

RETRIAL WILL TAKE UP QUESTION AGAIN: KILLER OR VICTIM?

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The murder trial of **Karen Norman** -- two weeks of legal arguments and maneuvering, testimony from 39 witnesses and the production of 69 pieces of evidence played out before turn-away crowds -- at times resembled a surreal masquerade drama with the actors continually shifting roles.

Norman , a 20-year-old Wayne State University student, was portrayed as a cold, determined killer -- and as a meek victim pushed to desperate action. Lamont Powell, who died with 47 knife wounds, was seen as a vicious rapist lurking behind a benign facade -- and as a mild-tempered ladies' man who dallied once too often.

The trial ended Friday with the roles still confused.

Judge Beverley Anne Jasper declared a mistrial when the jury of eight women and four men deadlocked after seven days of deliberations, including extraordinary weekend and evening sessions.

A RETRIAL -- tentatively scheduled for February -- will again attempt to resolve the case's central question: Who was the real victim shortly after midnight May 6 in that small house on the 17100 block of Charest?

Norman was charged with first-degree murder for stabbing Powell to death. But she, too, claimed the victim's role, testifying that she was defending herself, doing what she had to do to save herself from Powell's rape, beating and threats of death.

The prosecution said Powell was a generally retiring young man, with a longtime girlfriend, whose roving eye turned toward **Norman** . Assistant Prosecutor Dianne Odrobina said **Norman** , for unknown reasons, killed a helplessly drunken Powell.

Jasper's jury instruction at the end of the first trial spotlighted the uncertainty of **Norman** 's and Powell's roles.

POWELL, a 25-year-old autoworker, was referred to as "the deceased," rather than "the victim." In a highly unusual procedure, the jurors were told they could consider both Powell's and **Norman** 's reputations as "peaceful, non-violent" people, unlikely to commit brutal crimes.

Defense attorney Marjory Cohen sometimes appeared to be prosecuting a sexual assault -- despite her comment to Jasper that "obviously, Mr. Powell is not on trial here. . . ." -- while Odrobina derided the defense's image of Powell as "this enraged rapist."

The case was watched keenly by local attorneys, many of whom squeezed into the press section, already crowded with artists and reporters from both Detroit dailies, the city's major radio and television stations, USA Today and the weekly Revolutionary Worker.

Outside court, spectators waited in line for hours for seats, while members of the **Karen Norman** Support Committee offered the defendant's relatives for media interviews.

DURING THE TRIAL, representatives of "Donahue" tried to line up **Norman** and Cohen for the nationally syndicated television talk show. "Donahue" staffers were interested in the self-defense issue, counterposing **Norman**'s claim with the Dec. 2 fatal stabbing of Caroline Isenberg, an Ivy League acting student, during a Manhattan rooftop rape and robbery.

"All this for \$12," Isenberg told police before dying. "I should have given him the money. I should have let him do it. I should have given in."

But the real audience for the trial was the 10 women -- two of whom were excused for the final deliberation -- and four men chosen as the jury.

In her questioning of the potential jurors, Cohen stressed the self-defense theme, asking jurors to think of themselves in situations where they would have to resort to force.

A major setback for the defense came when Jasper refused to allow Althea Grant, director of the Detroit Rape Counseling Center, to testify about "rape trauma syndrome."

Norman had given inconsistent accounts of the attack to relatives, friends and police. That was part of the confusion and fear of being disbelieved that many rape victims experience, Cohen argued.

IN HER FINAL argument, Odrobina said Powell, whose blood alcohol was nearly twice as high as would be considered legally drunk, was "sleeping or dozing off . . . passed out" when **Norman** started stabbing him.

The clusters of wounds -- 10 to his right shoulder and 13 to his right ear -- proved Powell could not defend himself, let alone be the aggressor in a life-threatening rape, Odrobina said.

Norman's various stories were not the confused outpourings of a traumatized victim but a hastily concocted tangle of lies, Odrobina said.

Cohen, in her final argument after **Norman** testified for more than three hours about a brutal rape by Powell, told the jury: "No one is saying he deserved to die. . . . All you can do now is give justice to **Karen Norman** or compound the nightmare she's been living since that horrible night."

In the end, the question remained: Who was the victim?

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