

CONVICTED IN BELLE ISLE DEATH, MARTELL WELCH ASKS NEW TRIAL APPEALS COURT HEARS ARRAY OF ARGUMENTS

Detroit Free Press (MI) - Wednesday, August 6, 1997

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A severed leg, the victim's poor judgment, a prosecutor's inflammatory statements and a witness who was never heard are all reasons the man convicted in the Belle Isle Bridge murder case deserves a new trial, his lawyer argued Tuesday.

Speaking before the Michigan Court of Appeals, Carl Ziemba said that Martell Welch Jr. was denied a fair trial. Welch, 20, was found guilty last year of second-degree murder in the 1995 death of **Deletha Word** and given a 16-to-40-year prison sentence.

Word jumped from the bridge to escape Welch, who was menacing her with a tire iron after beating her over a minor car accident.

Ziemba told the three-judge panel that the prosecution never proved its case. But Timothy Baughman, head of the Wayne County Prosecutor's appellate division, said: "This is a textbook murder case with very real results."

Ziemba also objected to graphic testimony detailing the condition of **Word**'s body when it was pulled from the Detroit River. A boat's propeller had severed **Word**'s leg after she drowned.

But Judge Michael Smolenski questioned the testimony's impact.

"There was an ongoing beating, verbal abuse, a bleeding victim imploring for help and the defendant coming at her with a tire iron," Smolenski said. "How does the condition of Ms. **Word**'s body have such an overwhelming effect on the jury?"

Ziemba argued that his client did not force **Word**, a 33-year-old mother who was high on PCP, to jump.

"Did she make the proper decision? I think that is questionable. Is that normal conduct? ...Can you tell me every egress to Jefferson Avenue was absolutely cut off for this woman? Was the only way to go over the rail?"

A skeptical Judge Hilda Gage asked Ziemba: "You think Ms. **Word** should have stayed there and taken more?"

Ziamba said the prosecution painted the defendant in the "darkest hues possible" and argued that jurors should have heard the comments of a missing witness who reportedly told police that **Word**, as she ran past him, cried out that she was going to kill herself.

Edition: METRO FINAL

Section: NWS

Page: 2B

Index Terms: MARTELL WELCH JR. ; TRIAL ; NEW

Record Number: 9708060212

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