

United States Court of Appeals
for the Fifth Circuit

United States Court of Appeals
Fifth Circuit

FILED

November 29, 2021

Lyle W. Cayce
Clerk

No. 20-40718
Summary Calendar

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA,

Plaintiff—Appellee,

versus

KEITH PRESCOTT GACE,

Defendant—Appellant.

Appeal from the United States District Court
for the Southern District of Texas
USDC No. 3:19-CR-4-1

Before SOUTHWICK, OLDHAM, and WILSON, *Circuit Judges*.

PER CURIAM:*

Keith Prescott Gace was convicted by a jury of sexual exploitation of children by producing and attempting to produce child pornography (count one) after he pled guilty to distribution of child pornography (count two); receipt of child pornography (count three); possession of child pornography

* Pursuant to 5TH CIRCUIT RULE 47.5, the court has determined that this opinion should not be published and is not precedent except under the limited circumstances set forth in 5TH CIRCUIT RULE 47.5.4.

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(count four); and attempted destruction of property (count five). The district court sentenced him to a total of 1,020 months of imprisonment and a life term of supervised release.

On appeal, Gace argues that the district court abused its discretion under Rule 403 of the Federal Rules of Evidence in admitting images and descriptions of child pornography that, he contends, were highly prejudicial and of limited probative value to count one. When an evidentiary objection has been properly preserved, it is reviewed for abuse of discretion. *United States v. Dillon*, 532 F.3d 379, 387 (5th Cir. 2008). A district court's ruling regarding Rule 403 is reviewed "with an especially high level of deference to the district court, with reversal called for only rarely and only when there has been a clear abuse of discretion." *Id.* (internal quotation marks and citation omitted).

The district court properly conducted the balancing test under Rule 403 and did not abuse its discretion in determining that the probative value of the challenged evidence substantially outweighed the danger of unfair prejudice. *See Dillon*, 532 F.3d at 387–89. The challenged evidence was probative of Gace's intent to produce child pornography of his minor daughter, rather than an artistic family photo as Gace argued. *See United States v. Lewis*, 796 F.3d 543, 547–48 (5th Cir. 2015); *Dillon*, 532 F.3d at 389. Gace's contention that the Government did not need to introduce the evidence because he offered to stipulate that he pled guilty to possessing and distributing child pornography is unavailing. *See United States v. Naidoo*, 995 F.3d 367, 376 (5th Cir. 2021); *see also United States v. Caldwell*, 586 F.3d 338, 343 (5th Cir. 2009). The risk of unfair prejudice was minimal as the challenged evidence was similar to the photographs at issue in count one. *See Naidoo*, 995 F.3d at 378; *Dillon*, 532 F.3d at 389. Gace did not show that the amount of time that elapsed between committing the child exploitation offense and the other offenses reduced the probative value of the challenged

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evidence. *See United States v. Grimes*, 244 F.3d 375, 384–85 (5th Cir. 2001). Finally, any potential for unfair prejudice was mitigated by the district court’s limiting instruction to the jury. *See Naidoo*, 995 F.3d at 378; *Lewis*, 796 F.3d at 548.

Next, Gace argues that the district court erred by failing to give a specific instruction that the jury had to reach a unanimous decision as to whether he actually produced child pornography or attempted to do so. Because Gace did not raise this argument in the district court, our review is limited to plain error. *See Puckett v. United States*, 556 U.S. 129, 135 (2009).

The district court gave a general unanimity instruction, and Gace has not presented any evidence “tending to show that the jury was confused or possessed any difficulty reaching a unanimous verdict.” *United States v. Tucker*, 345 F.3d 320, 337 (5th Cir. 2003). Absent such evidence, Gace has not shown that there is any reason to believe that the jury verdict was not unanimous. *See id.* at 336–37. Therefore, he has not shown that the district court made any clear or obvious error by not giving a specific unanimity instruction. *See id.*; *see also United States v. Creech*, 408 F.3d 264, 269 (5th Cir. 2005).

