

First trial for the police murder of George Floyd opens amid atmosphere of nervousness

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The opening of the trial of Derek Chauvin, one of the four former Minneapolis, Minnesota, police officers charged in the death of 46-year-old George Floyd, was delayed for at least a day Monday after Hennepin County Judge Peter Cahill postponed jury selection as an appellate court reviews the possible reinstatement of a lesser third-degree murder charge dropped last fall.

Currently, Chauvin is charged with second-degree murder and manslaughter for his actions last May. Chauvin knelt on Floyd's neck for more than nine minutes while he was handcuffed and pinned to the pavement by two other officers. Legal experts suggest a third-degree murder charge would be easier for the prosecution to prove.

Minnesota law defines third-degree murder as "without intent to effect the death of any person, causing the death of another by perpetrating an act eminently dangerous to others and evincing a depraved mind, without regard for human life."

The push for the reintroduction of a lesser charge reflects the degree of anxiety surrounding the case. The ruling class is acutely aware that a failure to convict Chauvin, who was filmed pressing his knee into Floyd's neck even as Floyd cried out for help, could trigger an eruption of social anger across the US and internationally. Floyd's death ignited massive multi-racial and multi-ethnic demonstrations across the globe.

A separate trial for Chauvin's accomplices, former officers Thomas Lane, J. Alexander Keung and Tou Thao, is set to begin at the end of August. The three have been charged with aiding and abetting second-degree murder and aiding and abetting second-degree manslaughter.

Chauvin's trial is being conducted with an unprecedented level of security. Government offices were heavily fortified in days leading up to the trial.

The government center is barricaded with fences, razor wire and other barriers. The area will be closed to the public for the duration of the trial except for two "demonstration zones" carefully controlled by police.

In a public statement, Minnesota Governor Tim Walz, a Democrat, expressed his desire to show the world Minnesota is having conversations about "race and public safety." Referring to the "demonstration zones," Walz said people would have the room to "express their opinions." Walz also said the security measures were "well-coordinated" and "thought out" to deter "people who want to cause damage."

Minneapolis Mayor Jacob Frey, also a Democrat, said he was preparing for potential unrest with "painstaking detail." Up to 2,000 National Guard troops have been mobilized, in addition to up to 1,100 law enforcement officers from 12 local jurisdictions.

National Guard member have been deployed throughout downtown to patrol the area and intimidate demonstrators. According to Unicorn Riot, an independent online news publication, an FBI surveillance plane circled over Minneapolis last Thursday. The FBI similarly spied on protesters in Baltimore, Maryland, during the demonstrations against the police murder of Freddie Gray in 2015.

Extraordinary measures are also being taken in the selection of the jury which will determine Chauvin's fate. Potential jurors were sent 16-page questionnaires to determine how much they have heard about the case and what their opinions may be. The questionnaire asked if jurors had previous encounters with police, whether they were involved in any protests against police brutality and whether they believe the justice system is fair.

Questions in the survey include:

- "Did you or someone you know get injured or

suffer any property damage during the protests that took place after George Floyd's death?"

- "Have you, or someone close to you, ever helped support or advocated in favor of or against police reform? If 'Yes,' please explain."

- "Do you believe your community has been negatively or positively affected by any of the protests that have taken place in the Twin-Cities area since George Floyd's death?"

- One question asks respondents to answer on a sliding scale between "strongly agree" and "strongly disagree" on statements such as "Discrimination is not as bad as the media makes it out to be" and "I support defunding the Minneapolis Police Department."

The jurors for Chauvin's trial are being meticulously selected in an unprecedented manner. Unlike typical jury selection proceedings, potential jurors are being questioned individually, rather than as a group. Before they are confirmed, potential jurors will be questioned by the defense attorney and prosecutors. The defense can object to up to fifteen jurors without reason, while the prosecution can reject up to nine.

The extraordinary measures employed for Chauvin's trial express a nervousness in the ruling class. The trial will be closely watched with a high degree of anticipation and anxiety. Millions of workers, outraged by police brutality, social inequality and poverty, expect Chauvin and his accomplices to be held accountable for their actions. A minute fraction of officers are charged with murder and very few are found guilty. An acquittal could set off the social powder keg that is American society.



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