

## **BLACK MARKET TRAVEL AGENTS**

### **38 DEFENDANTS INDICTED IN \$MULTI-MILLION DOLLAR FRAUD SCHEME**

#### **LOCAL INVESTIGATION EXPOSES NATIONWIDE NETWORK THAT USED STOLEN IDENTITIES, CREDIT CARDS TO PURCHASE AIRLINE TICKETS**

A series of six indictments have been returned under seal by a federal grand jury in Kansas City, Mo., over the past year. Four of the six indictments were returned under seal on July 1, 2010. All of the indictments have been unsealed and made public upon the arrests and initial court appearances of the defendants.

#### **U.S. vs. Harrison, et al: Atlanta/KC Conspiracy**

**Demetria Harrison**, 40, a former Kansas City, Mo., resident, and her son, **Benjamin Suber**, 26, both of Union City, Ga., **Sabrina Bowers**, 29, of Kansas City, Mo., and **Deidre Turner**, 27, of Peculiar, Mo., were charged in a seven-count indictment returned under seal by a federal grand jury in Kansas City, Mo., on July 1, 2010.

The federal indictment alleges that all four defendants participated in a conspiracy to commit credit and debit card fraud and aggravated identity theft from Dec. 1, 2001, to Jan. 15, 2009. The indictment cites a number of flights between Kansas City, Mo., and Atlanta, Ga.

In addition to the conspiracy, **Harrison** is charged with three counts of credit and debit card fraud and three counts of aggravated identity theft.

#### **U.S. vs. Burks, et al : Los Angeles Conspiracy**

**Jason Burks**, 28, **Raun Lauderdale, Jr.**, 26, **Shante Pearson**, 32, **Abass Djibril**, 44, and **Terrence L. Clemens**, 21, all of Los Angeles, Calif., **Demetria Harrison**, 40, of Union City, Ga., **Deandreas Knight**, 20, of Berkeley, Mo., **Christopher Britto**, 27, of Paramount, Calif., and **Ruben Rivers**, 54, of Brooklyn, N.Y., were charged in a seven-count indictment returned under seal by a federal grand jury in Kansas City, Mo., on July 1, 2010.

The federal indictment alleges that all nine defendants participated in a conspiracy to commit credit and debit card fraud and aggravated identity theft from July 25, 2007, to May 14, 2009. The indictment cites a number of flights in and out of Los Angeles.

**Burks** allegedly acted as a black market travel agent and used stolen information to fraudulently purchase airline tickets. **Lauderdale**, **Knight** and **Clemens** allegedly obtained credit and debit card numbers, along with identity information, which they sold to **Burks**. For example, the indictment says, **Lauderdale** stole the credit card or debit card information from his place of

employment, a hotel in Long Beach, Calif.

**Harrison, Pearson, Britto, Clemens** and **Djibril** acted as passenger brokers or referral sources for the black market travel scheme. They referred passengers to **Burks**.

**Knight, Pearson, Britto, Clemens** and **Djibril** also obtained fraudulently purchased airline reservations for themselves through **Burks**.

In addition to the conspiracy, **Burks** is charged with one count of credit card fraud and one count of aggravated identity theft. **Burks** and **Harrison** are also charged together with two counts of credit card fraud and two counts of aggravated identity theft.

*U.S. vs. Beecham, et al: Chicago Conspiracy*

**Maurice E. Beecham**, 37, **Benjamin Everett**, 31, **Qeana Thompson**, 31, **Edwon C. Simmons**, 34, **Tyrone Ross**, 32, and **Chikosi Walker**, 31, all of Chicago, Ill., **Marcus Grisby**, 34, of Hoffman Estates, Ill., **Marlene Findley**, 41, of Atlanta, Ga., **Percy Richard**, 27, of Gary, Ind., **Demetria Harrison**, 40, of Union City, Ga., and **Monique Calhoun**, 23, of North Hollywood, Calif., were charged in a 22-count indictment returned under seal by a federal grand jury in Kansas City, Mo., on July 1, 2010.

The federal indictment alleges that all 11 defendants participated in a conspiracy to commit credit and debit card fraud and aggravated identity theft from Jan. 27 to Nov. 13, 2009.

**Everett, Ross, Simmons, Grisby** and **Thompson** allegedly acted as black market travel agents. **Beecham** allegedly stole credit and debit card information, along with identity information, and sold that information to co-conspirators. **Findley, Walker, Richard** and **Harrison** acted as passenger brokers or referral sources for the black market travel scheme.

In addition to the conspiracy, **Grisby** is charged with three counts of credit card fraud and three counts of aggravated identity theft, **Everett** and **Walker** are each charged separately with one count of credit card fraud and one count of aggravated identity theft apiece, **Harrison** and **Findley** are charged together with one count of credit card fraud and one count of aggravated identity theft, **Ross** and **Simmons** are charged together with one count of credit card fraud and one count of aggravated identity theft, and **Richard, Everett** and **Thompson** are charged together with one count of credit card fraud and one count of aggravated identity theft.

**Simmons** and **Calhoun** are also charged with one count of making a false statement to a federal law enforcement officer. **Simmons** and **Calhoun** allegedly worked together to develop a false story to tell federal law enforcement agents in order to conceal the existence of the conspiracy. According to the indictment, **Simmons** instructed **Calhoun** to either ignore phone calls from federal agents, or lie to the agents by telling them the airline tickets were purchased online through Craigslist.com. In reality, the indictment alleges, **Calhoun** purchased tickets from **Simmons**.