Lastly, Gace argues that in instructing the jury as to whether a depiction constitutes “sexually explicit conduct” under 18 U.S.C. § 2251(a), the district court erred in directing the jury to consider whether the depiction was designed to elicit a sexual response in the viewer as laid out in *United States v. Dost*, 636 F. Supp. 828, 832 (S.D. Cal. 1986), asserting that this *Dost* factor lacks any basis in statute. As he concedes, the district court’s instruction followed the Fifth Circuit Pattern Jury Instructions, and the district court did not abuse its discretion. *See United States v. McCall*, 833 F.3d 560, 563 (5th Cir. 2016); *United States v. Steen*, 634 F.3d 822, 826 (5th

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Cir. 2011); *United States v. Toure*, 965 F.3d 393, 403 (5th Cir. 2020); Fifth Circuit Pattern Jury Instruction 2.84.

AFFIRMED.

18 U.S.C. § 2251. Sexual exploitation of children

(a) Any person who employs, uses, persuades, induces, entices, or coerces any minor to engage in, or who has a minor assist any other person to engage in, or who transports any minor in or affecting interstate or foreign commerce, or in any Territory or Possession of the United States, with the intent that such minor engage in, any sexually explicit conduct for the purpose of producing any visual depiction of such conduct or for the purpose of transmitting a live visual depiction of such conduct, shall be punished as provided under subsection (e), if such person knows or has reason to know that such visual depiction will be transported or transmitted using any means or facility of interstate or foreign commerce or in or affecting interstate or foreign commerce or mailed, if that visual depiction was produced or transmitted using materials that have been mailed, shipped, or transported in or affecting interstate or foreign commerce by any means, including by computer, or if such visual depiction has actually been transported or transmitted using any means or facility of interstate or foreign commerce or in or affecting interstate or foreign commerce or mailed.

(b) Any parent, legal guardian, or person having custody or control of a minor who knowingly permits such minor to engage in, or to assist any other person to engage in, sexually explicit conduct for the purpose of producing any visual depiction of such conduct or for the purpose of transmitting a live visual depiction of such conduct shall be punished as provided under subsection (e) of this section, if such parent, legal guardian, or person knows or has reason to know that such visual depiction will be transported or transmitted using any means or facility of interstate or foreign commerce or in or affecting interstate or foreign commerce or mailed, if that visual depiction was produced or transmitted using materials that have been mailed, shipped, or transported in or affecting interstate or foreign commerce by any means, including by computer, or if such visual depiction has actually been transported or transmitted using any means or facility of interstate or foreign commerce or in or affecting interstate or foreign commerce or mailed.

(c)(1) Any person who, in a circumstance described in paragraph (2), employs, uses, persuades, induces, entices, or coerces any minor to engage in, or who has a minor assist any other person to engage in, any sexually explicit conduct outside of the United States, its territories or possessions, for the purpose of producing any visual depiction of such conduct, shall be punished as provided under subsection (e).

(2) The circumstance referred to in paragraph (1) is that--

(A) the person intends such visual depiction to be transported to the United States, its territories or possessions, by any means, including by using any means or facility of interstate or foreign commerce or mail; or

(B) the person transports such visual depiction to the United States, its territories or possessions, by any means, including by using any means or facility of interstate or

foreign commerce or mail.

(d)(1) Any person who, in a circumstance described in paragraph (2), knowingly makes, prints, or publishes, or causes to be made, printed, or published, any notice or advertisement seeking or offering--

(A) to receive, exchange, buy, produce, display, distribute, or reproduce, any visual depiction, if the production of such visual depiction involves the use of a minor engaging in sexually explicit conduct and such visual depiction is of such conduct; or

(B) participation in any act of sexually explicit conduct by or with any minor for the purpose of producing a visual depiction of such conduct;

shall be punished as provided under subsection (e).

(2) The circumstance referred to in paragraph (1) is that--

(A) such person knows or has reason to know that such notice or advertisement will be transported using any means or facility of interstate or foreign commerce or in or affecting interstate or foreign commerce by any means including by computer or mailed; or

(B) such notice or advertisement is transported using any means or facility of interstate or foreign commerce or in or affecting interstate or foreign commerce by any means including by computer or mailed.

