

# Eight-year sentence given in Chicago racial beating case

By Mike Robinson

CHICAGO (AP)—She listened all day as prosecutors described how her 13-year-old son was beaten and kicked into a coma. At times she held her head in her hands as if overcome by grief. When it was over, Wanda McMurray left the courthouse with a smile and said: "I have justice."

Frank Caruso Jr., 19, one of three white defendants accused in the brutal beating of her son, Lenard Clark, was sentenced last week to eight years in prison. Caruso is expected to appeal.

A jury last month convicted Caruso of aggravated battery and a hate crime in the

1997 beating of the black youngster in the largely white Bridgeport area. The blue-collar neighborhood has produced many major Chicago political leaders.

The attack touched a nerve and focused attention on Chicago's lingering racial tensions. In one of his weekly radio addresses, President Clinton condemned the brutal assault.

Defense attorney Ed Genson read from a letter written by Caruso, in which he said Bridgeport youngsters are taught to see members of minority groups as enemies. The letter denounced "stupidity and prejudice" and expressed regret about Lenard's injuries.

"I pray along with everyone else that he will recover from his injuries," the letter said. "I wish I could make everything right. Everyone thinks I am a monster."

Possible penalties ranged from probation to 13 years in prison. Circuit Judge Daniel Locallo said the cruelty warranted a stiff sentence.

"He showed a complete lack of concern for Lenard Clark, as evidenced by his last kick after stomping Lenard Clark unconscious," he said.

Lenard remains brain damaged from the beating and prosecutors said that bringing him to court would be too painful.

His schoolmate, Cleveon Nicholson, who went to Bridgeport with Lenard in search of air for their bicycle tires, was on hand for the sentencing.

The two boys lingered in the neighborhood until after dark and fell prey to what prosecutors described as a group of young men who habitually bullied black youngsters.

"Beating up kids is what he does," prosecutor Bob Berlin said. "He has a history of it ... The facts of the case are brutal and heinous and indicative of wanton cruelty."

The two other young men charged in the case, Victor Jasas and Michael Kwidzinski, were scheduled to appear in court this week.

## The former H. Rap Brown still fighting for justice, equality

KANSAS CITY, Mo. (AP)—The rhetoric is tamer but the former H. Rap Brown says he remains as committed as ever to fighting racial and social injustice.

Now known as Jamil Abdullah Al-Amin, he urged participants at a gang summit Friday that they must look toward each other to draw strength.

"You are not gangs but are nations and tribes," Al-Amin said at the National Urban Peace and Justice Summit. "God put you that way to get to know each other."



H. RAP BROWN

The summit came amid police concerns that a fatal drive-by shooting of a 10-year-old Kansas City, Kan., girl last week might have been

gang-related. A 15-year-old Kansas City, Kan., boy has been charged with first-degree murder in the case.

Al-Amin said he was not that far removed from the figure who emerged from the racial and social tensions of the '60s. He said his commitment to fighting injustice was strengthened by his conversion to Islam.

"I'm not dissatisfied with what I did," Al-Amin said. "But Islam has allowed things to be clearer."

Al-Amin, once a fiery militant who headed the Student Nonviolent

Coordinating Committee, now is a Muslim spiritual leader at an Atlanta mosque.

"We have to be concerned about the welfare of ourselves and those around us, and that comes through submission to God and the raising of one's consciousness," said Al-Amin, who converted to Islam while serving a five-year prison term for a New York robbery that ended in a shootout with police.

Al-Amin urged summit participants to realize the power and influence they can

have in efforts to bring about positive and lasting change in their communities.

"We are concerned about the welfare and the well-being of our community," he said. "Our job is to bring to their consciousness the practice and the level of commitment that is necessary to change what's in the community."

"Allah tells us that he will not change the condition of a people until there is a change within them," Al-Amin said.

Earlier in the day, more than 100 summit participants

attended workshops and group discussions that focused on economic development, police brutality, health care and community organizing.

Magdalenò M. Rose-Avila, who represents a Miami-based group called Homies Unidos, proposed that more than 2,000 gang members march on Washington to demonstrate to lawmakers the need for policy changes and funding directed toward the urban core.

## Defendant's fiancée speaks on crime

JASPER, Texas (AP)—One of three white men accused of dragging a black man to his death rejected a plea agreement because he wants to prove his innocence in court, according to the man's fiancée.

Shawn Berry, who could face the death penalty if convicted of capital murder, turned down an offer of a life sentence because he fears prison would be worse than dying by lethal injection, said his fiancée, Christie Marcontell.

Marcontell, who spoke Saturday with several newspapers, including the *Houston Chronicle*, said that if Berry goes to prison, "he's got both sides against him. He's got the white supremacists and the blacks against him."

Berry, John William "Bill" King and Lawrence Brewer are accused in the June 7 slaying of James Byrd Jr., who was chained to a pickup truck and dragged for nearly three miles along a rural road. Authorities allege they killed Byrd because of his skin color. All three are imprisoned awaiting trial, scheduled for Jan. 25.

Berry, 23, had cooperated with authorities after his arrest, telling them he

*"They found blood on his shoes. They know he was there"*

— Stella Byrd

watched from a distance while King, 23, and Brewer, 31, killed Byrd. But authorities say subsequent evidence, including blood found on Berry's shoes, shows he might actually have participated in the attack.

Berry's attorney, Joseph Hawthorn, acknowledged his client turned down a plea bargain. Jasper County District Attorney Guy James Gray has declined to comment on any discussions he may have had with Berry's lawyer.

Hawthorn arranged for Marcontell to speak with reporters after she expressed concern that Berry was being painted with the same brush

as his co-defendants.

Marcontell, 22, the mother of Berry's 13-month-old son, said she visits Berry twice a week. However, she said she purposely avoids asking about the killing because she wants to keep Berry's spirits up. Berry also has not discussed the slaying with her, Marcontell said, except to say that "it was all Bill (King), and he pushed Russell into it."

But Stella Byrd, the mother of the dead man, insists Berry is as guilty as his co-defendants.

"They found blood on his shoes. They know he was there," she said. "He's as guilty as the other ones."



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