

# GUILTY! GUILTY! GUILTY!

Joy follows a just verdict; so do calls for continued push for justice and equality Story and photos by David Pierini, Staff Reporter

Three hundred thirty days of tears, righteous anger and demands to end racist police brutality came to a sudden hush on a grassy plaza outside the Hennepin County Government Center.

A single word broadcast from an organizer's bullhorn broke the silence. "Guilty!"

Strangers hugged one another, car horns blared and some people dropped to their knees in thanks. Some quietly nodded, their eyes closed and hands clasped in prayer. One man brought a bottle of champagne, anticipating a celebration.

Minneapolis took a collective breath on April 20 for George Floyd, the Black man whose last breath came under the knee of a white police officer outside a convenience store last May. Floyd's cruel death came after he allegedly passed a counterfeit \$20 bill, a misdemeanor that normally ends with a ticket.

As declarations of justice moved through the crowd, Derek Chauvin was led out of the nearby courtroom in handcuffs after a jury convicted him on murder and manslaughter charges.

Like the celebration downtown, a joyous roar could also be heard from the intersection of 38th Street and Chicago Avenue, where Floyd died. People flocked late into the night to what is now informally known as George Floyd Memorial Square to reflect, celebrate and hope.

"I'm scared this isn't true," said Autumn Adkins, who lives a few blocks from the intersection of 38th and Chicago, where Floyd died. "It feels surreal like it might not be true. That's an honest feeling. I feel relieved, but the work isn't done so it feels like temporary relief. On to Daunte Wright."

As the world watched Chauvin's trial, Daunte Wright was stopped by police in



When the verdict was announced, the crowd outside the courthouse erupted with joy and relief.

Brooklyn Center and died from a single shot by a white police officer as he got back into his car.

The verdict arrived two days before Wright was to be laid to rest and his name reminded many that the work for justice and accountability goes on.

"A conviction is great but it's just the beginning," said Shvonne Johnson. "At the end of the day, George Floyd, Daunte Wright, Jamar Clark, Breonna Taylor and Tamir Rice are not here. We were here two years ago, we were here five years ago. We keep doing this like every other year. It's a pattern that's got to stop."

The two city council members representing North Minneapolis, Jeremiah Ellison and Phillippe Cunningham, expressed the same caution.

They, too, were part of the downtown crowd and while happy with the verdict, each saw it as a small step towards the types of sweeping changes that could

eventually bring justice equality. Ellison and Cunningham have been among the boldest on the council in their calls to overhaul the city's system of policing.

"I feel immense relief, but I also feel sadness," Cunningham said. "It's still a desperately sad situation in which someone lost their life. It's important not to get lost in this moment. We have to keep leaning into change. Having surface level reforms is not going to produce different outcomes. We have to build an entirely new system."

Ellison, a one-time activist whose desire to seek elected office was born during the protests that rose from the police killing of Jamar Clark in 2015, smiled but admitted to mixed emotions.

He said he was proud of his father, Attorney General Keith Ellison, for having



Jessica Smith of Robbinsdale celebrated the verdict through the sunroof of a car in downtown Minneapolis.





The band “We Got This” played celebratory music at George Floyd Memorial Square following the verdict.



A woman's sign showing the likeness of former police officer Derek Chauvin anticipated the jury's verdict.

assembled the team of prosecutors that convinced the jury to convict Chauvin.

“We have not yet turned the corner in creating systemic change in our police department. We couldn't make it through this trial without Daunte Wright being killed by police in Brooklyn Center,” Jeremiah Ellison said. “We couldn't make it through the entirety of the trial without Adem Toledo being killed in Chicago. The work's not done. While the prosecution did an incredible job of getting justice in this case, we haven't turned the corner to create systemic change in our police department.”

Alexis Kramer of Maplewood was standing next to Autumn Adkins when the verdict on Chauvin was announced. They did not know each other before that Tuesday afternoon but found themselves in each other's arms in the moment.

Kramer said she would continue being vocal for equal justice, but felt like the verdict was cause to celebrate.

“I know the whole United States and nations around the world are watching this,” she said. “I hope they're all celebrating too.”

The celebration began before the verdict was read with several chants to honor George Floyd and calls for justice equality.