(e) Any individual who violates, or attempts or conspires to violate, this section shall be fined under this title and imprisoned not less than 15 years nor more than 30 years, but if such person has one prior conviction under this chapter, section 1591, chapter 71, chapter 109A, or chapter 117, or under section 920 of title 10 (article 120 of the Uniform Code of Military Justice), or under the laws of any State relating to aggravated sexual abuse, sexual abuse, abusive sexual contact involving a minor or ward, or sex trafficking of children, or the production, possession, receipt, mailing, sale, distribution, shipment, or transportation of child pornography, such person shall be fined under this title and imprisoned for not less than 25 years nor more than 50 years, but if such person has 2 or more prior convictions under this chapter, chapter 71, chapter 109A, or chapter 117, or under section 920 of title 10 (article 120 of the Uniform Code of Military Justice), or under the laws of any State relating to the sexual exploitation of children, such person shall be fined under this title and imprisoned not less than 35 years nor more than life. Any organization that violates, or attempts or conspires to violate, this section shall be fined under this title. Whoever, in the course of an offense under this section, engages in conduct that results in the death of a person, shall be punished by death or imprisoned for not less than 30 years or for life.

18 U.S.C. § 2252. Certain activities relating to material involving the sexual exploitation of minors

(a) Any person who--

(1) knowingly transports or ships using any means or facility of interstate or foreign commerce or in or affecting interstate or foreign commerce by any means including by computer or mails, any visual depiction, if--

(A) the producing of such visual depiction involves the use of a minor engaging in sexually explicit conduct; and

(B) such visual depiction is of such conduct;

(2) knowingly receives, or distributes, any visual depiction using any means or facility of interstate or foreign commerce or that has been mailed, or has been shipped or transported in or affecting interstate or foreign commerce, or which contains materials which have been mailed or so shipped or transported, by any means including by computer, or knowingly reproduces any visual depiction for distribution using any means or facility of interstate or foreign commerce or in or affecting interstate or foreign commerce or through the mails, if--

(A) the producing of such visual depiction involves the use of a minor engaging in sexually explicit conduct; and

(B) such visual depiction is of such conduct;

(3) either--

(A) in the special maritime and territorial jurisdiction of the United States, or on any land or building owned by, leased to, or otherwise used by or under the control of the Government of the United States, or in the Indian country as defined in section 1151 of this title, knowingly sells or possesses with intent to sell any visual depiction; or

(B) knowingly sells or possesses with intent to sell any visual depiction that has been mailed, shipped, or transported using any means or facility of interstate or foreign commerce, or has been shipped or transported in or affecting interstate or foreign commerce, or which was produced using materials which have been mailed or so shipped or transported using any means or facility of interstate or foreign commerce, including by computer, if-

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(i) the producing of such visual depiction involves the use of a minor engaging in sexually explicit conduct; and

(ii) such visual depiction is of such conduct; or

(4) either--

(A) in the special maritime and territorial jurisdiction of the United States, or on any land or building owned by, leased to, or otherwise used by or under the control of the Government of the United States, or in the Indian country as defined in section 1151 of this title, knowingly possesses, or knowingly accesses with intent to view, 1 or more books, magazines, periodicals, films, video tapes, or other matter which contain any visual depiction; or

(B) knowingly possesses, or knowingly accesses with intent to view, 1 or more books, magazines, periodicals, films, video tapes, or other matter which contain any visual depiction that has been mailed, or has been shipped or transported using any means or facility of interstate or foreign commerce or in or affecting interstate or foreign commerce, or which was produced using materials which have been mailed or so shipped or transported, by any means including by computer, if—

(i) the producing of such visual depiction involves the use of a minor engaging in sexually explicit conduct; and

(ii) such visual depiction is of such conduct;

shall be punished as provided in subsection (b) of this section.

(b)(1) Whoever violates, or attempts or conspires to violate, paragraph (1), (2), or (3) of subsection (a) shall be fined under this title and imprisoned not less than 5 years and not more than 20 years, but if such person has a prior conviction under this chapter, section 1591, chapter 71, chapter 109A, or chapter 117, or under section 920 of title 10 (article 120 of the Uniform Code of Military Justice), or under the laws of any State relating to aggravated sexual abuse, sexual abuse, or abusive sexual conduct involving a minor or ward, or the production, possession, receipt, mailing, sale, distribution, shipment, or transportation of child pornography, or sex trafficking of children, such person shall be fined under this title and imprisoned for not less than 15 years nor more than 40 years.

