

Williams gets life sentence in strangulation, beating death

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Joe Sidney Williams Jr. was sentenced to life in prison Wednesday for the March 1986 beating, suffocation and strangulation death of Juanita White.

A 54th State District Court jury of seven women and five men deliberated about 2½ hours before returning their verdict. The jury deliberated about five hours Friday before finding Williams, 20, guilty of capital murder in the

□ Victim's son: Williams innocent — Local 1B

break-in at White's house at 1901 N. 15th St. She also was sexually assaulted.

Williams, who his attorneys say never wavered in his profession of innocence, maintained that contention after the verdict was read. When asked by Judge George Allen if there was any reason why he should not be sentenced, Williams said, "Yes. I never killed no one in my life."

In reaching the verdict, jurors had to determine if Williams acted deliberately with a reasonable expectation that death would occur, and if it's likely that Williams will continue to be a continuing threat to society. If jurors had answered both questions affirmatively, Allen would have sentenced Williams to death.

Jurors did not answer the first question and answered the second

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question yes, resulting in the life sentence.

Defense attorneys Rick Bostwick and Walter Reaves said jurors believed two prosecution witnesses who testified that Williams said he was involved in the burglary, but not the killing.

The attorneys said they will appeal the case and file a motion for a new trial. Williams will stay in the McLennan County Jail until a hearing on the motion can be scheduled.

"I think this is probably the only capital murder case that has ever been tried in the state of Texas where jurors didn't answer the first issue and answered the second one yes," Reaves said. "I think that tells you something about the caliber of the state's case."

Both attorneys said they were surprised the jury did not return the death penalty after finding Williams guilty based on what they called the "questionable testimony" of at least eight state witnesses who all had previous con-

victions, were in jail or on parole and admitting lying to police.

"It is a very surprising result in that it is a very complicated, sophisticated finding," Bostwick said. "It is the way the system is supposed to work."

Prosecutors Scott Peterson and Karen Amos said they thought the jury did a conscientious job and rendered a fair verdict.

"It is like I told the jury. It was not our decision, it was their decision," Amos said. "It is very difficult when you have a 19-year-old boy facing the death penalty."

One juror who asked not to be identified said the jury agreed not to say anything immediately about how they arrived at their verdict or why they failed to answer the first question.

"Let's just say that the way some things were worded, it isn't always easy to have people in agreement. I think we were a fine jury. This was my first time on a jury and I didn't even get a chance to get my feet wet first with another case. I just jumped in over

my head in this case and I will be glad to go home."

Another juror said, "It was a very trying, very exhaustive and an emotional three weeks, but other than that, I have no comment."

Peterson told jurors during summations that the nature of the crime proves that Williams would continue to be a threat to society.

"He burglarized her house, he beat her, he raped her, and then he stole her car. He showed no remorse and went out partying with his friends," Peterson said.

Peterson said Williams' juvenile records, which were introduced during punishment testimony, indicate a pattern of increasing violence that began with an assault complaint when he was 11.

Williams' co-defendant, Calvin Earl Washington, 30, also is charged with capital murder in White's death. He probably will be tried in another city because of publicity surrounding Williams' case, but no trial date or location have been set.