

Nine of 10 youths guilty in beating, judge finds

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LONG BEACH

A judge Friday found that nine of 10 youths had joined in beating three white women in Long Beach on Halloween night, ending a racially charged trial that did little to soothe fear or anger on behalf of the victims or the accused.

The youngest defendant, a 12-year-old girl, was acquitted of any involvement in what Judge Gibson Lee ruled was a hate crime by some of the teenagers. The ruling was handed down by Lee because juvenile courts do not have juries. The minors' sentences could range from probation to months in a youth camp.

Lee spoke in a courtroom where the defendants' relatives and supporters sat on one side and the victims' backers on the other. Security was especially tight. At least six of the defendants, wearing jail sweatshirts, broke into tears when the verdicts were read.

``It's not over yet," said a relative of one of the defendants.

Others were caustic about the judge's handling of the case.

``I am stunned, shocked, disheartened," said Frank Williams, who represented a 17-year-old defendant. ``The system has let her down."

``There are no winners today," said Brian Shern, supervising attorney for the district attorney's Juvenile Court operations in Long Beach. ``I feel sorry for the victims."

But he added he also feels sorry for the defendants' families.

``There are no winners."

Ten black youths, ages 12 to 18, were accused of assault with intent to cause great bodily harm in the attack on the three white women in a well-do-do neighborhood. Eight on trial faced a hate-crime sentencing enhancement after Lee agreed with the prosecution's claim that the youths, none with a criminal record, besieged the young women out of racial hatred.

The assault left Loren Hyman, 21, with multiple fractures of her face. Laura Schneider, 19, was knocked unconscious and likely suffered a concussion. There was no testimony that the third woman, Michelle Smith, 19, suffered significant injuries.

The incident outraged the black community after it was reported in the Long Beach Press-Telegram that the victims described the youths as ``a pack of hyenas."

At a public forum, residents blamed political leaders for not addressing their fears. The defendants' families accused investigators of grabbing the wrong youths in a rush to quell neighborhood alarm.

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