



April 20, 2021

Nine minutes and twenty-nine seconds. The life of a human being was brutally ripped from this earth under the knee of a person who was sworn to protect and serve him. In nine minutes and twenty-nine seconds. A crowd of onlookers watched in helpless horror as George Floyd breathed his last, labored breath. A group of police officers calmly stood by as a murder took place. For nine minutes and twenty-nine seconds.

Today, a jury in Minneapolis returned a series of guilty verdicts against Derek Chauvin, the former police officer who murdered Mr. Floyd. For many throughout the world, this guilty verdict provides a sense of relief, and restores a notion of faith that our justice system can and will protect our rights to life, liberty, and property. It confirms for many the principles that no one is above the law, and that Black lives do indeed matter.

But today's verdict alone will not heal the searing pain that too many Americans have faced in the form of brutality and dehumanization at the hands of law enforcement officers – particularly Black and Brown men. The litany of deaths that have become too numerous to recall have resulted from infractions as frivolous as selling loose cigarettes, selling CDs, failing to signal a lane change, playing with a toy gun, experiencing a mental health crisis, passing a counterfeit \$20 bill, legally possessing a firearm, holding a wallet, holding a mobile phone, sitting in their own living room, standing on their own stoop, and sleeping peacefully. Even as the trial in Minneapolis was under way, we witnessed the brutal killing of Daunte Wright resulting from a traffic stop only a few miles away from the Chauvin trial.

These killed individuals were consultants, EMTs, program counselors, entrepreneurs, people struggling with addiction, and people seeking gainful employment. They were mothers and fathers, sisters and brothers, friends and neighbors, and troubled souls down on their luck. They were upstanding pillars of their communities, and they were people who had previous run-ins with the law. In short, they were humans, with all of their beauty, their complexity, their hopes, and their flaws. And they each deserved to continue their human experience in its full measure long after the day they had their fatal encounter with police.

For Black and Brown men in America especially, no amount of social decorum, personal accomplishment, or socioeconomic status is sufficient to protect yourself from these traumatic encounters with law enforcement. We have seen professional basketball players, professional tennis stars, and recently a service member in uniform be physically assaulted, demeaned, and detained despite having committed no crime.

Today's verdict does not make up for this chasm of trauma, nor does the verdict end the suffering. But the delivery of justice in this case nevertheless serves as one small step on the road toward equal treatment under the law. As the sun rises tomorrow, this country will continue traveling down this long and winding road. And we will have a choice about whether we continue to move forward or we take steps backward. A rare few will be afforded the opportunity to exercise this choice to move forward as members of a jury that sees injustice and declares these encounters to be the illegal violations of human rights that they are. Some will exercise this choice to move forward as members of law enforcement who choose to perform their calling with the highest degree of integrity, inclusivity, and an unwavering commitment to service.

But most of us will exercise the choice to move forward through the daily and routine decisions we make that shape our perceptions of the world and those of us around us. We will choose to move forward by calling out micro-aggressions against people of color instead of just letting them slide. We will choose to move forward by engaging with those who attempt to rationalize acts of injustice instead of avoiding the hard conversation. We will choose to move forward by actively intervening when the physical or mental well-being of a fellow person is threatened by the slings and arrows of the intolerant. We will choose to move forward by teaching our sons and daughters how not to be bystanders. We will choose to move forward by settling for nothing less than the equal and dignified treatment of our fellow humans no matter their race, religion, gender, or first language, and no matter how inconvenient or frightening doing so may feel at the time.

Nine minutes and twenty-nine seconds...

The road to equal treatment under the law is uncharted and filled with uncertainty and danger. Moving forward toward a more just humanity takes courage in the form of acts large and small. Tomorrow, an opportunity to act for justice will present itself. When that opportunity comes—be it large or be it small—I wish you all the courage to take the step toward justice.

Sincerely,

Ryan