

COPS GUILTY OF RACKETEERING JURY: THEY STOLE FROM DRUG HOUSES, GAVE PROTECTION

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Three Detroit police officers were convicted Friday **of** drug **racketeering** , civil-rights abuses and extortion after a jury concluded they looted drug houses and gamblers, and offered protection to a pot-selling party-store owner in their patrol **of** the gritty 5th (Jefferson) Precinct.

The trio -- Rodney Rice, Irvin Lamont Upshaw and Larone Cook -- will be sentenced July 31, prosecutors said. The most serious charge, **of racketeering** , carries a maximum sentence **of** 20 years and a \$250,000 fine.

The officers were acquitted **of** other charges involving drugs, guns and violence by jurors in U.S. District Court in Detroit.

A fourth **cop** -- Christopher Cole -- was acquitted **of** all the conspiracy, **racketeering** and extortion charges. He broke into tears as he hugged his lawyer, Anthony Chambers, outside the courtroom, and then departed.

Chambers said Cole would seek reinstatement to the department.

"We're pleased by the jury's verdict," said Jonathan Tukel, an assistant U.S. attorney. The verdicts capped a three-year investigation involving the FBI and the internal affairs division **of** the Detroit Police Department.

Lawyers for the convicted officers expressed disappointment. They criticized the government witnesses, many **of** whom they intimated were lowlifes seeking revenge against the **cops** who patrolled their neighborhoods.

"He didn't do anything," declared defense attorney Steven Fishman **of** his client, Upshaw.

The verdicts are the latest embarrassment for the department, which is reeling from a U.S. Justice Department probe into questionable police shootings, alleged mistreatment **of** prisoners and other problems.

The case arose from a 1998 report that a small band **of** officers in the 5th Precinct may have been robbing and threatening or protecting drug houses and dealers on the city's east side. FBI agents interviewed several officers in the precinct in hopes **of** weeding out rogue **cops** .

A fifth officer, Mark Heath, earlier pleaded **guilty** to misconduct in state court and received a one-year sentence.

The trio convicted Friday was acquitted on the case's most colorful charge involving providing protection to drug organizations. Rice, a 13-year veteran at the time **of** his arrest, was accused **of** failing to appear at a drug trial in return for a payoff, resulting in that case's dismissal.

The three were accused **of** giving the drug organization advance warning **of** upcoming police drug raids.

Jurors weren't convinced.

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