

Chicago police officer convicted of second-degree murder in 2014 killing of Laquan McDonald

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Chicago Police Officer Jason Van Dyke was found guilty of second-degree murder and 16 counts of aggravated battery for the 2014 killing of African-American teenager Laquan McDonald by a jury on Friday.

The verdict was reached after fewer than eight hours of deliberation and was publicly released by Cook County Circuit Court Judge Vincent Gaughan. Van Dyke now faces a minimum sentence of six years in prison. Daniel Herbert, attorney for the defense, told the press there are plans to appeal the decision.

Van Dyke murdered the 17-year-old in an industrial area on Chicago's southwest side four years ago this month. The conviction on 16 counts of aggravated battery with a firearm is for each bullet that Van Dyke shot into the teen's body.

The defense attempted to convince the jury that Van Dyke acted out of fear for his life, painting a picture of McDonald as a deranged criminal.

However, overwhelming evidence, including the dashcam video and testimony from witnesses and experts, made clear that McDonald posed no threat to Van Dyke's safety. He was not lunging or otherwise moving toward Van Dyke before being shot. Dashcam footage showed that McDonald was not acting violently and was walking away from officers before the shooting.

Officer Joseph McElligott, who trailed McDonald in a squad car and shone a light on him for blocks on foot, testified that he never felt the need to shoot the teen.

An FBI ballistics expert said of the shooting that Van Dyke's emptying of the clip of his magazine into McDonald was consistent with "a deliberate rate of fire," "taking time to aim each shot." Another witness

for the prosecution testified that the use of deadly force against McDonald, who held a three-inch pocketknife, was completely unnecessary.

The verdict came in spite of the attempts at cover-up by the office of Chicago Mayor Rahm Emanuel, then-Chicago Police Department (CPD) Superintendent Garry McCarthy and the entire Chicago city Council. After the shooting, the city suppressed the police dashcam recording for over one year and allowed Van Dyke to walk free, while it paid McDonald's family \$5 million in exchange for agreeing not to talk about the case.

Van Dyke went to trial only because of the public outrage at the dashcam footage, which was leaked in late 2015. The release exposed the cover-up of the murder in a city notorious for sweeping routine police brutality and killings under the rug.

Chicago police began preparations on Thursday to suppress protests in the event of a not guilty verdict. Squad cars and police buses assembled in staging areas at Guaranteed Rate Field on the city's south side and in the Humboldt Park neighborhood on the city's west side. The Chicago Police Department announced that it would require officers to work 12-hour shifts with no days off in the period after the verdict.

Several schools and universities announced that they would take increased security measures on Friday, with some campuses shutting down early in anticipation of protests. St. Rita's High School on Chicago's south side said Thursday that school officials were meeting with police captains and ramping up security measures in preparation for the verdict. South Loop Elementary School told the press that it was ready to go into "lockdown mode" if protests broke out.

Crowds of protesters gathered outside of City Hall before the verdict was handed down, with cheers breaking out when the verdict was read. Demonstrators marched around city hall and through the Loop, blocking some streets.

Chicago Mayor Rahm Emanuel will not seek reelection in 2019, due in part to the exposure of his role in the cover-up of McDonald's murder. After the trial, he issued a statement with CPD Superintendent Eddie Johnson, declaring, "The effort to drive lasting reform and rebuild bonds of trust between residents and police must carry on with vigor."

The calls to reform the police are echoed by Democratic Party politicians and pseudo-left groups throughout the city and state, who attempt to frame the shooting as primarily a racial issue. On Friday, Illinois state Attorney General Lisa Madigan spoke of the need to increase so-called "community policing" to prevent police violence. This is a cloaked term meaning that the ruling class will move to increase policing of working class communities, while hiring more minority and female cops.

The same sentiments were echoed by Timuel Black, the 99-year-old Chicago civil rights activist and college professor, a long-time friend of former US President Barack Obama. An honorary member of the pseudo-left group Democratic Socialists of America, Black said during a talk hosted at the University of Chicago by radio station WBEZ's podcast *16 Shots* on Wednesday that the replacement of "foot soldiers" with "squad cars" in poor communities of color is to blame for the rise in police shootings, and said that McDonald would not have been shot if he had been white.

Such an account leaves out the basic class issues involved in police violence. Whatever role racism plays in individual shootings, police violence affects workers of all races. Data shows that while the blacks and Latinos are overrepresented in police murder statistics, the largest number of victims of police killings are white. Like McDonald, the vast majority are working class and poor.

For Obama's part, as president he oversaw both the growth of record social inequality in the US and an epidemic of police killings. Obama armed police departments around the country with military-grade weapons and refused to prosecute killer cops. During his two terms, he did everything he could to cover up

the class basis of police repression and promoted the idea that it is entirely an issue of race.

The city of Chicago is taking measures to increase policing and suppress public protests while thousands of hotel workers in the city remain on strike for higher wages and benefits and UPS workers have voted against a concessions contract which the Teamsters Union is intent on pushing through. The ruling class in Chicago and throughout the country fears that anger over police violence will connect with the struggles of workers for higher wages and better working conditions.

This is the reason why the ruling class is so desperate to cover up the true causes of police violence behind the smoke screen of identity politics and "police reforms," hiding the truth that it is the capitalist system of social inequality that lies at its root.



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