

TEENAGER GETS LIFE TERM FOR SLAYING AT PARTY

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A Detroit youth who fired a shotgun toward a group of teenagers leaving a party, killing one girl and wounding another, was sentenced Tuesday to mandatory life in prison without parole at hard labor and in solitary confinement.

Relatives and friends of **Damion Todd**, 17, gasped when Recorder's Court Judge Michael Talbot also sentenced the youth to 100 to 200 years for a conviction of assault with intent to murder.

Talbot has acknowledged that the state Department of Corrections does not enforce the solitary confinement and hard labor portions of sentences.

At another sentencing Dec. 5, Talbot explained why he imposes those stipulations anyway: "If the state ever changes its mind about invoking that part of the statute, my customers will be ready."

Todd apologized to the family of Melody Rucker, the slain girl, but Talbot was sharply critical of **Todd**, a comment made by **Todd**'s mother and the social rationalizations often made about the causes of crime.

Rucker, 16, was killed and a Benedictine High School classmate, Vinita Smith, was shot in the arm Aug. 16, on Sunderland near Outer Drive, as a back-to-school party was breaking up.

Rucker was the 19th of 33 teenagers 16 and under shot to death this year in Detroit.

Before his sentencing, **Todd**, a Henry Ford High School senior, said: "I would like to say that I'm very sorry for the situation that happened, and I send my love and sympathy to the Rucker family. I ask that they forgive my friends and I for what has happened."

Talbot said **Todd** committed the "ultimate crime" and had not shown remorse during the trial or at sentencing. The judge also criticized a statement reportedly made by **Todd**'s mother after his conviction, and the arguments that societal ills cause people to commit crimes.

After the verdict, Pamela **Todd** was quoted as saying, "If someone threw a rock at you, what would you do? Would you go home, or throw a rock back? You never know what you'd do if you're shot at, would you?" Her words apparently were a reference to the fact that shots had been fired earlier at **Damion Todd** and his friends.

"That kind of rationalization causes the young people who are sitting in this courtroom and others to conduct themselves in the manner in which you did," the judge told **Todd**.

"And we have heard excuses and excuses, everything from deprivation to poverty to something

or other, or lack of jobs on the street.

"You can be a poor person and be moral. That's what this case comes down to, a sense of respect for human life and morality."

Todd was convicted on the three charges Dec. 16 after a jury trial. He testified that he did not intend to kill or wound anyone when he fired out of the window of a car carrying him and three other youths. He said he wanted to scare the teens who fired at him and his friends as they left the party.

Vernard Carter, who was driving the car, also was convicted of first-degree murder and faces mandatory life in prison. Derrick McClure, who provided the shotgun, was convicted of second-degree murder. Both are 17. They are to be sentenced Jan. 9 before Talbot. Dewayne Smiley, 17, who was also in the car, testified for the prosecution and was not charged.

CUTLINE:

Judge Michael Talbot: "You can be a poor person and be moral. That's what this case comes down to, a sense of respect for human life and morality."

Caption: Photo

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