

# Jury gives fascist Pittsburgh synagogue shooter the death penalty

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On Wednesday, Robert Bowers, the Pittsburgh synagogue shooter who murdered 11 people and wounded six others in an antisemitic rampage in October 2018, was sentenced to death by a 12-person federal jury.

The jury deliberated for more than 10 hours before rendering its decision in what is now the first federal death penalty imposed under the Biden administration. According to federal law, a death sentence can only be imposed on a capital defendant by a unanimous vote of the jury, and the judge cannot reject the jury's decision. If a unanimous decision cannot be reached, a lesser sentence such as life in prison will be rendered.

The same jury had convicted Bowers on June 16 of all 63 charges against him. The US Justice Department brought 13 hate crime charges and 22 capital charges, including 11 for the use of a firearm to commit murder in the deadliest attack on a Jewish community in US history.

After the jury's decision, Assistant Attorney General Kristen Clark of the Justice Department's Civil Rights Division said, "A jury of his peers held the defendant accountable for his hateful actions and provided justice for those killed and injured."

The trial lasted two-and-a-half weeks. Along with eyewitness accounts of the cold-blooded execution of Bowers' victims, the evidence presented included his antisemitic social media activity.

On the morning of October 27, 2018, Bowers walked into the Tree of Life Synagogue during Shabbat services and opened fire with a Colt AR-15 semi-automatic rifle and three Glock .357 semi-automatic pistols. He used all four of his weapons for a span of more than 15 minutes, systematically killing congregation members at point-blank range throughout the building, while yelling at one point, "All Jews must

die!"

After 911 calls were placed, a SWAT team was mobilized and arrived on the scene. It was immediately engaged by Bowers in a gun fight. Among the injured were two SWAT team members, who were shot during the exchange of gunfire. Bowers also sustained multiple bullet wounds before he surrendered to police. At his arraignment several days later, he pleaded not guilty.

Bowers' far-right and racist views became known during the criminal investigation and it was established that he was motivated at least in part by the fascistic rantings of Donald Trump, who was president at the time of the massacre, as well as others seeking to stir up anti-immigrant and antisemitic sentiment within the public. Bowers was attracted to the ideology of white nationalism and became fascinated with the right-wing radio host based in Pittsburgh, Jim Quinn.

Posting on the social network Gab, Bowers, referring to Central American migrant caravans and immigrants, wrote, "HIAS [Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society] likes to bring invaders in that kill our people. I can't sit by and watch my people get slaughtered. Screw your optics, I'm going in."

In the course of the trial, evidence was presented that Bowers had brain damage and serious mental illnesses such as schizophrenia. One expert said he was "blatantly psychotic" and suffered from epilepsy. During his teenage years, Bowers attempted suicide multiple times and tried to kill his mother by setting her on fire when he was 13 years old.

Another evaluation showed that Bowers remained proud of his violent crime against Jews and that he had planned for it as much as six months in advance.

The *World Socialist Web Site* does not support the death penalty in general or in the case of Bowers,

notwithstanding the heinous nature of his crime and its antisemitic, fascist motivation. Capital punishment is a barbaric practice that persists at the federal level and in most US states despite being banned in 23 states and the District of Columbia. Its use against Bowers will only facilitate the inevitable efforts of fascists to turn him into a supposed martyr. He should be imprisoned for the rest of his life.

It is significant that some members of the victims' families as well as some survivors of the attack have spoken out against putting Bowers to death. The Death Penalty Information Center reported that "the New Light and Dor Hadash congregations, including Rabbi Jonathan Perlman, who was wounded in the attack, and Miri Rabinowitz, whose husband was killed, urged [Attorney General Merrick] Garland to forego the death penalty and instead seek a life sentence."

On Wednesday, Stephen Cohen and Barbara Caplan, co-presidents of New Light Congregation, which lost three members in Bowers' attack, issued a statement that said: "Many of our members prefer that the shooter spend the rest of his life in prison, questioning whether we should seek vengeance or revenge against him or whether his death would 'make up' for the lost lives."



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