

News

Suspect in Yetunde Price murder arraigned

By **BILLIE JORDAN**
CONTRIBUTING WRITER

Aron Hammer, an unemployed 24-year-old, was arraigned Tuesday in Compton, charged with one count of murder and one count of felony possession of a firearm in connection with the shooting death of Yetunde Price, the sister of tennis stars Venus and Serena Williams.

Hammer, who was represented by private counsel, was remanded to custody without bail and ordered to appear in court Sept. 23 for a continued arraignment and a plea.

Despite Hammer's impoverished circumstances, he has procured private counsel, criminal lawyer Excel Sharieff. Speculating on Sharieff's motives for representing Hammer,

court clerk Patrick Smith said, "Sharieff could be doing it for free." Smith is the clerk for arraignment Judge John J. Cheroske.

"I think (the lawyer is) representing him because it's a high-profile case," said Pamela McKinley, CSUN Pan-African studies senior.

Russell Stockard, assistant professor of cinema and television arts, said Sharieff could be representing Hammer because he thinks he's innocent, but it's probable he's chasing celebrity.

Lt. Dan Rosenberg of the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department, agreed that it is likely that Sharieff is representing Ham-

mer because of the publicity.

Hammer appeared briefly before the court, the media and Richard

Price was killed.

"I heard (Hammer is) developmentally disabled ... He could have been influenced," Stockard said. "You don't usually see a loud chorus of people saying 'he didn't do it.'"

Hammer's relatives and neighbors say he is innocent.

"When he was taken into custody, I would say his demeanor would be classified as nonchalant," Rosenberg said. The deputies surrounded the house and called everybody out; and Hammer was among them.

"We interviewed everybody in the house, and after we interviewed

them, we formed the opinion (Hammer) was responsible," Rosenberg said.

Rosenberg thinks the media coverage of Price's death is interesting. He said the media seem to be obsessed with connecting her death to drugs — to sensationalize the story because of Price's relation to the Williams sisters. The press has forgotten that she was a human being, Rosenberg said.

It is unfortunate that Compton continues to be stigmatized with a bad reputation, said David Wiltz, CSUN communication studies major.

"This is a neighborhood unlike any other in America," Rosenberg said. "The city of Compton's got some good parts and bad parts ... but basically (Compton residents) are hard-working citizens just trying to make it."

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Williams, the father of Price and the Williams sisters.

According to Rosenberg, Ham-