

Middle School Computer Class Intern Found
Guilty of Cyberbullying and Assaulting Student

Courtroom Journalist Article

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Middle School Computer Class Intern Found Guilty of Cyberbullying and Assaulting Student

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Pikesville, CA—Eighteen-year-old computer class intern and alumnus of Paul Laurence Dunbar Middle School Jesse Woodson was found guilty of the cyberbullying and assault of student Angel Sterling Tuesday night. Sterling, 13, became the target of online bullying on social networking site FacePlace by a group of fellow Dunbar students known as the Pirates after a student I.D. card belonging to Pirates member Madison Jackson was found in Sterling's home following a break-in. After receiving anonymous threats on instant messaging service Buddylink and discovering Woodson's vindictive FacePlace page, "Clip Angel's Wings," Sterling's grades plummeted, prompting her mother to pull her out of school. Following a half day at Dunbar on March 12, 2010, Sterling was found lying in an alleyway off of Fremont Ave. at 1 p.m. with a major rear head injury that kept her in a coma for the ensuing 48 hours. A corner of a nearby loose brick was covered in blood and hair. The prosecution argued against Woodson by citing the implications of his belligerent online interactions with Sterling and his position as "captain" of the Pirates. Conversely, the defense emphasized Sterling's confession to vice Principal Sydney Campbell regarding her desire to "do anything to get back to Nebraska, even if it meant breaking the law," as well as the lack of eyewitnesses of the incident.

The prosecution began by using detective Frankie Cooper, a computer forensics expert who was the first to find Sterling. Cooper referred to a previous incident in 2005 in which Woodson threw a brick at a student who was assaulting Woodson's sister. She also traced a threat sent from the Dunbar computer lab and discovered that it was sent from a computer that Woodson was logged on to at the time.

Dr. Samantha Holloway, who investigated the nature of Sterling's wounds, testified to having taken a sample of "red dust" found under Woodson's fingernails and on his clothing, and discovered that it was the same dust used to coat the city's bricks. The defense countered her claims with Dr. Brook Crane, who claimed that the slightest disturbance could have caused a brick to fall and hit Sterling. The prosecution questioned these statements later on in their closing statements by indicating that the dilapidated wall from which bricks could have fallen was located on the opposite side of the building where Sterling was found, with Holloway indicating that the chance of a brick falling was "statistically unlikely."

In his cross-examination, Woodson claimed to have had set up the FacePlace page as a method of giving the Pirates a place to vent their anger toward Sterling, and justified his threatening posts such as "Someone should teach that kid a lesson. Anyone got a brick?" as part of an inside joke within the Pirates stemming from his 2005 assault.

In its closing argument, the prosecution asserted that Woodson was the only interviewed individual who showed indications of having brick dust on his body, regardless of the material's alleged ubiquity in the city. The defense subsequently reasoned that Woodson had attempted everything in his power to lessen tension between Sterling and the Pirates.

At 8:25 p.m. on the night of the trial, Woodson was arrested under a count of assault with a deadly weapon (California Penal Code Section 245(a)(1)) and a count of infringement of the Anti-Bullying and Cyber-bullying of Students Act (California Penal Code Section 626.3). He was escorted from the courtroom under custody of the sheriff.