(2) Whoever violates, or attempts or conspires to violate, paragraph (4) of subsection (a) shall be fined under this title or imprisoned not more than 10 years, or both, but if any visual depiction involved in the offense involved a prepubescent minor or a minor who had not attained 12 years of age, such person shall be fined under this title and imprisoned for

not more than 20 years, or if such person has a prior conviction under this chapter, chapter 71, chapter 109A, or chapter 117, or under section 920 of Title 10 (article 120 of the Uniform Code of Military Justice), or under the laws of any State relating to aggravated sexual abuse, sexual abuse, or abusive sexual conduct involving a minor or ward, or the production, possession, receipt, mailing, sale, distribution, shipment, or transportation of child pornography, such person shall be fined under this title and imprisoned for not less than 10 years nor more than 20 years.

(c) Affirmative defense.--It shall be an affirmative defense to a charge of violating paragraph (4) of subsection (a) that the defendant--

(1) possessed less than three matters containing any visual depiction proscribed by that paragraph; and

(2) promptly and in good faith, and without retaining or allowing any person, other than a law enforcement agency, to access any visual depiction or copy thereof--

(A) took reasonable steps to destroy each such visual depiction; or

(B) reported the matter to a law enforcement agency and afforded that agency access to each such visual depiction.

18 U.S.C. § 2256. Definitions for chapter

For the purposes of this chapter, the term--

(1) “minor” means any person under the age of eighteen years;

(2)(A) Except as provided in subparagraph (B), “sexually explicit conduct” means actual or simulated--

(i) sexual intercourse, including genital-genital, oral-genital, anal-genital, or oral-anal, whether between persons of the same or opposite sex;

(ii) bestiality;

(iii) masturbation;

(iv) sadistic or masochistic abuse; or

(v) lascivious exhibition of the anus, genitals, or pubic area of any person;

(B) For purposes of subsection 8(B) of this section, “sexually explicit conduct” means--

(i) graphic sexual intercourse, including genital-genital, oral-genital, anal-genital, or oral-anal, whether between persons of the same or opposite sex, or lascivious simulated sexual intercourse where the genitals, breast, or pubic area of any person is exhibited;

(ii) graphic or lascivious simulated;

(I) bestiality;

(II) masturbation; or

(III) sadistic or masochistic abuse; or

(iii) graphic or simulated lascivious exhibition of the anus, genitals, or pubic area of any person;

(3) “producing” means producing, directing, manufacturing, issuing, publishing, or advertising;

(4) “organization” means a person other than an individual;

(5) “visual depiction” includes undeveloped film and videotape, data stored on computer disk or by electronic means which is capable of conversion into a visual image, and data which is capable of conversion into a visual image that has been transmitted by any means, whether or not stored in a permanent format;

(6) “computer” has the meaning given that term in section 1030 of this title;

(7) “custody or control” includes temporary supervision over or responsibility for a minor whether legally or illegally obtained;

(8) “child pornography” means any visual depiction, including any photograph, film, video, picture, or computer or computer-generated image or picture, whether made or produced by electronic, mechanical, or other means, of sexually explicit conduct, where--

(A) the production of such visual depiction involves the use of a minor engaging in sexually explicit conduct;

(B) such visual depiction is a digital image, computer image, or computer-generated image that is, or is indistinguishable from, that of a minor engaging in sexually explicit conduct; or

(C) such visual depiction has been created, adapted, or modified to appear that an identifiable minor is engaging in sexually explicit conduct.

(9) “identifiable minor”--

(A) means a person--

(i)(I) who was a minor at the time the visual depiction was created, adapted, or modified; or

(II) whose image as a minor was used in creating, adapting, or modifying the visual depiction; and

(ii) who is recognizable as an actual person by the person's face, likeness, or other distinguishing characteristic, such as a unique birthmark or other recognizable feature; and

(B) shall not be construed to require proof of the actual identity of the identifiable minor.

(10) “graphic”, when used with respect to a depiction of sexually explicit conduct, means

that a viewer can observe any part of the genitals or pubic area of any depicted person or animal during any part of the time that the sexually explicit conduct is being depicted; and

(11) the term “indistinguishable” used with respect to a depiction, means virtually indistinguishable, in that the depiction is such that an ordinary person viewing the depiction would conclude that the depiction is of an actual minor engaged in sexually explicit conduct. This definition does not apply to depictions that are drawings, cartoons, sculptures, or paintings depicting minors or adults.