Three former Minneapolis, Minnesota police officers convicted of violating George Floyd's civil rights

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After 13 hours of deliberation, the jury in the federal civil rights trial of the three former Minneapolis, Minnesota police officers who assisted Derek Chauvin in murdering George Floyd rendered a guilty verdict on all charges Thursday afternoon in the US District Court in St. Paul, Minnesota.

The jury—made up of 10 white and two Asian jurors—rejected the arguments advanced by defense attorneys for the three men that they deferred to Chauvin, were inexperienced, had poor training and were distracted by "hostile" bystanders as justification for their refusal to intervene and prevent the senior officer from continuing to kneel on Floyd's neck and killing him on May 25, 2020.

J. Alexander Kueng, Thomas Lane and Tou Thao were each convicted on one count of willfully depriving George Floyd of his rights to medical care as the 46-year-old black man pleaded for help, called out multiple times for his mother and said he could not breathe before he was rendered unconscious and then died while Chauvin knelt on his neck for nine and a half minutes.

Instead of coming to his rescue, Kueng knelt on his back, Lane held his legs and Thao repeatedly threatened outraged bystanders and told them to keep back. The jury also found Thao and Kueng guilty of not intervening to stop Chauvin's murderous actions as Floyd was handcuffed and lying face down on the street.

Members of Floyd's family were present and applauded the jury's verdict and said they hoped US District Judge Paul Magnuson would give the three former officers the maximum possible sentence. Philonise Floyd, George's brother, said, "I'm starting to feel like I can breathe again."

Judge Magnuson permitted the convicted men to be escorted out of the courtroom along with their attorneys by a US marshal and they were free on bond pending their sentencing for which a date has not been set. The judge also cited the upcoming trial in June on state charges of aiding and abetting murder and manslaughter in Floyd's death as a reason for not taking them into custody.

Chauvin, who was also indicted by the federal grand jury on May 6, 2021, along with the three others on civil rights crimes, pleaded guilty to the charges against him in a deal worked out by the US Justice Department that enables him to serve out his 25-year sentence in a federal instead of a state prison.

The case of the Minneapolis policemen is believed by legal experts and civil rights activists to be the first time the federal government has charged officers for failing to intervene against a senior officer who was committing a crime by using excessive force. Christy E. Lopez, a professor at Georgetown University Law Center, told the *New York Times* that the ruling forces the law enforcement agencies to "move beyond the bad apple narrative." Lopez added, "It shifts the entire narrative from misconduct being about just acts of commission to misconduct also being about acts of omission."

During the one-month trial, the prosecution used video evidence—including the video captured by teenager Darnella Frazier that went viral on social media and sparked the mass movement against police brutality and murder that swept across the US and around the world for the next five months—to review a second-by-second record of the murder. They brought

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in as witnesses doctors, other police officers, bystanders and paramedics who arrived on the scene after Floyd was killed.

Much of the testimony focused on the training that the three men received by the Minneapolis Police Department (MPD). Inspector Katie Blackwell, who was previously in charge of training at the MPD, testified for three days about the training new officers receive about the use of force and their constitutional duty to intervene when they witness another officer using excessive force. The defense attorneys attacked these claims, saying that the "duty to intervene" obligation was not adequately reviewed and was barely mentioned in the training.

The federal prosecutors also focused on the behavior of the bystanders as evidence of the criminality of the three officers. They asked, if a small crowd of average citizens could see that Floyd was dying in front of their eyes and in dire need of medical attention, then why couldn't the three men in uniform do the same? In her closing argument, prosecutor Manda Sertich said, "You just need plain old common sense. And you just need plain old human decency."

The federal guidelines for sentencing on a civil rights violation that results in death include life in prison or even death, but these sentences are extremely rare. The prosecutors are expected to seek sentences that are far less severe given that they recommended a sentence of 300 months, or 25 years, for Chauvin.

The verdict in the federal trial further undermines the presentation of police violence as purely a racial matter of white versus black in American society. The three officers were of different racial backgrounds: Kueng, 28, is bi-racial with a black father and white mother; Lane, 38, is white; and Thao, 36, is from the large Hmong-American community in Minneapolis. Additionally, the majority white jury agreed with the US Justice Department's characterization of the murder of George Floyd by the officers and rejected the arguments presented about his treatment being justified because he was on drugs, had tried to pass a counterfeit $20 bill and was physically threatening.

The verdict in the St. Paul courtroom is also the third conviction of police officers in murders of African American men in recent months by juries that included white people. On April 21, 2021, Derek Chauvin was convicted of murdering George Floyd in a state trial with a jury that was half white and half black or multiracial and, on December 23, 2021, in a Hennepin County, Minnesota court, Kimberly Potter was found guilty of murdering 20-year-old Daunte Wright by a jury of eight white and two Asian people and one black person.

Police violence and murder is the product of capitalism and is overwhelmingly directed against poor and working class people of all backgrounds across the country. While police violence is carried out disproportionately against blacks in the US, the largest number of victims are white.

Thursday's convictions are the exception which proves the rule. In most cases of police killings, approximately 1,000 every year, the killer cops get away without facing any criminal charges. The structures of law enforcement and the criminal justice system are—from the local police and jailhouse on up to the FBI and the US Bureau of Prisons—in place to protect the property of the ruling elite and maintain the exploitation of the working class for profit.

Police brutality and "excessive force" can only be stopped through the political struggle of the entire working class against the social inequality that is inherent and growing within the capitalist system.

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