



718.286.6000
WWW.QUEENSDA.ORG

QUEENS COUNTY DISTRICT ATTORNEY
125-01 QUEENS BOULEVARD
KEW GARDENS, NEW YORK 11415-1568



MELINDA KATZ
DISTRICT ATTORNEY

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CONTACT: PRESS OFFICE (718) 286-6315
QDACommunications@queensda.org

BROOKLYN MAN CHARGED WITH THREE HATE ATTACKS ON SIKHS IN RICHMOND HILL

Defendant Faces Up to 25 Years in Prison if Convicted

Queens District Attorney Melinda Katz announced today that Vernon Douglas, 19, has been charged with hate crimes for allegedly attacking and robbing three men in separate incidents near the intersection of 95th Avenue and Lefferts Boulevard between April 3 and April 12 of this year. A second man, Hezekiah Coleman, 20, is also charged with Douglas in connection with one of the attacks.

District Attorney Katz said, “This defendant is accused of targeting three men, all members of the Sikh community who wore turbans at the time of the attacks. We will not tolerate beatings motivated by hate in the borough of Queens – the most diverse county in the world. Our diversity is our strength and no acts of violence will undermine who we are. This defendant, along with his co-defendant, will be held to account for the charges of which they are accused.”

Douglas, of Watkins Street in Brooklyn, was arraigned today before Queens Criminal Court Judge Anthony Battisti on a 13-count criminal complaint. The defendant is charged with robbery in the first and second degree as a hate crime, four counts of assault in the second degree as a hate crime, assault in the second degree of an elderly person over 65, three counts of assault in the third degree as a hate crime and three counts of aggravated harassment in the second degree as a hate crime. If convicted, Douglas faces up to 25 years in prison.

Coleman, of 118th Street in Richmond Hill, Queens, was arraigned Wednesday before Queens Criminal Court before Judge Marty Lentz on a five-count complaint charging him with robbery in the first and second degree and assault in the second degree. Judge Lentz set the next Court date for May 26, 2022. If convicted, Coleman faces up to 25 years in prison.

District Attorney Katz said that, according to the criminal charges, at approximately 6:45 a.m. on April 3rd, the defendant approached a 70-year-old man as he was walking near the intersection of 95th Avenue and Lefferts Boulevard. The victim was wearing a turban. The defendant allegedly punched the victim several times in the face and head. The victim was treated at a local hospital for bruising to his right eye and bleeding from his nose.

According to the complaint, during a second incident at the same location, on April 12th, at approximately 7 a.m., the defendant, shirtless and carrying a stick, approached a 45-year-old man wearing a turban. Defendant Douglas allegedly hit the victim several times with the stick, striking him in the head and face and then punched him several times, again aiming for the man’s head and face. During the volley of blows, the defendant’s wallet was dislodged from his pocket and fell to the ground. The defendant allegedly picked it up, removed \$300 in cash,

threw the wallet to the ground and then fled the scene. The victim was taken to a local hospital where he required stitches to his forehead and treatment of his injuries.

Minutes later, at the same location, the defendant still shirtless, approached a third victim, 58, and allegedly hit him multiple times in the head and face with a stick, causing the man's turban to fall from his head. The defendant then picked up the head wrap and allegedly pulled the victim's beard. At that time, defendant Coleman allegedly approached the victim and punched him multiple times, then threatened to shoot him. Defendant Douglas allegedly took \$200 from the victim's pocket and ran away. The victim was taken to a local hospital where he was treated for the injuries.

The investigation was conducted by Detective John Hidalgo of the New York City Police Department's Hate Crimes Task Force.

Assistant District Attorney Michael Brovner, Bureau Chief of the District Attorney's Hate Crimes Bureau is prosecuting the case under the overall supervision of Executive Assistant District Attorney of Supreme Court Trials Pishoy Yacoub.

Criminal complaints and indictments are accusations. A defendant is presumed innocent until proven guilty.

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