



J. HANLEY
WINNEBAGO COUNTY STATE'S ATTORNEY



CARLA REDD
ROCKFORD POLICE CHIEF

PRESS RELEASE
March 25, 2025
State's Attorney J. Hanley

Winnebago County State's Attorney J. Hanley announces that **Taurean T.J. Thomas (DOB: 9/5/86)** and **Katonka D. Friar (DOB: 11/1/73)** have been arrested and charged for the offenses of First Degree Murder, Aggravated Arson, and Concealment of a Homicidal Death. Thomas is currently in custody at Marion Federal Correctional Institution on other, unrelated charges. He is scheduled to be brought back to Winnebago County on a later date to make his initial appearance in court on the new First Degree Murder charges. Katonka Friar was taken into custody yesterday, March 24th, and is currently lodged in the Winnebago County Jail.

On April 17th 2011, at about 4:30am, the Rockford Fire Department responded to a house fire at 2708 Canterbury Lane in Rockford, Illinois. Upon arrival, fire fighters found the single-family structure on fire and were able to extinguish it. During their investigation they found the back door of the house was standing open and the fire appeared to be contained in the southwest bedroom of the house. As they conducted a sweep for signs of life, they located what appeared to be bones within the rubble in the south east bedroom. At this time the Rockford Police Department was notified and responded.

Officers on scene located items of evidentiary value in the yard behind the house, near the back door that was found left open. A search through the rubble in the southeast bedroom revealed three human bodies, later identified as Natasha Cleary and her sons, 12-year-old son Marquwon Owens and 2-year-old Katarion Friar. The bodies were badly burned. The bodies were later transported to the Winnebago County Coroner's Office where an autopsy revealed the cause of death for Natasha and her two sons, Marquwon and Katarion, to be the result of a fatal gunshots.

On April 18th 2011, Detectives learned Natasha's Blackhawk Bank debit card was used in an attempt to withdrawal money from an ATM near the scene, located at 3106 N Rockton Avenue. The transactions were all declined because several incorrect PIN's were attempted. Detectives were provided video from the ATM machine and developed several leads. An extensive investigation continued for years.



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Katonka Friar has always been a prime suspect. Natasha Cleary and Friar divorced in 2009 and child support was ordered on July 30, 2009. In March 2011, Natasha filed a petition against Friar for failure to pay child support. On March 23, 2011, notice was sent to Friar alleging that he was in indirect civil contempt for failure to pay child support. The hearing date for that allegation was set for April 21, 2011.

In September of 2024, Rockford Police Detectives were able to obtain a DNA sample from Taurean Thomas that was later matched with relevant evidence located at the original crime scene. Detectives were also able to positively identify the person who used Natasha's ATM card on April 18, 2011, as Taurean Thomas. A subsequent interview of witnesses and suspects revealed additional evidence leading to the charges against Katonka Friar and Taurean Thomas.

Friar is scheduled to appear in court (today) Tuesday, March 25, 2025, at 1:30pm in Courtroom B of the Winnebago County Criminal Justice Center. And as stated above, Thomas is currently in custody at Marion Federal Correctional Institution on other, unrelated charges. He is scheduled to be brought back to Winnebago County on a later date.

First Degree Murder is a Class M Felony punishable by 20-60 years in the Illinois Department of Corrections. However, if convicted of murdering two or more people, Illinois statute mandates a sentence of natural life. Any sentence to the Department of Corrections is to be served at 100% and will be followed by 3 years of Mandatory Supervised Release.

The charges are merely allegations and the defendants are presumed innocent until or unless proven guilty in a court of law.

The case was investigated by the Rockford Police Department, Rockford Fire Department and the Winnebago County State's Attorney's Office.

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