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People v. Derek Chauvin opening arguments protest

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Minneapolis protest demands justice for George Floyd. Photo: FightBack! News

Minneapolis — Hundreds of people protested on Monday, March 29, to demand justice for George Floyd and conviction of Derek Chauvin. The demonstration took place after opening statements, and the first witnesses testified in court. Many were still reeling from an emotional day in court, where videos of Floyd's murder were replayed several times, and the proceedings were broadcast live.

In opening arguments, special prosecutor Jerry Blackwell told jurors that George Floyd said he could not breathe 27 times while Chauvin kneeled on his neck and back. He played one of the bystander videos taken the day that Floyd was killed,

which some jurors had not seen before. He said that Chauvin's decision was not a split-second one, but instead deliberate, as Chauvin ignored pleas by Floyd and the nearby crowd for nine minutes 29 seconds (popularly reported as eight minutes 46 seconds, based on a viral video of the murder).

Blackwell said Chauvin's actions were an exception, in a violation of Minneapolis Police Department use of force policies, and that several officers including the chief of police would testify for the prosecution. To suggest that Chauvin's brutality is not typical of MPD behavior overlooks that MPD kills unarmed civilians every year, as do police forces across the country. What is unusual is that Floyd's torture and murder were captured on video and broadcast live on social media, as it was happening.

Chauvin's opening arguments, presented by defense attorney Eric Nelson, blamed George Floyd for his own death. Nelson argued that Floyd was much bigger than Chauvin, who had no choice but to use force; that Floyd had pre-existing health conditions and that he allegedly had used drugs. While the prosecution urged jurors to believe what they saw in the murder video, Nelson argued that it is common sense that there are two sides to every story.

Three prosecution witnesses testified March 29

Jena Scurry is a 911 dispatcher who had watched Floyd's murder unfold on police surveillance cameras in the area. She testified that despite never having done so in her several years working dispatch, Scurry called to report the situation with George Floyd to the MPD sergeant supervising Chauvin and his accomplices. A recording of that call was played in court, "You can call me a snitch if you want to but we have the cameras up for [squad] 320's call and ... I don't know if they had to use force or not, but they got something out of the back of the squad and all of them sat on this man."

The second witness was Alisha Oyler, a lead worker who was on duty at the

Speedway gas station across the street when Floyd was killed. When asked why she took several videos of the murder, Oyler said it was because police “are always messing with people and it’s wrong.” The Speedway has been closed since that day, and has been renamed the People’s Way, part of the area known as George Floyd Square, an intersection has been closed to traffic by the community since Floyd’s murder.

The third prosecution witness on Monday was Donald Williams, a mixed martial arts fighter who said he witnessed Chauvin torturing Floyd with what he called a “blood choke.” When he described that move as deadly, the defense objected to his remarks because Williams is not a medical expert. The judge upheld the defense objection.

Williams was asked about his interaction with then-officer Tou Thao, who was holding the crowd back from coming to Floyd’s aid. “He did what America does and blamed it on drugs for being a Black man on the ground. He said ‘This is what drugs do to you,’ and I replied, ‘This is not what drugs do to you.’”

Before Williams’ testimony concluded, the court video feed stopped working, and court recessed, just as protesters were gathering outside.

Large protest outside trial venue

Emcees Sam Martinez, DJ Hooker and Angel Smith El energized the crowd with chants and invited them to get involved with ongoing organizing efforts, including the fight for community control of police. They work with Twin Cities Coalition for Justice 4 Jamar (TCC4J), which is leading an effort to change the city charter to establish an all-elected Civilian Police Accountability Commission (CPAC).

Michelle Gross, of Communities United Against Police Brutality, began by speaking about the razor wire and barricades around the courthouse, “That’s because the city and state are more afraid of the community than they are of violent police. What

does that say about our city and our state?"

But Gross and others are not intimidated. "We are going to watch this trial very closely. In the meantime we are going to be out here demanding the changes we seek. We want those nine bills passed at legislature. We want our recommendations to be followed. Rein in those brutal-ass cops, who are still brutal to this day. We won't quit until these cops are reined in."

Gross and others are supporting several bills for police accountability currently being considered at the Minnesota state legislature, including bills to end qualified immunity, to eliminate the statute of limitations for wrongful death, to strengthen civilian oversight, and to create an independent investigatory and prosecutorial body for police homicides.

Toshira Garraway, founder of Families Supporting Families Against Police Violence, organizes not only for other families, but also for her son's father, Justin Teigen, who was brutally beaten to death and thrown in a trash dumpster by Saint Paul police. She says that because state officials have allowed so many police murders to go ignored, they are responsible for George Floyd's deaths. Other family speakers included Del Shea Perry, mother of Hardel Sherrell; Marilyn Hill, mother of Demetrius Hill; Bayle Gelle, father of Dolal Idd, and Paul Johnson, friend of Travis Jordan.

Kaia Hirt and Chaz Neal spoke about the Locks for Loved Ones Lost project, an ongoing effort of community members to attach padlocks to the police-state fencing around the Government Center. Twice, when locks have gone up during the day, National Guard and sheriff's deputies cut them down at night. The organizers say the locks are to, "remember the people they killed and the families they shattered. They keep cutting them down and we keep putting them back. We'll never stop." As a song played, hundreds more locks were placed on the fence.

Then, the group marched from the courthouse to the temporary headquarters of the Minneapolis police 3rd Precinct. The old 3rd Precinct building was destroyed by protesters just a few nights after George Floyd was killed.

Organizer Jae Yates spoke: “I’m representing Twin Cities Coalition 4 Justice 4 Jamar today, but I’m also representing myself as a Black trans American. I feel like trans people – specifically Black trans people – we always show up. Every time a Black person is killed, trans people are there, because trans people know that if they’re coming for us, and they’re coming for Black men, they’re coming for all of us. And we can’t continue to ignore the Black lives that some people in the Black community don’t want to claim. What we’re not gonna do is tolerate homophobia and transphobia in this movement. What I’m not gonna do is be out here and show up for Black lives and not even have my basic humanity respected.”

They concluded, “And when we fight together, they cannot beat us. There are not enough cops to stop us. There are not enough bosses to stop us. We outnumber every oppressive institution that is over us. When we fight, we win! All power to the people!”

Other speakers included Jaylani Hussein, of CAIR-Minnesota; Trahern Crews of Black Lives Matter Minnesota; Samantha Pree-Gonzalez; Meredith Aby-Keirstead of the Anti-War Committee; Victor Ramirez Bustamante for MN Immigrant Rights Action Committee; Gabriel Black Elk of Native Lives Matter, and brother of Paul Castaway; Monique Cullars-Doty, aunt of Marcus Golden, also with TCC4J; and Chauntyll Allen, Black Lives Matter Twin Cities Metro.

When the march returned to the courthouse, Kaia Hirt chained herself to the fencing, and vowed to stay until state and city political leaders meet with families of those murdered by police. As of Tuesday afternoon, Hirt was still chained to the fence, surrounded by supporters.

Source: [FightBack! News](#)

