

The Sun

**Jury convicts man in rape of teen-ager**  
**Chase found guilty on 15 counts involving assault, robbery of girl**  
**Life term a possibility**  
**Howard circuit judge to decide defendant's sentence in April**

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Timothy B. Chase was convicted yesterday of raping and robbing a 15-year-old girl as she waited for her mother outside Howard County's central library in Columbia.

Chase looked steadily at the Carroll County jurors as the foreman read the verdict that could send him to prison for life.

But after the jurors left, Chase -- wearing an African Kufi cap and a T-shirt that read "Jesus" across the back -- began talking feverishly to his attorney, throwing his hands up in apparent frustration.

Tucking a book about Nation of Islam leader Louis Farrakhan under his shoulder, Chase -- escorted by authorities -- left the courtroom with a defiant strut.

The jury, which was sequestered Thursday because of an incident at the jail where Chase was being held, deliberated 3 1/2 hours before returning with a verdict.

It found Chase, 29, guilty of 15 charges including first- and second-degree rape, first-degree sex offense, kidnapping, robbery and perverted sexual practices for forcing the teen-ager and her 7-year-old sister into the woods behind the library March 20.

Chase of West Columbia will be sentenced April 10 in Howard Circuit Court by Judge Diane O. Leasure, who moved the trial to Carroll because of pretrial publicity.

The charges of first-degree rape and first-degree sex offense carry maximum sentences of life in prison. Because Chase had two previous armed robbery convictions, he is subject to Maryland's statute that calls for criminals convicted of three violent crimes to be sentenced to at least 25 years without parole.

The case against Chase struck a chord in the hearts of many Howard County parents who found themselves second-guessing the safety they always had taken for granted in the suburb.

Assistant State's Attorney Janine L. Rice, the lead prosecutor on the case, said she was pleased by the verdict.

"Pleasure is an understatement," Rice said. "As a person and an individual, the hardest part of the case was hearing Dr. {Willie} Bivings' testimony describing the injuries" and the victim's pain during the rape examination.

"It hasn't been a hard case; it's been a very involved case," Rice said, standing in Carroll County Circuit Court.

Neither Chase's attorney, W. Samuel Truette, nor Chase would comment on the case.

In five days of testimony and arguments, prosecutors centered their case on two pieces of physical evidence: DNA tests on semen stains found on the victim's sweater they said linked Chase to the crime, and two gold rings worn by the victim the night of the rape that police found in Chase's pockets five days later.

No positive identification

Their case appeared to suffer a blow when the Columbia teen-ager, after a moving hour of testimony, could not positively identify Chase as her assailant.

In a bold defense move, Chase testified in his defense Friday that he was a convicted armed robber and drug dealer and had received the two rings as partial payment in a crack cocaine sale the night of the rape.

In closing arguments yesterday, Truette told the jury that Chase had bared an "ugly truth" to them by admitting he was selling drugs -- in violation of his probation.

"Yes, he's a stickup man and a drug dealer, but that doesn't make him a rapist," Truette said.

Rice responded by telling the jurors that this was not a case about admitting past sins but about finding the truth.

"He wants to plea bargain with you," Rice told jurors, pointing at Chase. "This is not 'Geraldo Rivera,' where you air your dirty laundry in the hopes that people will think there is nothing worse you possibly could have done."

Chase spent all but six months between December 1984 and May 1994 in jail, convicted of two armed robberies and selling cocaine to an undercover officer.

After his release in 1994, he became a janitor at Howard County General Hospital. Friday, his father -- Rudolph Chase -- told jurors that Chase also earned extra money ironing his stepmother's nurse uniform.

Throughout the trial, Chase's attorney never disputed the viciousness of the crime, but he tried to persuade jurors that Chase was not the man who did it. Truette said the victim never picked Chase out of a lineup or identified his picture, and faltered when called to identify him from the witness stand Tuesday.

"I think so'," said Truette, recalling the victim's testimony when asked whether her assailant was in the courtroom. "The state just said that would be enough for you. Would that be enough for you?"

Truette pointed to Chase's claim that he walked with a limp at the time of the rape, something the girls did not mention in their testimony. Chase also has bad teeth, and the girls did not mention that, either, Truette said.

But in the end, the jury decided that Chase did commit the crime that one PTA leader called "a parent's nightmare."

"I am just delighted for the victim," said Sheila Begg of the Howard County Sexual Assault Center, who counseled the victim before and during the trial. "She's a wonderful young woman."

Difficult case

The case against Chase was not an easy one to handle. There were no fingerprints of Chase, as a defense witness pointed out.

Crime lab technicians found semen stains but only one proved large enough for DNA testing. And that one was so small that a test that is used to exclude suspects -- as opposed to identifying them as the possible source of the sperm -- had to be used. A DNA expert testified that Chase and the semen shared patterns that occur in one of every 9,000 African-American men.

Prosecutors could not use evidence that proved vital to Chase's arrest. Chase's wife -- who initially gave police a written statement incriminating her husband -- said she would refuse to testify against him, her right under state law.

According to charging documents, Lillian Chase told police that on the night of the rape, her husband came home with dirt on his clothes and with two rings and an earring.

She said he told her he had taken the jewelry from a girl who was waiting for her mother, and she gave police an earring that belonged to the victim.

The case was moved out of Howard after Leasure ruled that an article in the Howard County edition of The Sun was so detailed that Chase could not get a fair trial.

Once in Carroll, the jury was sequestered after Chase told the court that he had lost the notes he had took throughout the trial. They disappeared during a search of his jail unit. There was concern that if the notes became public, they could prejudice the jury.

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Chase's mother, who would not give her name, said before the verdict was reported that her son was innocent.

"I know my son would feel horrible if someone did something like that to his sisters, his aunt or his mother," she said.

"In our family, the men respect the women."

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