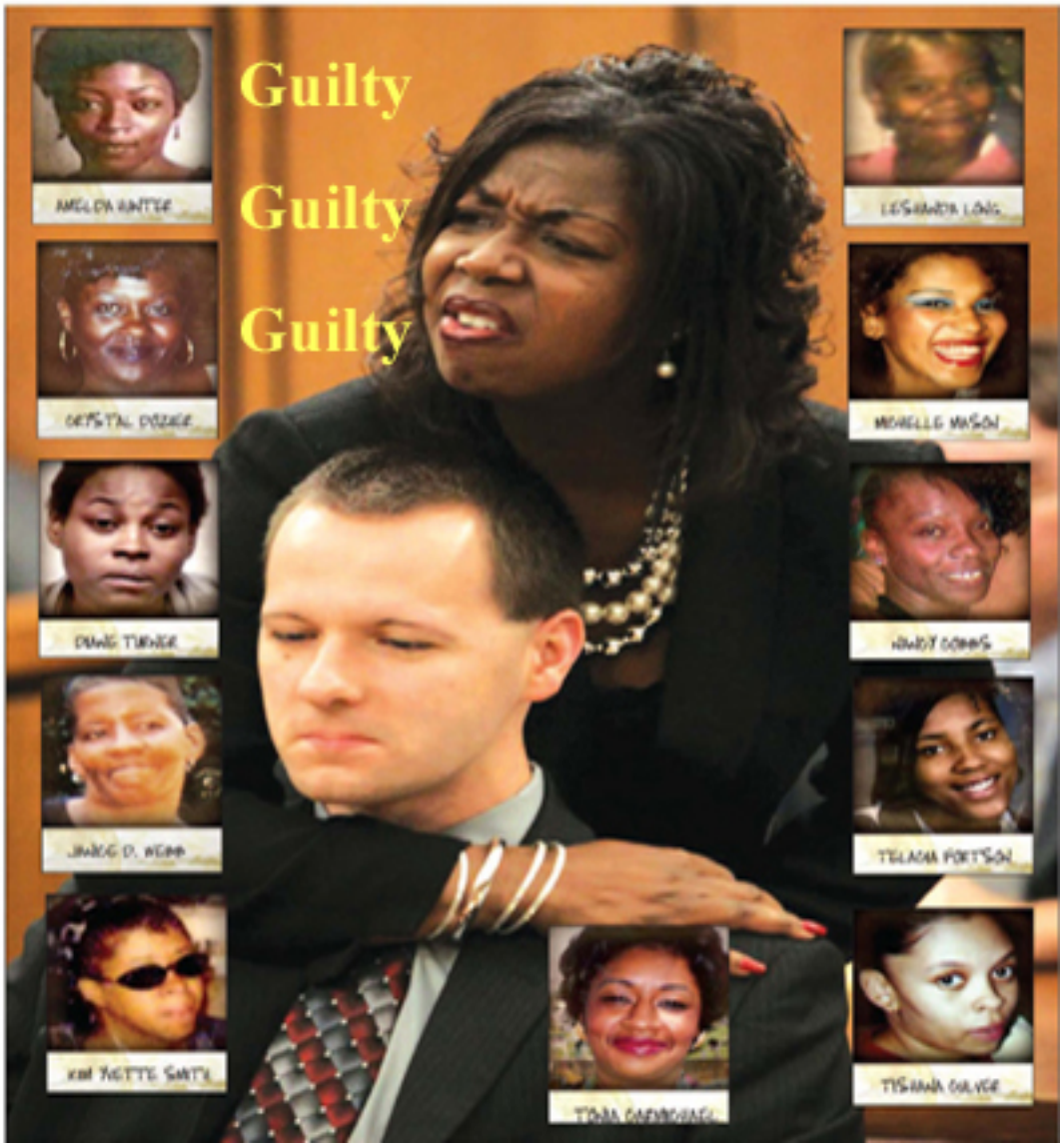

"I know everybody said he's a good guy. He helped out everyone, he I guess ran an all-night cemetery too," Carr said. "'Hey, Tony, you think I can put this body in your basement.' Because he was a nice guy."

Prosecutor proves her case

By JAMES W. WADE III

Staff reporter

51-year-old Anthony Sowell was convicted Friday in Cuyahoga County Common Pleas Court of the murder of Tonia Carmichael, who was strangled with an electrical charger for a cell phone or camera. After that verdict was read, similar verdicts were read for the other ten women, Nancy Cobbs, Tishana Culver, Crystal Dozier, Telacia Fortson, Amelda Hunter, Leshanda Long, Michelle Mason, Kim Yvette Smith, Janice Webb and Diane Turner.

