

4 DRUG GANG MEMBERS GUILTY OF CONSPIRACY

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A federal court jury Monday found four **members** of one of Detroit's meanest **drug gangs guilty** of **conspiracy**, leaving defendant Michael Smith staring wide-eyed at his attorney.

"So the least we can get for this is 10 years?" Smith turned and asked.

"Yes," his attorney replied.

"That's the least?" Smith repeated, incredulous.

Then he and his three cohorts, who face prison terms of 10 years to life for their roles **in** the violent **drug** peddling **gang** Best Friends, burst out laughing. Their roars filled the courtroom of U.S. District Judge Avern Cohn, where assistant U.S. Attorneys William Soisson and James King may have succeeded **in** putting them **in** prison forever.

The government said Smith, Tyrese Washington, Jessie Anderson and William Wilkes were part of Best Friends, which **in** the 1980s commanded a large part of Detroit's **drug** business through violence and intimidation.

"Have a good day, Mr. Soisson," Smith said as he and the other three were led out of the courtroom. "I know I will," Soisson said after Smith walked by.

The scene ended a trial marked by increased security and a threat to one witness. Several witnesses were former **gang members** who cooperated with the government. No sentencing date has been set.

The jury deliberated a day and a half. Fifteen deputy U.S. Marshals were **in** court as the verdicts were read before a courtroom filled with friends and relatives of the defendants.

Upon hearing the **guilty** verdicts, spectators hurled obscenities. Some rose and stormed out. "Let them out!" Cohn shouted to marshals blocking the door.

"Don't look at me!" one spectator hissed toward federal agents.

"They lied on Jesus, too," an older woman sitting **in** one row said as she cradled another distraught woman.

Defense attorney Raymond Mullins, who represented Washington, said the prosecution's efforts were misguided.

"The emphasis of the government tends to be placed on the ends and the tentacles of the octopus, rather than on the head," Mullins said.

Outside court, Soisson said the defendants' reaction to the verdict didn't reflect the seriousness of what their future holds.

Marshals escorted them all away **in** handcuffs.

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