

GEORGE FLOYD: 526 SECONDS TO THINK

By Didem ÖZÇAKIR

George Floyd was murdered by a police officer on the 25th of May. In the video that went viral, the officer Derek Chauvin kneels on the neck of George Floyd for 8 minutes and 46 seconds: 526 seconds in total. Despite Floyd's repetition of the phrase "I can't breathe" and the reactions of the bystanders, the officer keeps on kneeling even after Floyd is motionless.

This led to first nationwide and then worldwide protests about racial inequality, starting on the 26th of May. The USA saw the most prominent nationwide protests since 1992. #BlackLivesMatter movement again gained power, which first appeared during the 2010s to protest different cases of police brutality and injustice against the Afro-American community. The protestors are demanding change in the police system and systemic racism in America. The response from the Trump administration was also widely criticized as the president threatened to send the military. Dozens of acts of police brutality were recorded during the protests, besides the violent looting of police stations and private property by the protestors.

Barack Obama stated that the protests following Floyd's death *represented a "genuine and legitimate frustration over a decades-long failure to reform police practices and the broader criminal justice system."*

First, the official cause of death of George Floyd was attributed to his underlying health situations combined with force from the police, however, a private autopsy revealed that his death was a homicide. This private autopsy revealed that Floyd's underlying health conditions were not serious enough to solely cause his death.

Derek Chauvin, the officer who knelt on Floyd's neck, is charged with second-degree murder and manslaughter. First, he was dismissed from the police department. His arrest was after the protests have started, and it was at a record pace when compared with the cases of other Afro-Americans – some of which have still not been resolved in years. The other three officers are also detained and are charged with abetting the crime.

There have been countless protests all over the USA. Statues of former symbols of segregation have been removed or vandalized. In response to the massive protests that were internationally visible thanks to social media and COVID, the US government tried to impose curfews and activated more than 20,000 National Guard Personnel. There have been many cases in which protestors were attacked by the police forces using tear gas and force. This led to protests being more reactive to police brutality and jurisdiction. "Defund the police" or the comparison of training duration to become a police officer with other jobs were used in signs and social media posts.



Although most of the protests have been peaceful, instances where looting and damaging of private property of businesses were reported, especially after sunset. There are theories which state these lootings might have been done by extremist groups that are trying to benefit from protests. Nevertheless, the lootings were used as a point for criticizing the situation of the protests by some right-leaning groups.

President Donald Trump threatened to use the military to stop the protests if states were not successful within themselves. This meant using the Insurrection Act of 1807, which was last used during the 1992 Los Angeles riots. There have been statements by experts that using this act at this point would be unwise and might even be considered a war crime. President's statement "When the looting starts, the shooting starts" was considered to be provoking violence by Twitter guidelines and was restricted, causing tension between the social media firm and Trump to escalate. The president also declared that there were plans to designate Antifa as a terrorist organization. Antifa is for the Anti-Fascist movement and has roots going to the Nazi era of Germany. Experts have told that it would be impossible to designate Antifa as a terrorist organization since it was not an organized group with leaders, rather a school of thought with different groups within it. Trump administration saw Antifa as a triggering factor in escalating violence, lootings, and unrest during the protest and told that the organization was prone to using violence for their far-left ideals.

With the upcoming elections in November, the Trump administration now faces the biggest economic downturn in 100 years, a worldwide pandemic with $\frac{1}{4}$ of the cases in their country

who also has the highest mortality rate and the most influential protest of 30 years at the same time. Currently, some surveys show more than 80% of the American people believe the protests are for a good cause and are rightful. It is a topic of wonder in which way these events will affect the result of the elections.

Numerous other cases show the inequality between white people and people of color in the criminal justice system. Afro-American people account for approximately one-third of the country's prison population. This means there are 1000 black people in prison for every 100,000 black US citizens, whereas this number is 200 for white people. According to the protestors, the case of Breonna Taylor, who was shot eight times by the police in a no-knock warrant that was later revealed to be a mistake, or Ahmaud Arbery, who was killed by two white men while jogging in February and many more show other cases where justice was not served properly.

The tragic case of George Floyd demands the whole world, not just the societies with racism against Afro-American people, to think about the real value we give to human life. It shows that we should be rethinking the way we are legitimizing the use of force by the state and we should all be changing the law enforcement agencies in favor of the disadvantaged groups. Even if it is about domestic violence against women in Turkey, unjust cases against black people in the USA, or hate crimes against immigrants in Europe the law enforcement and justice system throughout the globe must be revised and reformed.