

United States : Trial of the Organizers of the Violent 2017 Events in Charlottesville, Va.

mercredi 1er décembre 2021, par [SHEPPARD Barry](#) (Date de rédaction antérieure : 1er décembre 2021).

Three recent trials involving murderous white nationalists were occurring at the same time in the United States.

One was the Wisconsin trial of Kyle Rittenhouse, who brought an automatic rifle to a Black Lives Matter protest of a police shooting of an African American that left him a paraplegic. Rittenhouse shot and killed two protesters and wounded a third.

Another was the trial of three white racists who hunted down and murdered a young Black man for the “crime” of jogging in “their” white neighborhood.

I covered covered recently these two trials in ESSF website.

There was a third trial I wish to come back on, of people and organizations who organized the violent racist rallies in Charlottesville, Virginia, four years ago in August, 2017, which gained international notoriety.

One counter-protester, 32-year old Heather Heyer, was murdered and 19 others were seriously injured when one of the racists, James Fields, drove his car into a crowd of counter-protesters. Fields was arrested and convicted, and is serving a prison sentence of life behind bars.

One incident that was videoed and seen across the United States and many other countries, was a nighttime torchlight march of some 500 Nazis, chanting “You will not replace us.”

One of the themes motivating white nationalists is the belief that white people are being “replaced” by — that is losing their dominance over — Blacks, Latinos and other non-whites.

The Nazis’ chant soon morphed into “Jews will not replace us”, reflecting the widely-held belief of white nationalists that Jews finance and are the scheming brains behind the movements of Blacks and other people of color, Muslims, communists and socialists, etc. — a resurrection of previous anti-Semitic tropes.

This was not a criminal trial, but a civil lawsuit against the organizers of what was billed as a “Unite the Right” rally, brought by victims of the racists’ violence, seeking monetary compensation as punishment.

That the ultraright demonstration in Charlottesville was held at all was one indication that the election of the openly racist Donald Trump was seen by white racists, correctly, as giving them cover to come out of the woodwork.

Trump himself said of the Charlottesville events, even after Field’s murderous rampage with his car, that “there were good people on both sides”, giving his stamp of approval to the white nationalists.

Since then such groups have thrived under Trump's cover. We have seen more organized, armed and disciplined organizations like the Proud Boys, the Three Percenters, Oath Keepers, and others. They were the spearhead of the violent attack on the Capitol building January 6, an attempt to overturn the presidential election and reinstate Trump.

There was no lack of evidence at the trial against the more than a dozen of the country's most prominent white supremacists and groups, including white nationalist theorist and leader Richard Spencer, rally organizer Jason Kessler and Christian Cantwell.

Text messages, social media posts, videos and expert testimony meticulously revealed how the defendants conspired in advance.

Some of what was revealed in court were messages in online chats and message boards exchanged by defendants leading up to the alt-right rally, spewing racist threats.

"This is going to be a violent summer", Spencer texted a supporter two months before the rally.

At about the same time Kessler wrote Spencer, "I would go to the ends of the earth to secure a future for my [white] people. This is war."

"We're raising an army, my liege," he said in another exchange. "For free speech, but the cracking of skulls it it comes to it."

"I think we are gonna see some serious brawls at cville next month too, and we'll see blood on some of these white polos lol," Elliot Kane wrote on a platform where he called himself "JUDENJAGER" or "Jew Hunter".

"I'm willing to risk a lot for our cause, including violence and incarceration, many in my audience would follow me there too," Cantwell wrote Spencer a week before the rally, "but I want to coordinate it and make sure it's worth our cause."

"It's worth it," Spencer replied. "At least for me."

In a recording in response to the murder of Heather Hayer, Spencer went on a tirade, using racist slurs for race and religious minorities, who should "get ruled by people like me."

At the trial the defense claimed that all this was "just joking." It was, they insisted, the hollow talk of angry young men whose fantasies of gassing Jewish people, brutalizing Blacks and forming a "White" ethnostate, etc. etc. were not to be taken seriously.

But the jury didn't agree and as a result of the evidence the jury found the defendants liable for many counts under the indictment, and awarded the plaintiffs various amounts totaling over \$26 million.

The verdicts will be appealed, and it is not clear how much will actually be paid to the plaintiffs in the end.

This was a partial victory. Significantly, the jury could not agree on the two counts of the indictment charging the defendants with racism.

When it became the defense's turn in the trial, they turned the court into a forum for racist rants. The defendants knew that their followers from all over the country were listening in on the public access line.

The Judge, Norman Moon, allowed this as a valid defense against the indictment.

These rants included numerous use of the n..... word, praise of Adolf Hitler, and spewing of racist pseudo science.

Some of the defense lawyers joined in. Within earshot of one of the Plaintiff's lawyers, Roberta Kaplin, who is Jewish and wore a Star of David necklace throughout the trial, defense attorney Joshua Smith repeatedly used the k... word.

One day, Nazis on far-right chat rooms listening in were able to break into the public access line and join the courtroom proceedings, saying the n..... word numerous times and declaring Trump's slogan of "Make America Great Again".

In spite of the racist rants the defendants used as their "defense", some on the jury couldn't bring themselves to agree on the conspiracy to organize a racist rally charge.

After the trial, Judge Moon praised the conduct of both sides in the trial, including the defense turning the courtroom into a bizarre forum for racist rants.

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