

Pittsburghers mourn, protest after guilty verdict in Floyd murder case

By Rebecca Johnson and Jon Moss

Jerry Dickinson has only been able to watch one second of the video of George Floyd's murder.

Dickinson, a professor in Pitt's School of Law and candidate for a local U.S. House seat, said he can't watch any more of the video because of his own experience with the Pittsburgh police. He said 10 years ago, a police officer threw him to the ground "for being Black."

"I was thrown to the ground by a police officer — Pittsburgh police. Me on my back, arrested not for doing anything, but for being Black in Pittsburgh. I will never forget that moment," Dickinson said. "Anytime I see a video now, that same incident we know this is happening to men and women, every single day. It's happening to your neighbors, it's happening to your family. We need change now."



Jaime Ely | Staff Photographer

A crowd of about 150 people gathered Tuesday evening at Freedom Corner after a jury found former police officer Derek Chauvin guilty of the murder of George Floyd.

.@JerrySDickinson, who is running to represent Pittsburgh in the U.S. House, said while the criminal justice system "worked" today, "we've got a lot of work to do to change the laws that are on the books right now to ensure that we have justice." pic.twitter.com/CSDZnZASrb

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Dickinson joined a crowd of about 150 people Tuesday evening at Freedom Corner in the Hill District after a jury found former Minneapolis police officer Derek Chauvin guilty of murder and manslaughter in the murder of Floyd. The crowd marched down Forbes Avenue chanting, "Hands up, don't shoot" and, "Say his name, George Floyd." It eventually reached Pitt's campus before dispersing at about 9 p.m. near Flagstaff Hill.

About 100 people have gathered at Freedom Corner in the Hill District after a jury found former Minneapolis police officer Derek Chauvin guilty this afternoon of murder and manslaughter in the May 2020 murder of George Floyd. pic.twitter.com/waQxXA2rTC

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Floyd died last May after Chauvin, a white police officer, pinned his knee on Floyd's neck for nearly nine and half minutes, a graphic killing that spurred worldwide protests and one of the largest civil rights movements in decades in the United States. The effects were also felt at Pitt, such as when the Black Action Society and 17 other Black Pitt student organizations released demands to administrators in the wake of Floyd's murder.

The demonstration started with an organizer pouring water as libations to "remind ourselves that we are everlasting" and to acknowledge Black people who lost their lives violently — Antwon Rose II, Marquis Jaylen Brown, Breonna Taylor, Trayvon Martin and numerous others.

An organizer is pouring water as libations to “remind ourselves that we are everlasting” pic.twitter.com/FQC11h4zvZ

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Brandi Fisher, an organizer with the Alliance for Police Accountability, said while she celebrated today with Floyd’s family, it’s “hard to feel victorious” when there will inevitably be more trials in the future after police officers murder Black people. She said she hopes this guilty verdict sends a message to people in power.

“It is so hard when I’m reminded that we’re going to have more trials to face and to go through in the coming months and the coming years, and we’re still not going to be sure what that verdict will be,” Fisher said. “It is our hope that this verdict — that the fact that this country was on edge — sends a message to the powers that be.”

.@BrandiSFisher of @apapgh_ said “it is our hope that this verdict sends a message to the powers at be.” pic.twitter.com/8BXWbCd1iG

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Two other people running for political office joined Dickinson at Freedom Corner as well. State Rep. Ed Gainey — who is running for mayor — said when he woke up this morning he felt “hope” because he didn’t believe that this day would come after generations of abuse at the hands of police.

But Gainey added that the fight isn’t over until there are equal laws and better policing that doesn’t disproportionately target Black people. He said “today is the day of change” but “tomorrow is a new day,” and the only way to change the City, the nation and the world for the better is “power to the people.”

“It can’t be over until we have equal laws for everybody where no African American feels like he’s going to be killed just because he gets pulled over by the police,” Gainey said. “We can never, ever go back to settle for over policing in our neighborhoods knowing that the only one going to jail is us.”

.@RepGainey, who is running a primary challenge against Mayor Bill Peduto, said “we can never ever go back to settle for over policing in our neighborhoods, knowing that the only one going to jail is us.” pic.twitter.com/Ob6ZHHSjhO

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Raymond Robinson, a magisterial judge candidate, added that he encourages people to “take to the streets” to change flawed systems and to vote for candidates seeking meaningful change.

The protest — which was organized by a number of community organizations such as Alliance for Police Accountability, Black Lives Matter Pittsburgh, Stop the Station Pittsburgh, Black Young & Educated, Take Action Mon Valley, Party for Socialism and Liberation Pittsburgh, Socialist Alternative Pittsburgh and Pittsburgh Feminists for Intersectionality — also included singing and poetry.

The crowd has paused several times while marching down Forbes Avenue, including to sing “Lovely Day” by the late Bill Withers. pic.twitter.com/HDDy5WsqUs

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Alexis reads their poem “Hush Hush”: pic.twitter.com/8YO1D5dNNf

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Senior Pitt leadership said in a Tuesday afternoon campuswide email that “the need for change — for an honest reckoning with the systemic racism that divides our country — seemed to grow more urgent than ever before” in the wake of Floyd’s murder and that sense of urgency “remains.” The administrators who penned the email included Chancellor Patrick Gallagher, Provost Ann Cudd, Dr. Anantha Shekhar, the senior vice chancellor for the health sciences and dean of the School of Medicine, Kenyon Bonner, the vice provost and dean of students, as well as Vice Chancellor for Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Clyde Pickett.

“We recognize that this trauma — and its aftermath — now feels too familiar,” the administrators said. “Our community will continue to lean into our values and our shared mission of creating and leveraging knowledge for the greater good.”

The email included resources for students, such as calling the University Counseling Center at 412-648-7930 x1. LifeSolutions, the faculty and staff assistance program, is available 24/7 by calling 866-647-3432.

This story has been updated to reflect that Shekhar also signed onto the email from senior Pitt administrators.