In each case, Sowell was also found guilty of related counts, including abuse of a corpse, kidnapping and assault. There were a total of 83 counts; Sowell was acquitted of only one count.

Sowell sat emotionless as the verdicts were read; the only time he moved around was right after he was found guilty of the aggravated murder of Tonia Carmichael, when he turned around to

be handcuffed by a Cuyahoga County deputy. He held up those handcuffed hands as he was led out of the courtroom.

The charges follow: aggravated murder, kidnapping, abuse of a corpse, and tampering with evidence for the murder of eleven females between June 2007 and June 2009. The victims were found at his residence located on Imperial Avenue, in Cleveland. The aggravated murder charges carry course of conduct and felony murder specifications, making these offenses eligible for the death penalty pursuant to
Ohio
law.

Just a few days earlier assistant prosecuting attorney Pinkey Carr displayed her poise in the court room doing the closing argument. As Carr walked to the center of the room to address the jurors, Carr said the jury has heard from 62 witnesses and can determine what to believe.

"You have the right to believe some, all or none," Carr said. "The proof in this case is proof beyond a reasonable doubt."

Over the next few days, Cleveland and the surrounding suburbs, the state of Ohio and all over the United States, people were in shock. Cleveland has a serial killer," Carr said.

"I know everybody said he's a good guy. He helped out everyone, he I guess ran an all-night cemetery too," Carr said. "'Hey, Tony, you think I can put this body in your basement.' Because he was a nice guy."

"'Thanks for burying Crystal so nicely,'" Carr said, mocking the defense. "After that, no more Mr. Nice Guy." Carr at one point even displayed the choking position in her closing argument.

"Leshanda Long, where's her body? Where?" Carr said. She said if the jurors believe the owner of Imperial Beverage, there was a large garbage bag in his store's dumpster that smelled really bad. She holds up two photos: one of the red bucket, the other of Long's skull.

"He did it because he's evil. He did it because he's a serial killer," Carr said. "He did it. Not the bogey man, not Jermaine Henderson, not his step-mother Sojourna."

Slowly, Carr holds up a picture of each of the 11 whose bodies were found on Imperial Avenue, saying they are the 11 reasons why Anthony Sowell is guilty. "Find him guilty of each and every count. Do justice," Carr said.

Carr began working in the Office of the County Prosecuting Attorney in 2002. She has been in the Major Trial Unit, the elite team of assistant prosecuting attorneys who handle rapes and murders, for seven years. She is a graduate of
Cleveland
’s
John F. Kennedy High School
,
Baldwin-Wallace College
, and Cleveland Marshall College of Law. She was previously employed for nine years by the City of Cleveland under former Mayor Michael R. White as Law Director, Chief Counsel; Chief Assistant Director of Law for Code Enforcement and Labor and Employment sections; and Assistant Criminal Prosecutor.

Ms. Carr has prosecuted numerous heinous crimes. She prosecuted Lamidi Kafaru, who is currently serving a life sentence for the murder of Cleveland Police Officer Derek Owens; the 20 05 East 87
th
Street
Federal arson trial of Antun Lewis; and the attempted murder and rape of Johanna Orozco, who survived a gunshot wound to the face. Ms. Carr also prosecuted Lorenzo Collins, who set an apartment building on fire killing four innocent children; and Anthony Johnson, who murdered his 18-month-old son.

Next up is the mitigation phase of the trial, which Judge Dick Ambrose set to begin Monday, Aug. 1, 2011. Both sides will present witnesses who will testify about Sowell as a person and whether he deserves the death penalty or not.

The same jury that found Sowell guilty of all counts after only about 15 hours of deliberations will return for the mitigation phase of the trial, and will recommend a sentence to Judge Ambrose.

A gag order imposed by Judge Ambrose remains in effect until Sowell is sentenced, so prosecutors and defense lawyers are not able to comment until then.

In a written statement, Cleveland Mayor Frank Jackson said, "My hope is that this verdict brings the family and friends of the victims closure and some measure of peace. Today marks the end of their wait for justice." Cleveland Police Chief Michael McGrath said in a statement "The first phase of the Anthony Sowell trial has concluded and as a result of the hard work by the Cleveland Division of Police homicide unit and the Cuyahoga County prosecutor's office a guilty verdict was handed down. The Cleveland Division of Police would like to extend our sincerest condolences to the families of the victims."