

COMPARING COCAINE TO SLAVERY, JUDGE LOCKS UP CHAMBERS GANG

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Calling cocaine worse than Hitler or any slave master, a federal judge Friday imposed stiff sentences on members of the **Chambers Brothers** drug gang, described by federal officials as the largest crack cocaine ring ever.

Larry Chambers, 39, who was the leader of the Detroit gang, was sentenced to life in prison and ordered to pay a \$250,000 fine. Three of his brothers -- Otis, Billy Joe and Willie -- and five other people were sentenced to prison terms ranging from 10 to 45 1/2 years.

Crack cocaine "is indeed doing to our poor people what no person could do," U.S. District Judge Richard Suhrheinrich told a packed courtroom in an impassioned speech about the drug and its deadly effects.

"It is enslaving them. . . . It is doing what Hitler could never do to us. It is doing what no slave owner or dictator could do to us," he said. "Drug dealers are making war on our babies. Not only children born today but children to be born."

Attorneys for the defendants said they plan to appeal because of heavy publicity surrounding the trial and false testimony by key government witnesses. One prosecution witness, Perry Coleman, has been convicted of perjury in the case and another, Terry Colbert, recently recanted his testimony.

The attorneys also blasted the government as blowing out of proportion the size of the drug operation, the amount of money raised by the gang and the number of crack houses involved.

"I think this whole case was overstated," said Larry Chambers' attorney, Anthony Chambers, who is no relation to the family.

Commenting on a motion for retrial based on Colbert's recantation, Assistant U.S. Attorney Larry Bunting said, "I have every confidence that the motion for a new trial will be denied."

"We believe Terry Colbert's testimony was true and we had evidence to back it up at trial," said Bunting, who prosecuted the case with U.S. Attorney Roy Hayes.

Government officials have said the **Chambers brothers** supplied and operated more than 300 crack houses throughout the city, beginning in 1983, until their indictment in 1988, at an annual profit of nearly \$42 million. The brothers allegedly recruited dozens of youths from their impoverished hometown of Marianna, Ark., to work in their crack houses.

The brothers allegedly employed a "wrecking crew" that would kidnap, threaten, assault and even kill victims.

Hayes, denying that the size and impact of the drug ring had been exaggerated, said:

"Take a look at the victims of this situation. . . . What we have shown is no matter how big you are, no matter how much money you make, no matter how tough you think you are, the system works.

"We will investigate, prosecute and convict."

Sentences for the other defendants were:

- * Billy Joe Chambers, 26, 45 1/2 years in prison and \$500,000 fine.
- * Otis Chambers, 21, 27 years, \$350,000.
- * Willie Chambers, 34, nearly 22 years.
- * Eric Wilkins, 22, nearly 34 years in prison. His sentence is to run concurrent with a 13 1/2-to-20-year sentence he is serving on a state charge.
- * Marshall Glenn and Jerry Lee Gant, 30 years.
- * Belinda Lumpkin, 19, 25 years.
- * Elaine Lucas, 25, 10 years.

The sentences for all defendants except Wilkins fall under new federal sentencing guidelines that deny the defendants parole.

DRUG GANG SENTENCES

Members of the **Chambers Brothers** gang were sentenced in federal court Friday.

- * Larry Chambers: life in prison and \$250,000 fine.
- * Billy Joe Chambers: 45 1/2 years in prison and \$500,000 fine.
- * Otis Chambers: 27 years, \$350,000.
- * Willie Chambers: nearly 22 years.

Memo: CORRECTION RAN March 26, 1989

getting it straight

* A Saturday article about the **Chambers Brothers** drug ring should have said the 34-year prison sentence given to Eric Wilkins, 22, will begin after Wilkins finishes a 13 1/2-to 20-year sentence on a state charge. The sentences will not run concurrently, U.S. District Judge Richard Suhrheinrich ruled.

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