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Chris Brown Pleads Guilty to Assault

By [DeNeen L. Brown](#) and [Ashley Surdin](#)
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Shortly after news spread that R&B singer Chris Brown would receive no prison time after pleading guilty yesterday to assaulting his pop-star former girlfriend, Rihanna, the word among some on the street was that the baby-faced superstar got off too easy.

The verdict: a case of celebrity justice.

"Did you see those pictures of her face?" said Kenisha Oduro, 22, of Silver Spring. "I think he got off because he is a celebrity. A normal person would have gotten time."

Brown's plea deal to a felony charge -- on the day of a scheduled preliminary hearing in Los Angeles -- includes five years of supervised probation and six months, or roughly 1,400 hours, of community service, which he might be able to complete in his home state of Virginia. In addition, Los Angeles Superior Court Judge Patricia Schnegg ordered Brown, 20, to stay away from Rihanna, 21.

But a bigger surprise came when the judge called Rihanna to the bench and explained to the Barbados-born singer that she, too, must stay away from Brown.

Rihanna replied: "Thank you, your honor." Rihanna's lawyers had not sought a stay-away order, but the judge issued one anyway. The order requires Brown and Rihanna to stay at least 50 yards from each other -- except at industry events, when they must stay 10 yards apart. (Such an order, which applies to both parties, is not uncommon. Courts are known to impose them if they are thought to be in the parties' best interest.)

"Rihanna believes this is a fair and just resolution to the case," said Donald Etra, Rihanna's lawyer. "The fact is that this essentially ends the criminal proceedings other than the sentencing, and since it was a fair and just resolution, it's better it ends this way, rather than go to trial."

Brown is scheduled to be sentenced Aug. 5.

The R&B star, if convicted, could have

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FILE - In this Feb. 7, 2009 file photo, Rihanna arrives at the Clive Davis pre-Grammy party in Beverly Hills, Calif. (AP Photo/Matt Sayles, file) (Matt Sayles - AP)

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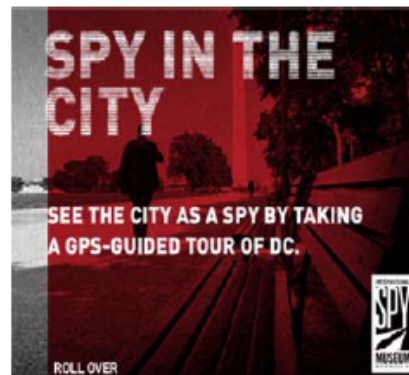
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faced up to five years in prison -- not an unlikely possibility, legal experts say, given the evidence.

"I think he realized that he wasn't likely to win if he took this to trial," said Laurie L. Levenson, a professor at Loyola Law School in Los Angeles. "I think this has come to define him, and he wants to move on with his life."

Brown's plea was taken by some, including the judge, as a positive step.

"Many celebrities try to go the 'not guilty' route and do everything possible to minimize their behavior and sidestep the judicial system to get away with it," said Patti Giggans of Peace Over Violence, a Los Angeles-based agency aimed at prevention and intervention of relationship violence. "This, in a sense, is accepting responsibility for his actions."

The hearing, however, left some celebrity watchers wanting: There were so many unanswered questions. The plea deal meant that neither Brown nor Rihanna testified -- so only they know, really, what happened in the rented Lamborghini in February hours before they were to appear at the Grammy Awards.

A photo of a bruised, beaten face -- purported to be Rihanna's -- was leaked to the public, and a debate over domestic violence lit up the Internet. A month after the Feb. 8 beating, it was reported that Brown and Rihanna had reunited. They were seen together frequently, and were photographed together at an NBA playoff game.

Until the fight, Brown and Rihanna were considered the music's scene rising royalty. She had the cover-girl look and such smash hits as "Umbrella." He had such hits as "Run It" and "Kiss Kiss" and endorsements that showcased a clean-cut image.

The case, however, raised questions about the ugliness and confusion surrounding domestic abuse. Some fans let Brown have it for his behavior. But others were suspicious of Rihanna's role. Last night, the Rihanna-Chris Brown debate continued as heated as ever.

Hosea McDaniel of Southeast Washington said: "We don't know the nature of what it stems from. The only two people who know what happened were in that car. . . . She may be at fault. We don't know if she hit him first or spit on him."

"It doesn't matter what she did to him," Oduro shot back. "The fact is, he beat her."

July Fulcher, director of policy programs for [Break the Cycle](#), a national nonprofit organization that works with youths to curb domestic and dating violence, says new research shows that domestic violence among young people is increasing. "One out of three teens experienced an abusive relationship," Fulcher said. "Looking specifically at physical and sexual abuse, it looks like one out of five teens has experienced that in a dating relationship."

She noted that "domestic violence is a learned behavior. It is something young people have seen this in families. They have seen this in neighborhoods. Unfortunately, when they start dating, they repeat the pattern of what they have seen in their families."

Other people reacted to the fact that Brown will receive no jail time.

"Paris Hilton got more jail time than Chris Brown did for beating a woman to a pulp," said Kim Gandy, president of the National Organization for Women. "How could he not spend one day in jail? I find it shocking. There are things that celebrity should not protect you against."

Surdin reported from Los Angeles, and the Associated Press contributed to this report.