

Man gets 14 years following wild sentencing hearing in Spotsylvania

Keith Epps

Nov 19, 2019

A man convicted of raping his estranged wife was formally sentenced to 14 years in prison Tuesday following a wild hearing that included him being dragged out of the courtroom by bailiffs and shouts from the victim's mother claiming the defendant was innocent.

Deandre Johnson, 25, of Ridgeley, W.Va., received the sentence a Spotsylvania Circuit Court jury recommended in June after convicting him of rape, strangulation, domestic assault and unlawful entry.

The turmoil started shortly after Judge Ricardo Rigual denied Johnson's request for a new trial. Johnson, who represented himself, went through a litany of things he claimed were worthy of having his convictions tossed out.

Prosecutor Ryan Mehaffey had just started his closing argument when the proceeding was interrupted by a loud bang on the defense table. Court bailiffs swarmed on Johnson and hauled him out of the courtroom.

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At the same time, the victim's mother stood up in the back of the courtroom and announced that she needed to talk to Judge Rigual.

"He didn't rape my daughter," the woman said.

The woman was told to either be quiet or leave the courtroom. She didn't say anything else once the sentencing resumed, but her daughter cried profusely after hearing what her mother said.

The hearing resumed in another courtroom, where Johnson listened to the rest of the hearing from a holding area with a window looking into the courtroom. Rigual said there was already extra security in court because jail officials had warned about Johnson's behavior.

Rigual had pronounced the sentence and declared the case ended when officials realized Johnson had not been given an opportunity to speak prior to being sentenced.

After Johnson spoke through a speaker system about how he'd been "wrongfully and unlawfully" convicted, the judge reaffirmed the 14-year sentence.

According to evidence presented at trial, Johnson and the victim were married in November 2018, but separated a short time later.

The woman was with her boyfriend at a residence in Spotsylvania the night after Christmas when Johnson showed up wearing all black. He ordered the boyfriend to leave and forced the woman back into the residence, according to testimony.

The boyfriend, who was with the victim in court Tuesday, testified at trial through a Spanish interpreter that he called the police after going into the home and seeing Johnson choking the woman.

He fled for the second time after Johnson came toward him, but deputies were already on the way. Johnson fled after hearing sirens, but left behind his shoes, jacket and DNA.

Police said Johnson admitted to grabbing the woman and taking her into the apartment, but denied sexually assaulting her. He continued denying that Tuesday.

Johnson has already been convicted of five counts of violating a protective order for contacts he made to the woman from jail.

On Tuesday, he was again ordered to have no contact with the woman, though he has said in letters to the court that he plans to contest their divorce and expects to reconcile with the woman.



Johnson

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