

Extreme Punishment:
A Presentation by Steven Epstein hosted by the William & Mary Human Security Law Center
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On January 24, 2023, the Criminal Law Society and the Human Security Law Center at William & Mary Law School co-hosted a presentation by Steven Epstein, long-time civil litigator and partner at Poyner Spruill in Raleigh, North Carolina, and the true crime author of *Murder on Birchleaf Drive* (June 2019) and *Evil at Lake Seminole* (June 2020). Mr. Epstein's newest book, *Extreme Punishment* (October 2022), was the subject of his talk at the law school.

The plot of *Extreme Punishment* centers around the shocking 2014 murder of Daniel Markel, a successful professor at Florida State University Law School. Mr. Markel, a graduate of Harvard Law, was also a father of two and an ex-husband to Wendi Adelson, herself a clinical faculty member at Florida State. Mr. Markel and Ms. Adelson divorced in 2013, and the couple were in a bitter custody dispute at the time of his death. In particular, Mr. Markel was refusing to accede to Ms. Adelson's strong desire to relocate with the children from Tallahassee to South Florida.

Mr. Markel was shot in his car while parked in his home's garage on the morning of July 18, 2014. He was discovered alive by his neighbor Jim Geiger, who also observed a silver Toyota Prius speeding away from the scene of the crime. After a delay in the deployment of first response personnel, which resulted in the firing of the area's Director of Dispatch, Mr. Markel was taken to the nearest hospital. He succumbed to his injuries in the early morning hours of July 19, 2014.

Mr. Markel's murder sent shockwaves around the United States and the world, particularly in circles of legal education; its legacy still lingers over the campus of Florida State University. Naturally, investigations into the event and efforts to track down those responsible were already underway before Mr. Markel's passing.

Layers of intrigue and family interest soon began revealing themselves as the investigations continued. Officials discovered that the Prius seen departing the scene was occupied by Luis Rivera and Sigfredo Garcia. Mr. Rivera, leader of the North Miami tribe of the Latin Kings gang, rented the vehicle in his own name and, together with Mr. Garcia, apparently drove from Miami to Tallahassee to carry out the crime.

After being arrested, Mr. Rivera "flipped" on Mr. Garcia, helping to crystalize Mr. Garcia's ties to Mr. Markel's in-laws. Mr. Garcia had two children with Katie Magbanua, who at the time of the murder was the lover of Charlie Adelson, Wendi's brother and a wealthy periodontist. The FBI carried out a "sting operation," secretly recording a conversation between Ms. Magbanua and Mr. Adelson in a restaurant. This recording, after some audio enhancement, led to Mr. Adelson's arrest. His trial will begin in April 2023.

For her part, Ms. Magbanua was convicted in her second trial, after her first trial ended with a hung jury. Forty-four checks signed by Donna Adelson, Wendi's mother, to Ms. Magbanua, all dated after Mr. Markel's murder, may suggest that Wendi's parents were also involved in their son-in-law's death.

As the justice system and law enforcement investigations shed more light on the actors and their motivations, followers of this real-life murder story have much to anticipate. With new revelations practically guaranteed in forthcoming trials, this story is far from over.