



JUSTICE, GEORGE FLOYD AND UNFORGIVABLE BLACKNESS: AMERICA ON TRIAL AS A REPEAT OFFENDER

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REGARDLESS OF THE OBVIOUS LEGAL LANGUAGE, focus and maneuvering in that Minneapolis courtroom that is being watched by the world in horror, hope, trauma and righteous anger, there is in it all a larger moral meaning. And it is that America, itself, is on trial, not just Derek Chauvin and his other police crime partners. And America, more definitively White America, is on trial as a repeat offender, indeed, an inveterate offender with ingrained, deeply rooted and long-established habits and practices that are anti-Black, anti-human, savagely self-serving for Whites and barbarically brutal against others different and vulnerable. Indeed, Derek Chauvin, like Donald Trump, is one of the many monsters America has created within itself, through its virtually religious commitment to systemic racism, White supremacy and the perverse, pervasive and persistent violence it practices against the vulnerable and different at home and abroad.

Chauvin's savage and sustained death-dealing knee on the neck of George Floyd and his crime partner policemen's crushing weight on Floyd's back is a metaphor and mirror of what America has done and continues to do to Black people in various and vicious ways. Indeed, from the Holocaust of enslavement and the savagery of segregation to the public lynching of George Floyd and beyond today, America has for centuries had its racist knee on the neck and its White supremacist weight on the back of Black people, African Americans. And it has sheltered and shown over the centuries the depraved disregard for Black life, lives and rights that is murderously modelled and mirrored in Chauvin's and his crime partner policemen's merciless and murderous attitudes and actions for which they and America are now on trial.

So, what we are witnessing in Minneapolis is a criminal trial on the criminal history and current practices of White supremacy and systemic racism against Black people in America. And the cold-blooded, callous and inhuman public murder of George Floyd is serving as a model and mo-

ment in time of focus in a long record of such social savagery constantly directed against us as persons and a people. Indeed, one of the most striking aspects of the first week was the contrasting distinction between the humanity of the Black witnesses and the inhumanity of the ruthless and racist actions of the police. Darnella Frazier, 17 when she took that historic and vital video, spoke of her ongoing anxiety and trauma and wondering constantly could she have done more to intervene and save George Floyd's life. But she rightly realizes as she says that "It's not what I should have done. It's what he (Chauvin) should have done." The store clerk, Christopher Martin, wonders whether he should have just not reported receiving a counterfeit bill and absorbed the cost himself. And Charles McMillian, the elder, also wondered what else he might have done in addition to pleading for the life of George Floyd. The witnesses who gathered in a small group recounted how they pleaded for George Floyd's life, repeatedly informed Chauvin that he was killing him and called him out for his arctic cold callousness.

But Chauvin and his crime partner policemen would not be moved. Stone-faced and stone-hearted, posing and playing out the "bad white man" with his hand in his pocket and his knee on the neck of his subdued and suffocating victim, Chauvin performed publicly and shamelessly his depraved desire to demonstrate his power of life and death. Thus, he sought to affirm and reaffirm for nine torturous minutes and 29 seconds who was Whiteness and rightly in control, as he slowly and ruthlessly robbed George Floyd of his breath and life.

The witnesses, young and old, spoke also of their deep sadness and trauma caused by witnessing a human being, so senselessly and savagely killed, a Black man, crying, pleading for his life, calling for his mother, posing no threat, prone, handcuffed behind his back, face pressed into the pavement with a suffocating knee on his neck, repeatedly telling his murderous assailant he could not breathe. And again, Chauvin shows not an

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iota, ounce or hint of human sensitivity to suffering and to agonizing and continuing pleas for life and simple justice. The profound sadness and continuing trauma is felt, not only by the first witnesses, but also by all of us Black people who watch this savage suffocation of George Floyd over and over again. For we, them and George Floyd, share this long history of police violence and the systemic racism which informs and undergirds it, sanctions it and supports this and other violence. And there is a shared sense and silent knowledge, as witnesses noted, that it could have been anyone of us, someone else's brother, father, son, husband, uncle – and also, someone else's sister, mother, daughter, aunt or other relatives.

And this, more than anything else, is because of our racistly contrived mortal sin and fatal flaw of *unforgiveable Blackness*. As our honored forefather, W.E.B. DuBois says in describing the racist hatred and hostility directed against the Black World Heavyweight Champion boxer, Jack Johnson, it is the established order's central justification of our oppression. He states, "the reason Jack Johnson was so beset by his own country, a country ironically which had only recently reaffirmed that all men were created equal was because of his Unforgivable Blackness." DuBois' use of the word "beset" was chosen precisely because its definition is to hem in, hobble, harass and attack from all sides continuously and consciously. Certainly, this speaks to the pattern and practice of policing which the Black people of Minnesota and America at large have experienced since the Holocaust of enslavement where these pernicious practices were set in place. For the police come and act as an occupying army with an arrogantly and erroneously assumed right and responsibility to terrorize and suppress us, these so-called menaces to White society and its flawed, fragile and fictitious conception of itself.

The trial from the beginning demonstrates also and again that White America cannot on its

own or honestly criticize and condemn itself and give justice to its victims. It must be confronted and compelled at every level through righteous and relentless struggle. In fact, they constantly try to escape culpability by putting George Floyd and all its victims, especially us, on trial, racializing crime and criminalizing the whole race. It is not them, they irrationally reason, but us and our *unforgivable Blackness*. It is our unforgivable humanity and sacred soulfulness that attracts and repels them, that they envy and hate, and our internal creative capacity, resilience, resourcefulness and resistance they seek to appropriate, co-opt and exploit in corrupt and commoditized ways.

WHATEVER HAPPENS IN THAT COURTROOM, it must not be seen as a defeat if racism again wins or a sign and wonder, if reason and humanity triumph, especially in a country where you have to call the police on the police and still not know what will happen. If we win procedural justice in the court, it is important, but winning substantive justice in society is infinitely more so. No court case can undo the awesome and anti-human damage done to us as direct and indirect victims of police violence and the systemic racist violence of whom it is a part and fundamental expression. Only a radical reconception and reconstruction of society and conscious acts of reparations can begin to lay the framework for our moving forward toward substantive justice and liberation from all forms of oppression. And this, as always, requires us to set aside all illusions of quick solutions, but keep the faith, hold the line, continue and intensify the struggle, and dare victory in the vital interest and advancement of African and human good and the well-being of the world. This world-encompassing mission our honored foremother, Mary McLeod Bethune tells us, is our sacred task. "It is" she says, "nothing less than this."▲

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