

# Trial begins in killing of Ecuadorean immigrant in New York suburb

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A trial began last week in a tense courtroom in the town of Riverhead, Long Island, in connection with the killing of an Ecuadorean immigrant 16 months ago.

Marcelo Lucero, 37 years old at the time of his death, had lived in the US for 16 years. He was fatally stabbed near the railroad station in Patchogue, about 60 miles east of New York City in suburban Suffolk County. The attack took place just before midnight on November 8, 2008. According to prosecutors, it was the culmination of an evening in which seven area teenagers had roamed the town looking for Latino immigrants to attack.

Seven students at Patchogue-Medford High School were picked up in the attacks. Four have pleaded guilty to hate crime charges and are expected to testify for the prosecution. Jeffrey Conroy, 19, is now on trial on a second-degree murder charge.

The group of local students targeted immigrants for more than a year, according to prosecutors. The four who have pleaded guilty are expected to testify to what they referred to as “beaner-hopping.” Conroy also faces attempted assault charges in connection with attacks or attempted attacks on six immigrants that day, including Mr. Lucero.

Hispanic immigrants were considered easy prey because of their immigrant and in some cases illegal status, which made it unlikely that they would call the police. Conroy reportedly has white supremacist tattoos on his body, including a small swastika.

On the night in question, according to the prosecution’s opening statement as reported in press accounts, the teenagers “were not in Patchogue looking to go to a party.” They were “looking for blood—specifically Mexican blood.”

Two of the group had shot a BB gun at a Latino man, Marlon Garcia, earlier that day in nearby Medford. The

group later drove to Patchogue and chased Hector Sierra, who managed to escape. They saw Lucero and a friend, Angel Loja, and Lucero was stabbed in the chest after his friend escaped.

The judge ruled that Conroy’s statements to the police after he had been arrested would be admissible at the trial. According to the prosecution, Conroy confessed without any prompting. His defense attorney claims he never admitted his guilt.

Another element in the case is the long delay in treatment for Lucero. An emergency call was made at 11:55 that night, but the Ecuadorean immigrant did not reach Brookhaven Memorial Hospital until 12:34 a.m. According to a former New York City chief medical examiner who examined the autopsy report on Lucero and was quoted in the *New York Times*, “This is the kind of wound that’s survivable if everybody acts very quickly.”

Michael Baden, the forensic pathologist and former medical examiner, added, “If he had gotten to a hospital, say, in 10 minutes or 15 minutes, usually this type of an injury is survivable when properly treated.”

In addition, the emergency medical technician who arrived with the ambulance for Lucero was not fully trained in ALS, or Advanced Life Support. Lucero lost a lot of blood and, a few minutes before he arrived at the hospital, went into cardiac arrest. According to the testimony of the ambulance company assistant chief, “There was nobody on scene who was actually qualified to administer an IV to Mr. Lucero.”

Lucero’s relatives were outraged by the delay and inferior treatment, but the defense attorney is also expected to use this argument to challenge the prosecution claim that Conroy is guilty of murder.

Jury selection in State Supreme Court in Riverhead was slow and difficult, as many prospective jurors

claimed that they would not be able to be unbiased because of their hostility to “illegal immigration.” Others testified that because of their own immigrant backgrounds or their job situations, they had strong views in sympathy with immigrants. One woman who said most clients in her job are undocumented Latino immigrants added, according to news accounts, “I don’t think that because of that they should be killed.”

Another prospective juror who was excused by the judge criticized those who said they could not be fair because of their views on illegal immigration. “I don’t care whether the man was legal, illegal, white, black, purple or green,” she said. “There was a murder. It almost seemed like the poor victim was the one going on trial.” Lucero’s brother, Joselo Lucero, told the press, “We’re not talking about any issues about immigration. We’re talking about justice and human rights.”

The Suffolk County trial and courtroom scene reflected the social tensions and the racial divisions stoked by local politicians of both Democratic and Republican parties and right-wing anti-immigrant groups, which seek to divert the anger and anxiety produced by the economic crisis into the scapegoating of immigrants and others. Nearly every immigrant has experienced some form of discrimination or harassment in recent years.

The Suffolk County chief executive, Steve Levy, a Democrat, is notorious for his attacks on undocumented workers. Levy has just announced that he is joining the Republican Party and planning to run for governor in the statewide election later this year.

Suffolk County, on the eastern half of Long Island, has a population of more than 1.5 million, and has more than doubled in the past 50 years. The percentage of Latinos in the county almost doubled between 1990 and 2008, from 7.1 to 13.7 percent.



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