

## **Jury weighing death penalty - Lawyer makes plea for life prison term for convicted killer**

Detroit News, The (MI) - Thursday, August 14, 2003

Author: The Detroit News ; David Shepardson

DETROIT -- A federal **jury** was to begin deliberations today to decide whether to sentence a convicted Detroit drug dealer to **death** .

John Bass, 34, of Detroit was convicted Monday of killing Armenty Shelton in a drug-related murder and of conspiracy to distribute cocaine. If sentenced to **death** , he could be the first man in eastern Michigan to receive the **death penalty** since 1938.

In an emotional presentation, defense **lawyer** Andrea Lyon repeatedly reminded jurors that the alternative to **death** is mandatory life imprisonment without the possibility of parole.

"John Bass will be carried out of prison in a pine box. Will it be in God's time or yours?" said Lyon, who appeared near tears at times. "Please don't kill him."

Lyon repeatedly told jurors that just one of them could spare Bass' life -- even if all 11 others disagreed.

The government's presentation was restrained and didn't directly ask the jurors to impose the **death penalty** . The government didn't call any witnesses and didn't question any family members who took the stand.

Assistant U.S. Attorney Michael Leibson said Bass went on a "decade-long campaign of violent acts, torture and murder."

As long as jurors follow the judge's instructions, "any verdict that you reach will be the right one," Leibson said.

Leibson didn't dispute many of the mitigating factors that the defense introduced to try to convince the jurors to sentence him to life -- but argued that they weren't relevant.

Leibson also noted that at least two people -- including Shelton, who was shot repeatedly by Bass -- died as a result of Bass' actions. A witness testified that Bass shot and killed Shelton in 1996 in Detroit to cover up the killing of his brother, Patrick Webb. The government claimed Shelton killed Webb at Bass' order.

Also, Leibson noted that other family members hadn't gotten into trouble and they had grown up in the same environment as Bass.

Family members portrayed the 34-year-old Bass' life as an unspeakable tale of poverty, drugs and violence.

Bass's mother, Carolyn Webb, is an admitted crack addict who had Bass at 19, her fourth of 10 children. At least eight of her children are fathered by different men and most -- including Bass -- don't know who their father is.

Webb moved her children in and out of tiny Detroit apartments and abandoned houses, often forcing as many as seven children to sleep on a mattress in an unheated room, family members told the court.

She engaged in prostitution and encouraged her children to steal and sell drugs to support the family, said her sister, Virginia Marshall.

When Bass was 8, his mother shot her common-law husband to **death** in the living room, while Bass and many of the children hid in an upstairs closet. She was acquitted at trial in the **death**.

Bass, the father of four children, suffers from brain damage, dropped out of school in ninth grade and began selling drugs at 15, family members said. His 12-year-old son, DeJon, testified by videotape on his father's behalf.

At least one juror wiped away tears during the presentation.

Government prosecutors had alleged Bass ran the Dog Pound gang, which distributed cocaine in southeast Michigan and Ohio, and took part in the murders of Shelton and three other men.

He allegedly hired Shelton to kill his brother in 1996 to cut his brother out of the drug trade. Jurors found Bass not guilty in the **death** of his brother.

Webb's 17-year-old son, Patrick Webb Jr., testified on Bass' behalf.

"I don't believe he killed my dad," Webb Jr. said. "I don't want to see him die."

The Justice Department is seeking the **death penalty** against five other men in Michigan. In 16 of the last 17 federal **death penalty** cases, **juries** have opted against imposing the **death penalty**.

Edition: One Dot

Section: Metro

Page: 01D

Index Terms: MICHIGAN ; MURDER ; TRIALS ; CAPITAL ; PUNISHMENT

Dateline: DETROIT

Record Number: det17003142

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