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Dyson Williams Sentenced To 17 Years For Killing Nun In Harlem Chase

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Franciscan Handmaids, Harlem

A 22-year-old Manhattan man was sentenced on Tuesday to 17 years to life in prison after his high-speed drive through Harlem caused a horrific wreck that resulted in the killing of an 84-year-old nun and the injury of four people.

In June 2010, Dyson Williams was in a blue Chrysler Pacifica in Harlem that was pulled over by police who were investigating a robbery. Williams took the wheel and led police on a 20-block chase, culminating with the Pacifica's striking of another car. That car in turn plowed into and killed Sister Mary Celine Graham, 84, of the Franciscan Handmaids of Mary, a Harlem religious order.

Last month Williams pleaded guilty to robbery, murder and assault.

Assistant District Attorney Peter Casolaro said Graham had become a nun at an early age and worked with young people as a teacher for many years.

"All that good work has come to an end because she is gone," Casolaro said, adding that Williams had "brushed off" the incident.

"He certainly doesn't express the empathy that a normal person would in causing so much anguish," Casolaro said.

Williams' defense attorney disputed that, saying his client told him that the crash was "horrible" and a "mistake."

The crash injured four others, none of whom chose to speak at the sentencing. In court the prosecution highlighted their ongoing troubles.

Former nurse's aide Patricia Cruz, who was hit during the crash, is still recovering from her injuries and in "constant pain," Casolaro said.

Another person, whose legs were severely injured as a result of the accident, can no longer walk, Casolaro said. The woman whose car was struck by Williams still has difficulty getting behind the wheel and has psychological scars, he added.

Williams' chase began after police pulled over the Chrysler Pacifica with him and William Robbins, 20, in connection with a string of armed robberies. After Robbins exited the driver's seat, Williams took the wheel and the car sped off. Last month Robbins pleaded guilty to robbery and agreed to 15 years in prison in exchange for prosecutors' dropping murder and other charges.

Before the sentencing, members of Williams' family gathered in the audience. Holding her head in her hands, one woman burst into tears and had to leave the courtroom.

Shackled and wearing a bright orange jumpsuit, Williams shouted to family members as he exited the courtroom. "Don't worry about it," he said.