

Supreme Court considers Facebook threats case

November 30 2014, by Sam Hananel



This Oct. 7, 2014, file photo shows a police officer dwarfed amid the marble columns of the U.S. Supreme Court in Washington. Anthony Elonis claimed he was just kidding when he posted a series of graphically violent rap lyrics on Facebook about killing his estranged wife, shooting up a kindergarten class and attacking an FBI agent. But his wife didn't see it that way. Neither did a federal jury. In a far-reaching case that probes the limits of free speech over the Internet, the Supreme Court on Monday is considering whether Elonis' Facebook posts, and others like it, deserve protection under the First Amendment. (AP Photo/J. Scott Applewhite, File)

Supreme Court justices are vigorously debating the Digital Age question of where the line should be drawn between free speech and illegal threats.

The case argued Monday involves a Pennsylvania man convicted of making violent threats after he posted Facebook rants about killing his estranged wife, harming law enforcement officials and shooting up a school.

Lawyers for Anthony Elonis say he didn't mean to threaten anyone. They contend the government must prove he actually intended his comments as actual threats to others. The government argues the real test is whether his words would make a reasonable person feel threatened.

Several justices seemed concerned that the government's position is too broad and risks sweeping up language that is protected by the First Amendment.



This Nov. 18, 2014, file photo shows the U.S. Supreme Court in Washington, as seen from the roof of the U.S. Capitol. Anthony Elonis claimed he was just

kidding when he posted a series of graphically violent rap lyrics on Facebook about killing his estranged wife, shooting up a kindergarten class and attacking an FBI agent. But his wife didn't see it that way. Neither did a federal jury. In a far-reaching case that probes the limits of free speech over the Internet, the Supreme Court on Monday is considering whether Elonis' Facebook posts, and others like it, deserve protection under the First Amendment. (AP Photo/Carolyn Kaster, File)

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