

Checking in following the Chauvin trial verdict

by Dominic J. Ledesma

On April 20, a jury found former Minneapolis police officer Derek Chauvin [guilty](#) of murdering George Floyd on May 25 of last year. Chauvin was found guilty on all three charges that were brought against him by the State of Minnesota.

Unfortunately, Floyd's murder has been preceded and succeeded by similar tragedies, including Breonna Taylor, Eric Garner, Philando Castile, Daunte Wright, Adam Toledo and many other lives, too many to list here.

I have been reflecting a lot over the past few days on the concept and meaning of justice. This, of course, has been in connection to following the Chauvin trial. It has also been, however, in observation of the ongoing tensions in society that have stemmed from the tragic and avoidable loss of Black and Brown lives during encounters with law enforcement officers. But as a prosecuting attorney, Steve Schleicher, stated during the trial's closing argument: "This case is called the State of Minnesota vs. Derek Chauvin. This case is not called the State of Minnesota vs. the police." This statement, among others in my view, reminded us of the imperative to seek justice for tragic loss of lives like Floyd's. What is more, I think it also speaks to one of the ways our society needs to do better.

From my perspective, what the Chauvin trial verdict represented was an overdue measure of accountability. In my view, the accountability that was sought through this trial was reflected by the many ways in which accountability has often been absent, lacking, or disparately applied. This includes the justice system but extends to multiple systems in U.S. society that have been found to produce—and reproduce—inequitable effects on Black, Indigenous, and other Communities of Color. It is the disparate application and impact of equity that enables broader forms of injustice to exist.

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Like many discussions currently taking place, people are asking "where do we go from here?" To situate this question in Extension, it is important to revisit this

question from the vantage point of “where have we come in a year?” Here are a few a few reflections.

The Talking & Reflection Circle we held a week after Floyd’s murder was a testament to the fact that issues of equity, justice, and equality matter to Extension professionals and are imperative for our work. Similarly, in Dean Martin’s response to George Floyd’s murder unequivocally stated, “Through our work and actions across Wisconsin we will continue to strive for a society that is free of racism, bigotry, and bias. We are committed to working with community members and leaders to improve our efforts across the state. Strengthening collaborations between Extension and our community partners includes efforts that reduce trust gaps and improve relations between law enforcement and Wisconsin communities.” Facilitating community conversations with local law enforcement agencies in at least three different counties are a few examples of how our Extension professionals have been engaged in this work. Additionally, Institute Directors have provided leadership to create new professional learning opportunities for their staff around issues of race and equity. Finally, last year our Division implemented a [Call to Action](#) which not only reiterated our commitment to becoming a more inclusive and anti-racist organization, but put in place nine specific initiatives that would help us demonstrate and advance our efforts in key areas.

Within less than a year, we have made significant strides as a Division. We are engaging in more conversations and opportunities to learn with and from one another. These opportunities have helped us grow and evolve together. In a very short period, I would argue that we have elevated our collective expectation to know better, do better, and become better.

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There is a need for continued healing and a need to be continually engaged in anti-racism work in all forms. Thus, we will continue to promote notions of equity and inclusion across our work and state, and we will continue to center issues that impact our employees, our families, and our society.