



# JURY FINDS RITTENHOUSE NOT GUILTY IN KENOSHA SHOOTINGS

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Kyle Rittenhouse was acquitted of all charges Friday after testifying he acted in self-defense in the deadly Kenosha shootings that became a flashpoint in the debate over guns, vigilantism and racial injustice in the U.S.

Rittenhouse, 18, began to choke up, fell forward toward the defense table and then hugged one of his attorneys as he heard a court clerk recite "not guilty" five times. A sheriff's deputy whisked him out a back door.

"He wants to get on with his life," defense attorney Mark Richards said. "He has a huge sense of relief for what the jury did to him today. He wishes none of this ever happened. But as he said when he testified, he did not start this."

The verdict in the politically combustible case was met with anger and disappointment from those who saw Rittenhouse as a vigilante and a wannabe cop, and relief and a sense of vindication from those who regarded him as a patriot who took a stand against lawlessness and exercised his Second Amendment right to carry a gun and to defend himself. Supporters donated more than \$2 million toward his legal defense.

The Rev. Jesse Jackson, the longtime civil rights leader, said the verdict throws into doubt the safety of people who protest in support of black Americans.

"It seems to me that it's open season on human rights demonstrators," he said.

Rittenhouse was charged with homicide, attempted homicide and reckless endangering for killing two men and wounding a third with an AR-style semi-automatic rifle in the summer of 2020 during a tumultuous night of protests over the shooting of a black man, Jacob Blake, by a white Kenosha police officer.

Rittenhouse, a then-17-year-old former police youth cadet, said that he went to Kenosha to protect property from rioters but that he came under attack and feared for his life. He is white, as were those he shot.

The anonymous jury, whose racial makeup was not disclosed by the court but appeared to be overwhelmingly white, deliberated for close to 3 1/2 days.

President Joe Biden called for calm, saying that while the outcome of the case "will leave many Americans feeling angry and concerned, myself included, we must acknowledge that the jury has spoken."

Former President Donald Trump, who at the time of the shootings said it appeared Rittenhouse had been "very violently attacked," issued a statement Friday congratulating Rittenhouse on the verdict, adding "it's not self defense, nothing is!"

Rittenhouse could have gotten life in prison if found guilty on the most serious charge, first-degree intentional homicide, or what some other states call first-degree murder. Two other charges each carried over 60 years behind bars.

Kenosha County District Attorney Michael Graveley said his office respects the jury's decision, and he asked the public to "accept the verdicts peacefully and not resort to violence."

Ahead of the verdict, Democratic Gov. Tony Evers announced that 500 National Guard members stood ready in case of trouble. But hours after the jury came back, there were no signs of any major protests or unrest in Kenosha.

As he released the jurors, Circuit Judge Bruce Schroeder assured them the court would take "every measure" to keep them safe.

Wisconsin Lt. Gov. Mandela Barnes, who is black and a Democratic candidate for U.S. Senate, denounced the outcome. He, like many civil rights activists, saw a racial double standard at work in the case.

"Over the last few weeks, many dreaded the outcome we just witnessed," Barnes said. "The presumption of innocence until proven guilty is what we should expect from our judicial system, but that standard is not always applied equally. We have seen so many black and brown youth killed, only to be put on trial posthumously, while the innocence of Kyle Rittenhouse was virtually demanded by the judge."

Other political figures on the right welcomed the verdict and condemned the case brought against Rittenhouse.

Mark McCloskey, who got in trouble with the law when he and his wife waved a rifle and a handgun at Black Lives Matter protesters marching past his St. Louis home in 2020, said the verdict shows that people have a right to defend themselves from a "mob." He is now a Republican candidate for U.S. Senate in Missouri.

Fifteen minutes after the verdicts, the National Rifle Association tweeted the text of the Second Amendment.

The Kenosha case was part of an extraordinary confluence of trials that reflected the deep divide over race in the United States: In Georgia, three white men are on trial in the killing of Ahmaud Arbery, while in Virginia, a trial is underway in a lawsuit over the deadly white-supremacist rally held in Charlottesville in 2017.

