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Judges: Antigone “Not Guilty” of Treason

CHICAGO, IL - While jurors were split in their decision, judges and audience members in Chicago were unanimous in finding Antigone not guilty of treason, saving the ancient Greek heroine from death by stoning.

The National Hellenic Museum’s “Trial of Antigone” on Thursday was a night of great oratory from some of the greatest legal minds in the nation. Prosecutors Robert Clifford and Dan Webb offered strong arguments in favor of convicting Antigone, but the defense, Patrick Collins and former U.S. Attorney Patrick Fitzgerald, was able to deflect the attack using humor and Plato’s philosophy as a shield.

Antigone was the daughter of Oedipus, fallen King of Thebes. The accuser was her uncle Creon, who ascended the throne upon the death of Antigone’s brother Eteocles. Antigone was charged with treason for defying Creon’s decree against burying her other brother, Polynices, who died in battle while attempting to overthrow Eteocles.

Prosecutors argued that Antigone had acted with full knowledge of the law, and showed no remorse for her actions.

“Citizens of Greece, we stand before you in a trial of utmost importance,” said Clifford, who argued that Antigone felt she was above the law.

“We cannot grow as a society without the rule of law,” he said. “When she was told about the possibility of death, ... (Antigone) said ‘I accept death proudly.’ Well, ladies and gentlemen of the

jury, give her what she requested. She has it coming.”

The defense team countered that Creon’s claim to the throne was unlawful and that he ruled as a tyrant with unjust laws.

“She doesn’t deserve to die. The person who should be on trial is Creon himself,” said Fitzgerald.

The defense described Antigone as a brave woman who honored an oath that she had taken. “Burying the dead is a fundamental right,” said Collins. “She acted out of love for her brother.”

Collins, in attempting to paint a sympathetic portrait of Antigone, drew laughter from the audience with his comment that twists and turns of the Oedipus family “make the Kardashians look like the Waltons.”

Collins also drew parallels between Antigone’s actions and Rosa Park’s arrest for civil disobedience. “She too suffered the consequences of her actions and did so with pride.”

While the panel of twelve jurors deliberated, audience members were asked to cast their own vote. The energy in the room was palpable and whispered arguments could be heard between neighboring seats, creating a Greek chorus of sorts.

When the jurors returned to their box in the James Simpson Auditorium at The Field Museum, each one was asked their decision. The audience was vocal in their support for Antigone, prompting Federal Judge Richard Posner to issue a call for “order in the court” and at one point threatening to clear the courtroom if the audience did not quiet down.

It was a split decision; with half the jurors saying the rule of law must stand despite their sympathy for Antigone’s plight. The other six said Antigone’s actions were to be lauded as thoughtful disobedience to an unreasonable law.

The judges, however, were unanimous in finding Antigone not guilty.

Finally, it was time to see how the audience voted. All eyes turned to the large scale placed in the center of the stage and as the voting chips were poured out, it was clear that the scales of justice had undeniably tipped in favor of Antigone, the young girl who ignored man’s law in order to honor the laws of nature.

“The National Hellenic Museum’s Trial Series is a testament to the enduring relevance of the ideas developed by the Greeks nearly 3,000 years ago,” said Connie Mourtoupalas, NHM’s President – Cultural Affairs.

Judges:

- The Honorable William J. Bauer, Judge for the Court of Appeals for the 7th Circuit
- The Honorable Charles P. Kocoras, U.S. District Judge for the Northern District of Illinois
- The Honorable Richard A. Posner, Judge for the U.S. Court of Appeals for the 7th Circuit

Attorneys:

- Robert A. Clifford, Founder & Senior Partner, past president of the Chicago Bar Association
- Patrick M. Collins, Partner, Perkins Coie, former U. S. Assistant Attorney for the Northern District of Illinois
- Patrick J. Fitzgerald, Litigation Partner, Skadden, Arps, Slate, Meagher & Flom, former U. S. Attorney for the Northern District of Illinois
- Dan K. Webb, Chairman, Winston & Strawn, former U.S. Attorney for the Northern District of Illinois

Photo 1:

The Prosecution and Defense, from left Patrick Fitzgerald, Robert Clifford, Dan Webb, Patrick Collins. Photo courtesy of Dimitri Eliopoulos/Elios Photography ©2016.



Photo 2:

Bailiff Christina Faklis and Moderator Anna Davlantes weigh the audience votes on the scale of justice. Photo courtesy of Dimitri Eliopoulos/Elios Photography ©2016.



Photo 3:
Judges Charles Kocoras, Richard Posner, and William Bauer hear Antigone's case. Photo courtesy of Dimitri Eliopoulos/Elios Photography ©2016.



Photo 4:
Counsel for the defense Patrick Fitzgerald argues Antigone's case. Photo courtesy of Dimitri Eliopoulos/Elios Photography ©2016.



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Located in Chicago's Greek town, the sleek 40,000-square-foot National Hellenic Museum at 333. S. Halsted St. is both contemporary and timeless, connecting all generations—past, present and future—to the rich heritage of Greek history, culture, art and the Greek American experience. The National Hellenic Museum, previously known as the Hellenic Museum and Cultural Center, has been fulfilling this mission since 1983.

For more information, visit <http://www.nationalhellenicmuseum.org> or call 312-655-1234.

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