

Department of Justice

Office of Public Affairs

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Friday, January 21, 2011

Mobile, Alabama, Man Sentenced on Federal Civil Rights and Weapons Charge Related to Desecration of Synagogue

WASHINGTON – A judge sentenced Thomas Hayward Lewis to 12 months and one day in prison, followed by three years of supervised release, for violating the civil rights of congregants of the Congregation Tree of Life Messianic Synagogue, as well as possession of an unregistered firearm, the Justice Department announced.

Lewis, 24, of Mobile, Ala., pleaded guilty last year to violating one count of the Church Arson Act by defacing the Congregation Tree of Life Messianic Synagogue with threatening graffiti and neo-Nazi markings. Lewis admitted in court that between the late night of Jan. 3, 2009, and the early morning of Jan. 4, 2009, he and an accomplice, Christian Rodney Ice, spray painted the synagogue with anti-Semitic graffiti and neo-Nazi markings. Lewis also pleaded guilty to unlawful possession of an unregistered firearm. Ice, who also pleaded guilty to violating the Church Arson Act, is currently serving a two-year probation sentence.

"Threats against religious institutions and their members have no place in this country and will not be tolerated," said Thomas E. Perez, Assistant Attorney General for the Civil Rights Division. "This case should send a clear message to others who would carry out similar criminal acts that they will be held accountable for their actions."

"The U.S. Attorney's Office is committed to the protection of our citizens' civil rights. The U.S. Constitution's guarantee of freedom of religion is one of our citizen's most sacred civil rights," said U.S. Attorney for the Southern District of Alabama Kenyon R. Brown.

This case was investigated by the FBI and the city of Mobile Police Department. This case was prosecuted by Assistant U.S. Attorney John Cherry of the U.S. Attorney's Office for the Southern District of Alabama and Trial Attorney D. W. Tunnage of the Civil Rights Division's Criminal Section.