

Derek Chauvin admits to killing George Floyd in plea deal on federal civil rights charges

Kevin Reed
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Derek Chauvin, the former Minneapolis police officer who killed George Floyd by kneeling on his neck for nearly nine minutes on May 25, 2020, pleaded guilty on Wednesday in a St. Paul, Minnesota, courtroom to federal charges as part of an agreement worked out with US government prosecutors.

After answering a series of questions from US District Judge Paul Magnuson and Minnesota federal prosecutor Allen Slaughter about the plea agreement, the former-cop, who is white, admitted for the first time in open court that he kept his knee on Floyd's neck "even after Mr. Floyd became unresponsive" and that his actions caused the 46-year-old black man's death.

In exchange for his guilty plea, Chauvin, 45, is expected to be sentenced by Judge Magnuson to a prison term of 25 years. The arrangements with prosecutors stipulate that the federal sentence would run concurrently with his state sentence of 22.5 years. This means Chauvin would serve an additional 2.5 years in prison beyond the sentence that was imposed following his conviction in a jury trial last June.

The plea agreement also provides for Floyd's murderer to serve out his jail term in a federal prison. According to the *New York Times*, federal prison is preferred by Chauvin because it is "generally considered to be safer" and could separate him "from prisoners he may have arrested." Another provision of the deal would prevent Chauvin from ever working as a police officer again.

With credit for good behavior, the earliest he could be released from prison would be between 17 years and 21.25 years. If Chauvin had pleaded not guilty and gone to trial, legal experts said the federal government's case was strong and a conviction would have resulted in a life sentence.

On May 7, the US Justice Department brought a

grand jury indictment against Chauvin and the other three officers who were involved in the arrest on the streets of Minneapolis that resulted in Floyd's death. On count one, the grand jury charged that Chauvin "while acting under color of law, and while aided and abetted by officers known to the grand jury, willfully deprived George Floyd of the right, secured and protected by the Constitution and laws of the United States, to be free from an unreasonable seizure, which includes the right to be free from the use of unreasonable force by a police officer."

The 19-page plea agreement is dated December 15 and signed by Chauvin and his attorney as well as Kristen Clarke, assistant attorney general with the Civil Rights Division of the US Department of Justice. The agreement states that Chauvin admits to using "unreasonable and excessive force" and that "he acted willfully and in callous and wanton disregard of the consequences to Mr. Floyd's life."

Furthermore, the statement says Chauvin admits that he "knew that what he was doing was wrong, in part, because it was contrary to his training" and that he "chose to continue applying force even though he knew Mr. Floyd's condition progressively worsened. The defendant also heard Mr. Floyd repeatedly explain that he could not breathe, was in pain, and wanted help."

These are indeed remarkable admissions in and of themselves given that they are mirrored by any number of acts of violence and brutality against unarmed, helpless or incapacitated individuals who have encountered similar pathological behavior by police officers in the US and around the globe.

By pleading guilty to the federal charges, Chauvin has spared the criminal justice system from further public exposure of the social context and psychology behind the murder of poor and working class people by

law enforcement that continues with unceasing regularity across the United States. According to “Fatal Force,” a database maintained by the *Washington Post*, 910 people have been shot and killed by police in the US so far this year.

The public execution of George Floyd outside of the Cup Foods store in Minneapolis was captured on smartphone video by 17-year-old bystander Darnella Frazier and shared on social media. Frazier’s video immediately undermined an official statement by the Minneapolis Police Department that Floyd had died after a “Medical Incident During Police Interaction.”

Millions of people watched the horrific scene in which Floyd said he could not breathe and called out for his mother numerous times before he lost consciousness and died within a space of less than ten minutes. Public anger and outrage over the brutal killing in broad daylight of a black man by a white police officer sparked a multiracial movement of between 15 and 25 million people against police violence in 2,000 US towns and cities.

While federal prosecutors dropped a second charge against Chauvin regarding his failure to administer aid to George Floyd while he was “lying on the ground in clear need of medical care,” the former officer pleaded guilty to another federal charge which was brought subsequently against him. Chauvin agreed that he violated the civil rights of a 14-year-old boy in 2017 by holding him by his throat, striking him with a flashlight and pressing his knee on the black youth’s neck without justification.

The unidentified youth was in the courtroom during the hearing as were the relatives of George Floyd. Brandon Williams, one of Floyd’s nephews, said outside the courtroom, “Had he been held accountable for what he did in 2017 to that minor, George Floyd would still be here. Today, he had a chance to blow kisses and give air hugs to his family. We can’t do that to our loved one who’s not here.”

Judge Magnuson ordered a pre-sentence investigation and must also formally accept the guilty plea before sentencing Chauvin at a hearing that has yet to be scheduled. Meanwhile, Chauvin, who is being held in solitary confinement in a Minnesota prison, is in the process of appealing his state conviction on murder and manslaughter charges.

The other three officers—Thomas Lane, J. Alexander

Kueng and Tou Thao—face remaining federal civil rights charges in the indictment that included Chauvin as well as a state trial for aiding and abetting the murder of George Floyd. Their federal trial is scheduled to start in January and the Minnesota trial in March. The three men wanted their federal case separated from Chauvin’s and they got their wish when he pleaded guilty on Wednesday.



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