*U.S. vs. Pryor, et al: Oakland Conspiracy*

**Waiki Pryor**, 29, of Richmond, Calif., **Shante Pearson**, 32, of Los Angeles, Calif., **Delano Ruttly**, 26, of Palm Beach, Fla., **Crystal Green**, 22, of Miramar, Fla., and **Norman Nico Johnson**, 35, and **Abdullah A. Gardner**, 26, both of Inglewood, Calif., were charged in a 15-count indictment returned under seal by a federal grand jury in Kansas City, Mo., on July 1, 2010.

The federal indictment alleges that all five defendants participated in a conspiracy to commit credit and debit card fraud and aggravated identity theft from March 8, 2009, to June 16, 2010. The indictment cites a number of flights in and out of Los Angeles, Calif.

**Pryor** allegedly acted as a black market travel agent. **Ruttly** acted both as a black market travel agent and as a source of stolen credit card and debit card numbers and the means of identification of the cardholders for **Pryor**. **Ruttly** obtained stolen credit card numbers from **Green**, who stole them from her place of employment at a customer call center. **Pearson**, **Johnson** and **Gardner** acted as passenger brokers or referral sources for the black market travel scheme. They referred passengers to **Pryor**. In addition, **Pearson**, **Johnson** and **Gardner** obtained fraudulently purchased airline reservations for themselves through **Pryor**.

In addition to the conspiracy, **Pryor** is charged with seven counts of credit and debit card fraud and seven counts of aggravated identity theft.

*U.S. vs. Palmer, et al: Brooklyn/Orlando/Los Angeles Conspiracy*

**Steven James Palmer**, also known as "Haze," 29, of Philadelphia, Penn., **Gerard Dorien Bates**, also known as "Coko," 23, of Detroit, Mich., **Sean Fleming**, also known as "David Bravo" or "Pucci," 28, of Hialeah, Fla., **Romeyo Calavarey**, also known as "Malawtic Surreal," 25, and **Kareem Nelson**, 31, both of Atlanta, Ga., **Troy Sampson**, also known as "Alaysia Simpson," 33, of North Miami, Fla., **Tyrone Jackson**, also known as "TJ Milan," 23, of Newark, N.J., **Alexander Lewis**, also known as "Mike Gotti," 25, of McDonough, Ga., **Termain Brice**, 31, of Bronx, N.Y., and **Simon P. Carter**, 31, of Brooklyn, N.Y., were charged in a 15-count third superseding indictment returned under seal by a federal grand jury in Kansas City, Mo., on May 5, 2010. The original indictment was returned on July 14, 2009.

The superseding indictment alleges that all nine defendants participated in a conspiracy to commit wire fraud, debit and credit card fraud and aggravated identity theft from Aug. 20, 2008, to March 27, 2010. **Palmer** was originally based in Brooklyn, N.Y., but later moved to Orlando, Fla., then relocated with **Bates** to Los Angeles, Calif., in June 2009.

**Palmer**, **Fleming**, **Jackson**, **Brice** and **Carter** allegedly purchased stolen debit and credit card information from the Bangladesh conspirators and others to make online purchases of airline tickets. They provided the confirmation codes for the tickets to their customers, including **Sampson** and **Nelson**. **Bates** acted as a passenger broker, referring passengers for the black market travel scheme.

In addition, the indictment says, conspirators booked tickets for themselves using the stolen credit and debit card information.

**Lewis** and **Jackson** allegedly supplied stolen credit and debit card numbers from their employers. **Lewis** worked at hotels in the Atlanta, Ga., area, and **Jackson** worked at a bank.

Several conspirators, including **Palmer**, **Bates**, **Fleming**, **Calavarey**, **Jackson** and **Brice**, had access to the merchant identification number belonging to an East Coast business, which they allegedly used to call a credit card verification service. Conspirators could thus check the stolen credit card numbers to determine whether or not the numbers were valid and could be used to purchase airline tickets.

In addition to the conspiracy, **Palmer** is charged with one count of credit card fraud and one count of aggravated identity theft.

In addition to the conspiracy, **Brice** is charged with six counts of credit card fraud and six counts of aggravated identity theft.

*U.S. vs. Clay: Atlanta Conspiracy*

**Ricardo Clay**, 30, of Atlanta, Ga., was charged in a 16-count indictment returned under seal by a federal grand jury in Kansas City, Mo., on April 7, 2010.

The federal indictment alleges that **Clay** participated in a conspiracy to commit aggravated identity theft and credit card fraud from March 22, 2009, to March 16, 2010. **Clay** worked with the Bangladesh conspirators and others to obtain stolen debit and credit card information, the indictment says, then used that information to purchase airline tickets for customers of the scheme.

Among the tickets purchased by **Clay** as part of the conspiracy were United Airlines flights from Chicago, Ill., to Springfield, Mo., and from Springfield to Los Angeles, Calif.

In addition to the conspiracy, the indictment charges **Clay** with 12 counts of aggravated identity theft and three counts of debit or credit card fraud.

Phillips cautioned that the charges contained in these indictments are simply accusations, and not evidence of guilt. Evidence supporting the charges must be presented to a federal trial jury, whose duty is to determine guilt or innocence.

These cases are being prosecuted by Assistant U.S. Attorneys John E. Cowles and Matt Hiller. They were investigated by the U.S. Postal Inspection Service, the Overland Park, Kan., Police Department, and the Kansas City Secret Service Task Force, and with the assistance of the Drug Enforcement Administration.