

# US judge jails Silk Road mastermind for life (Update)

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Max Dickstein stands with other supporters of Ross Ulbricht, the alleged creator and operator of the Silk Road underground market, in front of a federal court house on the first day of jury selection for his trial on January 13, 2015 in New York

The American convicted of masterminding the criminal website Silk Road was sentenced in court Friday to life in prison over the online enterprise that sold \$200 million in drugs to customers worldwide.

It was the maximum possible punishment for Ross Ulbricht, who was convicted in February by a jury on seven counts of narcotics trafficking, criminal enterprise, computer hacking and money laundering.

The 31-year-old Texan with a graduate degree displayed no emotion as he stood in dark prison scrubs to hear his fate read by Federal Judge Katherine Forrest, as his devoted parents sat in the packed gallery.

Ulbricht, who ran Silk Road under the alias "Dread Pirate Roberts" and was accused of commissioning five murders at a cost of \$650,000, was sentenced to two life sentences for narcotics distribution and criminal enterprise.

He also received the maximum sentence of five, 15 and 20 years for hacking, trafficking in false documents and money laundering convictions.

In the gallery, his mother put her head in her hand.

It was a stunning fall from privilege for Ulbricht, who the government said amassed \$13 million in commissions by making the purchase of heroin, cocaine and crystal meth as easy as shopping online at eBay or Amazon.

Prosecutors said the narcotics-trafficking enterprise resulted in at least six drug-related deaths.

## **Crimes were 'unprecedented'**

"You should serve your life in prison," Forrest told Ulbricht, saying there was no parole in the federal system.

"What you did was unprecedented," she said. "You have to pay the

consequences of this."

Forrest said the court also sought the forfeiture of more than \$183.9 million in Silk Road drug profits.



Lyn Ulbricht, mother of Silk Road founder Ross Ulbricht, speaks to reporters outside the Federal Courthouse on May 29, 2015 in New York

The parents of a 25-year-old Boston man and a 16-year-old Australian schoolboy, who both died after ingesting drugs obtained from Silk Road, spoke of their devastating loss.

"I strongly believe my son would be here today if Ross Ulbricht had

never created Silk Road," said one of the parents, identified only as Richard.

But Ulbricht made little mention of their anguish, sniffing and sobbing his way through a self-pitying statement before the court.

He told Forrest that he wanted to "tell you about myself from my perspective," and denied that he was greedy and vain.

He also promised that he now respected the law and would never break it again if released.

"I'm not a self-centered, sociopathic person... I just made some very serious mistakes."

His four-week trial had been considered a landmark case in the murky world of online crime and government surveillance.

Given the significant public interest in the case, Forrest said his sentence had to serve as a deterrent to anyone looking to step into his shoes, and must reflect the severity of his crimes and protect society.

## **Right to appeal**

The defense had requested the mandatory minimum sentence of 20 years and Ulbricht has the right to appeal.



Ross Ulbricht's attorney Joshua Dratel (R) speaks to reporters as Lyn (L) and Kirk (C) Ulbricht, parents of Silk Road founder Ross Ulbricht, listen outside the Federal Courthouse on May 29, 2015 in New York

The sentence was the maximum possible under federal law on each count—tougher even than the lengthy sentence sought by government prosecutors.

Forrest read from chilling online messages and journal entries that she said showed Ulbricht had displayed "arrogance," knew exactly what he was doing and had an escape plan to flee the country.

"I'm running a goddamn multi-million-dollar criminal enterprise," she read out.

His own writings proved that he was "callous as to the consequences and the harm and suffering it may cause others," she said.

The government said Silk Road conducted 50,000 sales of heroin, 80,000 sales of cocaine and 30,000 of methamphetamine—highly addictive and dangerous drugs.



Kirk Ulbricht, father of Silk Road founder Ross Ulbricht, gets a hug from a friend outside the Federal Courthouse May 29, 2015 in New York

Forrest said Ulbricht was no better than a common drug dealer and blind

to the collateral damage to society caused by expanding the drugs market.

"I don't know you feel a lot of remorse for the people you hurt. I don't know you know you hurt a lot of people."

She said she found "profoundly moving" the nearly 100 letters written from family and friends testifying to a kind, intelligent and loved friend, saying that he was a "very complex" person.

Ulbricht created the Silk Road in January 2011, and owned and operated the underground site until it was shut down by the FBI in October 2013, when he was arrested in a San Francisco library.

The government called it "the most sophisticated and extensive criminal marketplace on the Internet" used by vendors in more than 10 countries in North America and Europe.

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