finding Richard Phillip Ritchie of Palmdale guilty of the first-degree murder of 32-year-old Howard Garfield McClendon. The jury also found Ritchie guilty of conspiracy to commit murder and they found true the special circumstances that McClendon was murdered because of his race and lying in wait.

In July 1997, McClendon was beaten with a baseball bat, chased into the desert and stabbed so many times he was nearly decapitated. The Los Angeles resident's skeletal remains were found about three months later, said Deputy District Attorney Geoffrey Lewin with the Organized Crime Division who prosecuted the case.

Lewin said Ritchie and a female co-defendant, Kelly Sorrell, lured McClendon into a car and drove him down a dirt road to attack him so Sorrell could receive "lightning bolt" tattoos, a supposed badge of honor for white supremacists who kill African-Americans.

Sorrell, 37, testified against Ritchie after earlier pleading guilty to one count of first-degree murder and admitting the hate crime allegation. She will be sentenced to 29 years to life in prison on Friday in Department 102 in case BA259634.

Ritchie is facing life in prison without the possibility of parole when he returns on Feb. 6 for sentencing before Judge Sam Ohta in the same case.

He is already serving a state prison sentence of more than 38 years for his conviction in a string of home-invasion robberies in 1999. He was convicted in 2001 of robbery, false imprisonment, grand theft auto and burglary.

In 1996, he was convicted and sentenced to 16 months in prison for arson involving a cross burning.

The murder case was investigated by the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department.

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About the Los Angeles County District Attorney's Office

Los Angeles County District Attorney Jackie Lacey leads the largest local prosecutorial office in the nation. Her staff of nearly 1,000 attorneys, 300 investigators and 800 support staff members is dedicated to seeking justice for victims of crime and enhancing public safety. Last year, the [Los Angeles County District Attorney's Office](#) prosecuted more than 73,000 felony defendants and 113,000 misdemeanor defendants.