

Three Racist Vigilantes Found Guilty of Felony Murder in Georgia

Ahmaud Arbery was murdered by white men in 2020 sparking national outrage, unlike Wisconsin, where another vigilante was acquitted, these men were found guilty on multiple counts

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Brunswick, Georgia in the southern region of the state, served as a flashpoint during the early months of 2020 when a young African American man was chased and shot to death by white racists claiming they acted in self-defense while trying to carry out a “citizen’s arrest.”

Ahmaud Arbery had committed no crime and was only out jogging in the area when he was targeted, chased and brutally murdered by the assailants.

Wanda Cooper-Jones, the mother of Arbery, said she had never thought the day would come where the men who killed her son faced sentencing on multiple counts of murder. The attorney for Cooper-Jones, Lee Merritt, praised the mother’s persistent quest for justice.

[Lee Merritt noted that:](#)

“Eighteen months ago when she learned about the murder of her son, they told her that she would just have to deal with it alone. They told her that there would be no arrest, that there would be no accountability, that there would be no justice. And she made her son a promise before she laid him in the ground, that his mom would fight for justice for him.”

Travis McMichael, Gregory McMichael and their neighbor William “Roddie” Bryan, Jr. on February 23, 2020, pursued Arbery after he had stopped at a construction site to view the work that was being done. The African American had taken nothing from the location and had no property on his person when he was attacked, assaulted and murdered by the vigilantes.

Garin Flowers reported in [an article for Yahoo News saying:](#)

“The makeup of the jury also caught heat during the selection process for its lack of diversity in a state still haunted by the memory of lynchings. Glynn County, where the trial took place in southeastern Georgia, is about a quarter Black, but only one Black juror was chosen. The state accused the defense of eliminating Black jurors based on race. Walmsley said at the time that the ‘court has found that there appears to be intentional discrimination’ in the jury selection process, but allowed the trial to move forward. He said the defense had met the legal standard necessary to dismiss the potential jurors, coming up with reasons beyond race for removing them. The three men also face federal hate crime charges in a trial scheduled for February 2022.”

Historical Context of the Verdict

Later in 2020 after the murder of Arbery, Breonna Taylor in Louisville, Kentucky, was killed by police while in her own apartment. The shooting was a case of mistaken identity, yet no charges were ever filed against the law-enforcement officers who fired the fatal shots which resulted in Taylor’s death.

Obviously, the tipping point was the public police execution of George Floyd in Minneapolis on May 25 of last year. The videotaped murder of Floyd on the streets of Minneapolis fueled the already existing outrage over police brutality and racist violence against African Americans and other people of color across the United States.

Cities and towns all over the country exploded in mass demonstrations and urban rebellions from coast to coast. The protests against the police killing of Floyd spread around the globe with manifestations in Europe, Asia, Latin America, Africa, the Caribbean and Canada. The uprisings even prompted the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) to hold a full hearing in Geneva, Switzerland on the question of racist violence in the U.S. The UN hearing was held at the aegis of several African states utilizing a resolution of the Organization of African Unity (OAU), the predecessor of the African Union (AU), based upon a resolution motivated by Malcolm X during his July 1964 visit to the Second OAU Summit held in Cairo, Egypt.

The brother of George Floyd, Philonise, testified at the UNHCR hearing on June 18, 2020 and appealed to the international body to take action aimed at ending racist violence in the U.S. The then administration of President Donald Trump evoked the slave-era Insurrection Act of 1806 deploying federal agents and troops to cities in various regions of the U.S. Trump demanded that the authorities dominate the streets. In essence he was calling for the use of maximum and lethal force in quelling the demonstrations and rebellions.

Dozens of people were killed along with thousands being arrested from the time of the George Floyd killing and extending for several months. With the demonstrations continuing throughout the summer of 2020, it left an indelible mark on the political landscape of the country. The civil unrest following the murder of Floyd exposed to the world even further the institutionally racist and genocidal character of the U.S. state.

The three white men who murdered Arbery were claiming self-defense based upon a slavery-era law related to making “citizen’s arrests.” This law was overturned even in the Georgia state legislature in 2020.

Wisconsin Releases Vigilante After Killing Two and Wounding One

In another similar case, Kyle Rittenhouse of Illinois, was acquitted of murder after killing two people and injuring a third in another state, Wisconsin, on August 25, 2020. The deaths at the hands of Rittenhouse came during anti-racist demonstrations in Kenosha, Wisconsin in the aftermath of the shooting of Jacob Blake, an African American man wounded seven times by the police while he was moving away from the officers.

Blake's shooting which resulted in his permanent paralysis, was a source of mass demonstrations and even a one-day strike by National Basketball Association (NBA) players in the aftermath of the incident. Of course, due to the role of the judge in the Rittenhouse trial, none of this social background information was allowed to be presented as evidence of racist motivations on the part of the defendant.

The deceased, who were also white: Joseph Rosenbaum (36), Anthony Huber (26), and the one wounded, Gaige Grosskreutz (27), were not allowed to be described in the proceedings as victims of gun violence. The judge admonished the prosecuting attorney for ostensibly introducing a line of argument forbidden by the bench.

Under these circumstances it was not surprising to many that Rittenhouse was allowed to walk away from such a blatant act of murderous violence. How could anyone seriously claim self-defense after crossing the state line with a high-powered AR-15 rifle under the guise of protecting private property. There were no concerns on the shooter's part in regard to those demonstrating to demand justice for Blake. These and other factors clearly illustrate the inherent bias and institutional racism within the U.S. legal system.

Historically there have been thousands of lynchings in the U.S. which have not been investigated by the authorities and often declared "justifiable homicide" by the courts. This process of utilizing law-enforcement personnel, prosecuting attorneys and the courts remains in force well into the 21st century.

In regard to the Rittenhouse verdict of not guilty, the federal government through the Justice Department could file Civil Rights violation charges against the 18-year-old. Evidence related to his right-wing connections and subsequent support received during the prosecution could be introduced as elements which motivated the acquitted shooter in traveling to Kenosha and feeling emboldened enough to confront protesters exercising their purported first amendment rights.

Moreover, what right did Rittenhouse have to exercise maximum lethal force against anyone acting in response to a racial crisis in Kenosha? After being charged with the killing of two people and the wounding of someone else, Rittenhouse was defended by elements within the white community which called for his release.

These two divergent verdicts in Wisconsin and Georgia, illustrate the inconsistencies within the U.S. political and legal system. Although Wisconsin had been considered a progressive state in decades past during the 20th century, it is the state which produced Senator Joseph McCarthy who made a political career out of persecuting communist and those considered subversive to the capitalist and racist power structure. Wisconsin during 2011, was the focal point of right-wing political attacks on public sector unions and educational institutions which set a standard for replication throughout the midwestern region and throughout the U.S. as a whole.

Georgia was built on the forced removal of the Indigenous nations and the super-

exploitation of the African enslaved people. Voter suppression and racist violence remains the stock-in-trade of the ruling class within the state and throughout the South. This verdict, many claim, is an anomaly within the social trajectory of the methodology used to maintain the status-quo.

What these two verdicts confirm is the necessity of transforming the entire system to eliminate the material basis for racism, national oppression and economic exploitation. Until the capitalist system is removed, and socialism is enacted, the problems of racist violence, vigilante and police terrorism will remain.

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Featured image: Ahmaud Arbery mural with niece in Georgia (Source: Abayomi Azikiwe)

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