

## 2 imprisoned in girl's slaying

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DETROIT -- Bracing herself against a podium and pausing to sob, Deneen Thomas struggled Thursday to describe the pain of losing her 3-year-old daughter, Destinee, to a drug-related shooting.

"She was murdered for no apparent reason. They stole my daughter's life," Thomas said before Julian Key and Cedric Pipes were sentenced to life **in** prison. "It's like someone snatched my heart out."

Destinee died **in** her bedroom last March 23 when a spray of bullets riddled her house. Key, **in** a car driven by Pipes, opened fire on her home with an AK-47 rifle, police said.

The shooting was to protect their drug turf, authorities said.

The murder was Detroit's third involving children under age 8 **in** less than a month and shook the city's leaders. Overall, there were more than **two** dozen **slayings** involving juvenile victims. Law enforcement officials vowed to crack down on gun violence, even naming their effort **in** her memory: Project Destinee.

While her death troubled city residents, it scarcely registered with Key, 20, and Pipes, 22.

"I feel sorry for the family. There wasn't no fair trial," Pipes said.

At the time Destinee died, Pipes was on probation for cocaine possession. While on probation, he tested positive for drugs three times and missed seven appointments with his probation officer, court records show. He blamed his second-degree murder conviction on a jury already convinced of his guilt by the media.

Like his family, Key, a convicted thief, wore a T-shirt with his smiling face on one side and the words "All we want is his freedom" on the other.

"This was a tragedy to the world. I'm innocent. Justice wasn't served," he told an unimpressed Wayne County Circuit Judge Brian Sullivan.

Sullivan imposed the required punishment, life without possibility of parole, and told the men they had killed someone where she should have been safest -- **in** her home.

Sullivan called the **slaying** the work of "small-time narcotics dealers who couldn't afford a car but could afford an assault rifle."

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