
**JHA statement on Derek Chauvin verdict
April 22, 2021**

When an officer's behavior is observable, their actions cannot be denied.

As I listened to the news focused on the results of the Derek Chauvin trial and the many responses of relief being articulated in response to the verdict, one point came up with consistency: the impact of the videos taken by people who saw what Officer Chauvin did. Following the verdict, I heard several civil rights leaders and criminal defense attorneys take to social media, radio, and television to articulate the same basic premise: what is different about the Chauvin case is that people saw what happened and had the courage to capture it on video to create evidence. We cannot deny what we see for ourselves.

In a criminal legal system that is ineffective and rife with racism and unfairness, good people work every day to change policies and practices and defend those who are most deeply harmed by them. As they swim upstream trying to bring equity into a structure built on unfairness, it is critical to recognize this one system does not function in a vacuum; it is the culmination of the many failed, broken, and unfair systems and social safety nets that come before it. Pervasive racism and poverty have made this country a place where injustice and inhumanity live, fueled by lack of access to needed care, opportunity, education, respect, and fair treatment that allow people to feel safe and valued in their own neighborhoods. Fixing one part of one system is an almost impossible task, and the real charge is to rebuild them all. The Chauvin trial demonstrated that there is something that can be done now to improve how people who work in the criminal justice system behave: increased transparency. Transparency begets accountability. Government activity, including the behavior of those who work for our public institutions and agencies, must be observable and should be able to be witnessed by citizens.

It is often said that sunlight is the best disinfectant. Thus, citizen witnesses can be a powerful and critical force for change. We must insist that our government treat all people with respect, dignity, humanity, and within the bounds of our laws. We do this not by relying on legal outcomes following a tragic event, but by demanding transparency and providing public oversight to prevent such events from occurring. Accountability should not be a concept solely based on meting out consequences, it should be demanded in the daily execution of duties and responsibilities. Most people are more likely to live up to their job requirements and societal expectations when they know they are being watched. Therefore, we must provide the external checks that prevent people from giving in to their worse natures to create a more fair and just society, which means creating transparency when and wherever possible. This includes

the increased use of cameras in spaces where citizens do not have a line of sight - in lock ups, jails, prisons, and other places closed off from public view - along with increased information sharing and independent review, to identify just a few initial steps.

A criminal legal conviction based on clear evidence is certainly desirable, but it is hard to see that outcome as justice in and of itself. Any step towards illuminating the behavior of those who are entrusted with upholding the law and the treatment, care, and custody of other people, or where they wield this power over others, is an important one. This ensures that transparency is increased and accountability is created.

Sincerely,

Jennifer Vollen-Katz, ED