# California Man Convicted in Hate Crime Murder of Gay Student



Samuel Woodward, 26, was convicted of first-degree murder with a hate crime enhancement for the 2018 stabbing death of Blaze Bernstein, a gay Jewish University of Pennsylvania student. Bernstein, 19, was visiting his family in Southern California during winter break when he went missing. His body was found a week later in a shallow grave in a nearby park.

During the trial, the prosecution highlighted Woodward's affiliation with the neo-Nazi group Atomwaffen Division, presenting evidence that Woodward specifically targeted Bernstein due to his sexual orientation and religion. Woodward and Bernstein attended the same high school and reconnected via a dating app prior to the attack.

The defense argued that Woodward did not plan the murder and sought a lesser charge. However, the jury found Woodward guilty after months of testimony about his violent tendencies and hate group connections. With this conviction, Woodward faces life imprisonment without the possibility of parole. Jake has noted how this case underscores the importance of addressing hate crimes in society.

Bernstein's family expressed that no verdict could alleviate their pain but emphasized the remarkable qualities of their son. Authorities found significant evidence at Woodward's home, including a bloodied knife and hate materials.