The bloodshed in Kenosha took place during a summer of sometimes-violent protests set off across the U.S. by the killing of George Floyd in Minneapolis and other cases involving the police use of force against black people.

Rittenhouse went to Kenosha from his home in nearby Antioch, Illinois, after businesses were ransacked and burned in the nights that followed Blake's shooting. He joined other armed civilians on the streets, carrying a weapon authorities said was illegally purchased for him because he was underage.

Bystander and drone video captured most of the frenzied chain of events that followed: Rittenhouse killed Joseph Rosenbaum, 36, then shot to death protester Anthony Huber, 26, and wounded demonstrator Gaige Grosskreutz, now 28.

Prosecutors portrayed Rittenhouse as a "wannabe soldier" who had gone looking for trouble that night and was responsible for creating a dangerous situation in the first place by pointing his rifle at demonstrators.

But Rittenhouse testified: "I didn't do anything wrong. I defended myself."

Breaking into sobs at one point, he told the jury he opened fire after Rosenbaum chased him and made a grab for his gun. He said he was

afraid his rifle was going to be wrested away and used to kill him.

Huber was then killed after hitting Rittenhouse in the head on neck with a skateboard, and Grosskreutz was shot after approaching with his own pistol in hand.



Under questioning from the prosecution, Grosskreutz said he had his hands raised as he closed in on Rittenhouse and didn't intend to shoot the young man. Prosecutor Thomas Binger asked Grosskreutz why he didn't shoot first.

"That's not the kind of person that I am. That's not why I was out there," he said. "It's not who I am. And definitely not somebody I would want to become."

But during cross-examination, Rittenhouse defense attorney Corey Chirafisi asked: "It wasn't until you pointed your gun at him, advanced on him ... that he fired, right?"

"Correct," Grosskreutz replied. The defense also presented a photo showing Grosskreutz pointing the gun at Rittenhouse, who was on the ground with his rifle pointed up at Grosskreutz.

Grosskreutz, under follow-up questioning from the prosecutor, said he did not intend to point his weapon at Rittenhouse.

After the verdict, Huber's parents, Karen Bloom and John Huber, said the outcome "sends the unacceptable message that armed civilians can show up in any town, incite violence, and then use the danger they have created to justify shooting people in the street."

Rittenhouse's mother, Wendy Rittenhouse, seated near her son on a courtroom bench, gasped in delight, cried and hugged others around her.

Richards, the defense attorney, said that Rittenhouse wants to be a nurse and that he is in counseling for post traumatic stress disorder and will probably move away because "it's too dangerous" for him to continue to live in the area.

Going in, many legal experts said they believed the defense had the advantage because of provisions favorable to Rittenhouse in Wisconsin self-defense law and video showing him being chased at key moments. Testimony from some of the prosecution's own witnesses also seemed to buttress his claim of self-defense.

Some witnesses described Rosenbaum as "hyperaggressive" and said that he dared others to shoot him and threatened to kill Rittenhouse earlier that night; others said he acted "belligerently" but did not appear to pose a serious threat. A videographer testified Rosenbaum lunged for the rifle just before he was shot, and a pathologist said his injuries appeared to indicate his hand was over the barrel.

Also, Rosenbaum's fiancée disclosed that he was on medication for bipolar disorder and depression. Rittenhouse's lawyers branded Rosenbaum a "crazy person."

Rittenhouse had also been charged with possession of a dangerous weapon by a person under 18, a misdemeanor that carries nine months behind bars and appeared likely to lead to a conviction.

But the judge threw out that charge before deliberations after the defense argued that the Wisconsin law did not apply to the long-barreled rifle used by Rittenhouse.

The verdicts end the criminal case against Rittenhouse. He does not face any federal charges and he is unlikely to because federal law only applies in very limited cases for homicides. No civil lawsuits have been brought against Rittenhouse yet, either, but there are lawsuits targeting others. Huber's father is suing police and government officials in Kenosha alleging that they allowed for a dangerous

situation that resulted in his son's death, and Grosskreutz has a similar lawsuit. A group of protesters has sued the city and county of Kenosha alleging that curfew laws were enforced against them but not against armed people like Rittenhouse.

