

Sentencing hearing begins for killer of 5 in Liberty City

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The sentencing phase began Tuesday for a man convicted of executing five men inside a Liberty City apartment 13 years ago during a drug heist.

After what is expected to be a week of testimony, a Miami-Dade jury will recommend to Miami-Dade Circuit Judge Dava Tunis whether Tavares Calloway should be given the death penalty or a life sentence.

“The sentencing phase is like a mini-trial,” said Sydney Smith, one of Calloway's attorneys.

In July, jurors convicted Calloway, 31, of five counts of first-degree murder and one count each of robbery with a firearm, kidnapping and burglary of an occupied dwelling.

The victims were found bound, gagged and shot in the head.

Calloway and another man seeking drugs and money stormed an apartment in January 1997, hogtied five men, taped their mouths shut and removed their pants.

After debating whom to leave alive, Calloway methodically shot each in the head, prosecutors said at the trial.

The dead were drug dealers Adolphus Melvin, 27; Gary St. Charles, 22; Trenton Thomas, 26; Frederick McGuire, 31, and Melvin's visiting nephew, Derwin Bernard Copeland, 28.

The case remained cold for more than a year until detectives investigating another murder learned about Antonio Clark, whose fingerprint was matched to one at the massacre scene. He led police to Calloway, who detectives said also confessed in detail.

Clark has been convicted. He is serving a life sentence.

With no fingerprints, physical evidence or eyewitnesses to the gunfire to link Calloway to the murders, his confession became the focal point of the case.

Calloway testified at his trial that homicide detectives pressured him to falsely confess with the promise it would help catch the real killers.