

COURTROOM DRAMA

3 Knocks on Door Signal Jury Ready With Verdict

The signal, three knocks on the jury room door, came at 11:34 a.m. Saturday.

The raps by foreman Max Causey meant the jury of eight men and four women had reached a verdict in the Jack Ruby murder trial.

Reporters pushed to get into the courtroom.

Deputies held them back. Security measures were still in effect. Each reporter would be searched.

11:40 A.M.—Dist. Atty. Henry

Wade paced back and forth in front of the empty jury box. He puffed a cigarette nervously. Melvin Belli, the chief defense lawyer, talked with reporters. He expected a conviction and a severe penalty. "We'll appeal. Hell, yes, we'll appeal," he said.

11:48 A.M.—Tension was increasing as reporters awaited the arrival of Judge Joe B. Brown, who was driving to the Criminal Courts Building to receive the verdict. Spectators

milled around outside the courtroom, hoping to catch a glimpse of the central figures in this courtroom drama. Others stood across Main Street from the courtroom.

11:50 A.M. — Assistant Dist. Atty. William F. Alexander sat with his wife on a courtroom bench. "What do you think the verdict is, Bill?" reporters asked. "I'm predicting death," he replied.

12 NOON—Assistant Dist. Atty. A. D. Jim Bowie observed that he could not recall when he had been so weary. An officer told him, "You'll have the satisfaction of knowing you helped make history." Bowie smiled and said, "I wish it were history now." Meanwhile, Assistant Dist. Atty. Frank Watts paced the courtroom, his arms folded.

12:10 P.M.—Sheriff Bill Decker called out to reporters. "It won't be long now. The judge is here." Then Decker had a final security briefing with his deputies. Defense attorney Phil Burleson shook hands with Wade and observed, "This has been an ordeal." Wade nodded in agreement.

12:10 P.M.—Judge Brown entered the courtroom, his black robe flowing. Deputies followed with Ruby. He was tense. So was everyone else.

12:20 P.M.—Judge Brown told spectators, some of them standing because all seats had been taken, "I want no demonstration, no sound, no gesturing of any kind . . ." The courtroom became deathly quiet.

12:21 P.M. — Judge Brown glanced at the verdict, began reading, "We, the jury find the defendant guilty of murder with malice . . ." All eyes were on Ruby. He peered at Judge Brown, glanced quickly at the jury box, then peered at Judge Brown again as the stern-faced jurist continued to read . . . and assess his punishment at death."

The suspense had ended.

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