

STIFF PRISON TERMS END MELODY RUCKER CASE

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Saying "for crimes of this nature there cannot be excuses, there must be consequences," Detroit Recorder's Court Judge Michael Talbot sentenced two teenagers Friday to lengthy prison terms for their roles in the shotgun murder of Melody Rucker.

The stern sentences handed down during the emotionally charged proceedings Friday -- and the sentencing last week of the gunman to life in prison without parole -- capped legal action against three 17-year-olds charged with killing the Benedictine High School student last summer at a back-to-school party.

"My heart has been cut away . . . all because some people won't use common sense," said Vera Rucker, the mother of 16-year-old Melody, who was killed by shotgun blasts from a passing car as she stood outside the party with friends on Aug. 16.

Vernard Carter, 17, who drove the car, was sentenced to a mandatory term of life in prison without parole for his first-degree murder conviction. Talbot also sentenced Carter to a concurrent term of 100 to 200 years for the wounding of Vinita Smith, 16, in the incident.

Derrick McClure, 17, was sentenced to 40 to 80 years. McClure, who supplied the shotgun used in the attack, was convicted of second-degree murder.

The gunman in the killing, **Damion Todd**, also 17, was earlier sentenced to life in prison without parole.

TALBOT MET privately with the Rucker family in his chambers after the sentencing. Outside court, Vera Rucker, struggling for composure, said: "He gave us his sympathy. I was glad and I want to thank him for standing up."

According to testimony in the trial, the three young men were retaliating for shots allegedly fired at their group earlier by other, unidentified, youths. **Todd** testified he was merely try to scare the party goers when he fired four times, spraying 100 pellets into the crowd.

Melody Rucker was struck in the head. She was one of 43 Detroit youths, 16 years and younger, to be shot to death in 1986. Vinita Smith was wounded in the arm.

Carter and McClure apologized to the victims' families, and McClure said: "I'm ready to pay my debt."

Carter offered his "sympathy and respect," and said "I pray to God to bless and comfort them."

But Talbot chastised McClure for providing the murder weapon, saying "the ready access to weapons in our community is problem number one." To Carter, recalling testimony that his car

cruised by the party slowly enough for four shots to be fired, Talbot said: "You forfeited your right to go about a normal life by the taking of a life."

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