

Du faces up to 16 years in prison

By Kay Hwangbo
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Soon Ja Du faces up to 16 years in prison after being convicted Oct. 11 of voluntary manslaughter in the killing of a black teen-ager.

A jury also found the Korean American merchant guilty of using a firearm to commit a crime, an "enhancement" to the crime that added five years to the maximum sentence she now faces.

Du sat motionless for a few seconds after the verdict was read.

Los Angeles County Superior Court Judge Joyce Karlin set the sentencing time and date at 3 p.m. on Nov. 15. Du remains free on \$250,000 bail until then.

The involuntary manslaughter conviction is less severe than the second degree murder charge, and more serious than the involuntary manslaughter charge, which Du faced.

The fact that the jury chose manslaughter means that it did not believe Du harbored malice, the test for murder, in killing Harlins.

"They murdered my granddaughter—an innocent 15-year-old child," said a tearful Ruth Harlins as she left the courtroom. "She got away with murder."

Du left the courtroom with her husband, Billy. She slipped past the

throng of reporters inside and outside the courtroom, apparently by leaving through a side door.

"Mrs. Du is drawing support from her Christian faith, her family and her friends. But she is distraught over this," defense attorney Charles Lloyd said.

Lloyd said that he and partner Richard Leonard would only appeal the jury's decision if Karlin orders Du to spend time in prison. They will not appeal if Karlin mandates probation and/or a fine, Lloyd said.

If an appeal becomes necessary, Lloyd said they will base their appeal on the fact that the jury was biased against the Korean merchant because of its racial makeup—five blacks and seven whites or Hispanics.

Du shot Harlins during a March 16, 1991 incident in which Du, according to witnesses, accused Harlins of stealing a \$1.79 bottle of orange juice.

In a videotape of the struggle, Harlins is seen striking Du several times, and Du throws a chair at her. Later, Du takes out a gun. Harlins walks away from the counter, falling after the gun was fired.

Two black children who witnessed the incident said Harlins never intended to steal the juice. Du's lawyers contended that the teen-ager was shoplifting, that Du acted in self defense, and that the gun went off accidentally.