



JUSTICE FOR GEORGE FLOYD AND US ALL: THE MEASURE AND MEANING OF THE VERDICT

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DR. MAULANA KARENGA

IN THE MIDST OF OUR RIGHTFUL AND DE-SERVED rejoicing and relief in hearing the guilty verdict against Derek Chauvin for his depraved public murder of George Floyd, it is also important to pause and reflect on the measure and meaning of this victory. We need not read more into this victory than is real or necessary, but it is important to mark the victory and reflect on how it was achieved, what it means in the larger scheme of things, and what it obligates us to do to expand this significant gain.

As always, let us give praise to our people and then to our allies. For it is always important to remember and reaffirm it is our lives at stake and our struggle. And if we don't stand up, our allies won't show up. Also, it is essential for us to remember the historical and current role we play as a moral and social vanguard in America whose victorious struggle will not only free us from oppression, but also expand the realm of human freedom and justice in this country and the world. This understanding is especially important when we discuss the meaning and measure of this victory and the need to continue, intensify and expand the struggle.

Our reflection, of necessity, leads us always to the historic and ongoing struggle for racial justice in this country. And the struggle for justice for George Floyd is part and parcel of the national struggle against police violence and larger systemic violence which has been imposed on us for centuries. Certainly, in more recent times, the Ferguson struggle for justice for Michael Brown is rightly seen as the spark that expanded the struggle and ignited a forest fire of resistance. It opened the road of resistance that led us across the country and to Minneapolis and the struggle for justice for George Floyd and in a larger sense, justice for us all. And it is the ongoing struggle for racial justice as a whole that is the context for the victory in Minneapolis. For without this ongoing struggle, which had a world-wide impact, this victory could not have been achieved. Indeed, the heightened and expanded consciousness, commitment and social activism created a

climate more responsive to the defining video, the courageous witnesses, and the other factors that combined to achieve this victory.

Clearly central, indeed indispensable, to achieving this guilty verdict was also the small group of people, among whom were four minors, who witnessed and testified to the slow, savage and depraved murder of George Floyd by Derek Chauvin. They are called bystanders, but that does not really describe them. They were courageous and deeply involved witnesses who wouldn't turn away, who called out and challenged the brutal and bestial killing of a fellow Black person and human being. Indeed, they offered in testimony the graphic evidence of film, fear, trauma and tragic narrative of the slow, savage and wanton murder of George Floyd and their agonizing inability to stop it. Darnella Frazier, who with courage and composure filmed the public murder of George Floyd, even while being traumatized by it all, should be raised up and praised always in the telling of this narrative of struggle for justice which spoke to the world. Strong too was the voice of her 9-year-old cousin who testified how she felt about watching the murder and said, "I was mad and sad," reflecting the combination of trauma and righteous anger so many of us felt.

We also raise and praise the name of the Black men who challenged Chauvin and his crime partners for their savage behavior. There was Donald Williams who would not let Chauvin's attorney label him too angry to be a trustworthy witness, noting he was angry because a human being was being killed by the police wantonly and without warrant. And there was Charles McMillion who was, as all the witnesses, concerned about what he might have done to intervene and save George Floyd's life from a killer cop.

Also, contributive to the guilty verdict was the role of the Black police chief of Minneapolis, Medaria Arradondo. His decision, not only to quickly fire and distance his department from Chauvin and his police crime partners, but also to

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testify against his officers set a precedent and other officers followed. His actions, not only set a precedent of a chief testifying against his officers, but also, opened the possibility of a widening crack in the blue wall of silence and solidarity in abusive and deadly crime against our people. Whether he continues to hold this position and actualize his stated values and influence others to act likewise will depend on the strength and continued struggle of the Movement. For it is again the Movement that created the context to make this moment possible.

Important also was the decision and crucial move of Keith Ellison, the first African American attorney general of Minnesota, to take over of the prosecution from the local prosecutor after having been asked by the Floyd family to take control of the case and after his appointment by Governor Tim Walz. He realized, as an African American and a student and witness of history, that this was an extraordinary murder and historical moment and that he was morally compelled to accept the invitation that history had handed him. And, he said at his press conference after the verdict, "I would not call today's verdict justice ... because justice implies true restoration, but it is accountability which is the first step towards justice." He therefore called for continuing struggle for "systematic societal change."

But in spite of this coming together of these factors to yield this important victory, let's not imagine it's more than it is. It is a major victory, but a single victory. It is procedural justice, courtroom justice, but not substantive justice, racial and societal justice. Achieving racial justice involves radically reconceiving and reconstructing this system, and ending the varied forms of oppression based on race, class, gender and other categories of difference and vulnerability.

Especially must we not let the established order coopt this Movement and make this victory

a result of the system rather than the struggle. For gains made are made through the righteous and relentless struggle of the people. As Frantz Fanon teaches, concessions are not made by the kindness, good will or change of heart of the oppressor. "It simply shows he cannot delay granting concessions any longer." Thus, it is not really the system granting concessions or procedural justice, it the liberation struggle that extracts it. This means we must set aside any illusions about the verdict being a new beginning and rather see the struggle as promising and ensuring a new beginning. It is for us a question of life and death, of domination, deprivation and degradation, not only in one case against one officer, but a case against America itself. Indeed, even while the trial for justice for George Floyd continued, Duante Wright was murdered by police violence and on the day procedural justice and accountability was achieved, Ma'Kyah Bryant, 16 years old, became one of the latest victims of police deadly force and violence.

IT IS A QUESTION OF DIFFERENT VALUING OF life in the dominant society. And as Ella Baker reminds us and teaches us "until the killing of Black men, Black mothers' sons, becomes as important to the rest of the country as the killing of a white mother's sons, we who believe in freedom cannot rest." And we know this applies also to Black mothers' daughters. This freedom is a freedom to live, be secure in our person and peoplehood in our houses, our churches, mosques and temples, secure in our cars, jogging or walking in the streets, and playing in the park and learning in school as children. And it is not only freedom from domination, deprivation and degradation in all their forms, but also freedom to live good and meaningful lives, flourish and come into the fullness of ourselves.▲

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