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Chauvin witness David Fowler: medical expert or racist liar?

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David Fowler covered up the lynching of teenager Anton Black, pictured above. Derek Chauvin's defense used him as an 'expert witness' to do the same to George Floyd.

As the trial of killer cop Derek Chauvin wound to a close, the defense called its final and star witness: forensic pathologist Dr. David Fowler. The defense hoped that Fowler's testimony would serve as a foil to the avalanche of medical and scientific evidence put forward by the prosecution.

Fowler testified April 14 that George Floyd's death should be classified as undetermined due to underlying health conditions. He claimed that Chauvin's knee

on Floyd's neck ["was not a significant factor in his death."](#)

Chauvin's attorney, Eric Nelson, framed Fowler's testimony carefully to shift the blame for Floyd's death onto the victim's heart disease and alleged drug use. Some commentators referred to this strategy as "everything but the knee on the neck."

There's something particularly insidious about blaming a police murder on the victim of racist violence.

Who is Dr. David Fowler? His main credential as an expert witness is his 19 years as Maryland's chief medical examiner. There are several aspects of Fowler's career that need to be brought into the spotlight and examined.

Product of apartheid

A part of Fowler's background that jumps out immediately is where he received his training to be a physician.

In 1983, David Fowler [graduated from the University of Cape Town](#) and began his career in what was then racist apartheid South Africa. Fowler established himself as a forensic physician in a country where the 75% percent of the population, Black people, were denied the most basic human rights.

In 1991, less than a year after apartheid rule started to crumble, Fowler moved to Baltimore to take a job in the Maryland Office of the Chief Medical Examiner. He was promoted to deputy chief medical examiner in 1998 and then chief medical examiner in 2002.

Fowler's near-immediate departure from South Africa in the wake of Nelson Mandela's release from prison and his relocation to a U.S. city with a significant Black community and history of racist police abuse paints a disturbing picture.

This picture becomes even more disturbing when put in the context of his recent outrageously inaccurate and pro-police testimony in Derek Chauvin's trial.

During his 19-year career as the Maryland chief medical examiner, Fowler consistently rubber-stamped case theories promoted by the police and state's attorney. Fowler also consistently absolved the cops of liability when it came to police murders of Black people.

To this end, Fowler and his deputy, [Pamela Southall](#), are subjects of an ACLU lawsuit that alleges that both physicians were willing participants in a coverup aimed at absolving the police for the [murder of a 19-year-old Black teenager](#), Anton Black.

Anton Black coverup

Black died in 2018 after being chased, assaulted and beaten by a group of six men that included a local chief of police, two off-duty police officers, a firefighter and two civilians wearing Confederate flag imagery.

This lynch mob used the full weight of their six bodies to pin Anton Black in a prone position on the ground, killing him. In many ways, Black's death mirrors George Floyd's.

More than four months after Black's death, Fowler finally released his autopsy report. Fowler declared the cause of death an "accident."

The justification given for his conclusion was very similar to Fowler's testimony in Chauvin's trial. He attributed Black's death to a "sudden cardiac death" due to an underlying heart condition.

Anything but the knee on the neck...

Fowler's conclusions in both cases — attributing the deaths of Black men to anything but racist police violence — are so outrageous and against common sense that they can't be called medical opinions. In reality, they are politicized conclusions that directly serve to protect the ability of the police to wage war on working class and oppressed communities.

Who better to do that than a doctor educated and trained in apartheid South Africa?

They were murdered

Neither George Floyd nor Anton Black died from underlying health conditions. They were murdered by a brutal and racist police system. Fowler and Chauvin's defense team would ask the public to pull the wool over their own eyes and choose to accept racist police terror.

Fowler's testimony and Chauvin's trial generally represent a battle between the narrative of the ruling class and the reality of racist oppression in the U.S. The wealthy and the powerful want people to continue to accept police brutality as necessary and beneficial to society.

The deaths of George Floyd and Anton Black, and the efforts to prevent their killers from being brought to justice, make it clear what is at stake in this trial and in the struggles to come. It's racist police terror or Black liberation. It's ruling-class false narratives or working-class truth.

Because the stakes are so high, racist liars like Fowler, passed off as "medical experts," must be challenged at every turn.

The people won't have the wool pulled over their eyes this time. Justice for George Floyd! Justice for Anton Black! Community control of the police now!

