

**Genarlow, make this wise choice: By [Mike King](#) The Atlanta Journal-Constitution
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He's represented by some of the best pro bono legal help available. Even the Rev. Al Sharpton has become a spiritual and political adviser. So Genarlow Wilson — Georgia's most famous prison inmate of the hour — probably doesn't need any fatherly advice from me. But here it is anyway:

Take the deal, son.

Get out of prison as soon as you can. If you lose this next round in your legal fight, there's a real chance you'll be stuck in prison for eight more years. Take the deal.

The district attorney who prosecuted you — a guy your attorneys and supporters have decided to cast as the villain, with you as his victim — has offered to negotiate a plea to a lesser charge that could get you out of prison faster and perhaps keep you off the sex offenders registry, which you say is your biggest concern.

And even if the Georgia Supreme Court works extraordinarily quickly and changes your sentence — an outcome that is anything but certain, since it has already turned down a previous appeal — you need to show a little more remorse for what was a clear violation of human decency.

No matter what you hear in music lyrics or watch in videos, real men don't treat women the way you did. You and your friends took despicable advantage of two girls who were in no way capable of consenting to sex, one because of her age and one because of the alcohol she had consumed during that drunken, drug-addled party in a motel room on New Year's Eve in 2003.

Unfortunately for you, one of those friends videotaped the whole encounter for his own perverse enjoyment. That tape, not the prosecutor, is what convicted you. In a strictly academic sense, the Wilson case illustrates problems with Georgia's laws addressing sex offenses. Voters have told legislators to get tough on such crimes, and they responded by creating ever-growing lists of sex offenses and offenders.

In some cases, the laws they've written provide little distinction between a pedophile cruising playgrounds for young children and a 17-year-old youth having sex with his 15-year-old girlfriend in the back seat.

Wilson, for example, is serving felony time for a crime that, had it been committed today, would be a misdemeanor. He was 17; the girl with whom he engaged in oral sex was 15, a minor. His trial took place before the Legislature changed the law to make such a narrow age difference subject to a lighter sentence. However, the Legislature declined earlier this year to make the new law retroactive to apply to Wilson's case.

It's important to remember that all of Wilson's co-defendants plea-bargained to lesser charges rather than go to trial. Most of the young men got five years in prison with the possibility of parole, followed by 10 years of probation. Wilson was offered the same deal but refused, saying he didn't want to be on the state's sex offender list like his pals were going to be. He took a high-stakes gamble and was acquitted of rape of the 17-year-old, but was found guilty of aggravated child molestation. That charge carried a mandatory 10-year-sentence.

Wilson's 21 now, having served just over two years of his 10-year sentence.

"Some of the decisions I made were not some of the best ones," he says, and he's right. On that New Year's Eve, he made some very bad decisions, and he has made some since then as well.

Don't make any more, Genarlow. Take the deal and fight the battle over the sex offender registry in a different arena. The prosecutor says he's willing to cut you some slack; so will everyone else, but only if you accept responsibility for what you did.

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