

The Role of Juries in Social Change

Sonali Chakravarti '00
Wesleyan University



RADICAL

ENFRANCHISEMENT

IN THE JURY ROOM

AND PUBLIC LIFE

**SONALI
CHAKRAVARTI**

Overview of the Talk

I. Radical Enfranchisement in the Jury Room

II. Examples of the jury in social change

The Black Panther Trials in New Haven, 1971

The Trial of Derek Chauvin, 2021

III. Should we teach jurors about the power of nullification?

Nullification during the Fugitive Slave Act, 1850

Nullification in criminal prosecutions involving illegal abortions, 2023?

Jury trials can influence social change in three ways:

(1) They serve a pedagogical function for the communities in which they take place and the broader nation and educate citizens about the legal process and the foundations of democracy.

(2) They advance new ways of thinking about complex political issues through the voir dire process (interview by the judge and attorney). Voir dire answers require the ability to hold multiple truths at the same time in a way that is unusual in political life.

(3) For jurors, trials serve as a crucible for forging the skills necessary for the most challenging aspects of enfranchisement, including what to do when the law and justice diverge.

Black Panthers Trials in New Haven, 1969-1971

Trial 1: Defendants Lonnie McLucas and Warren Kimbro for the kidnapping and killing of Alex Rackley

Trial 2: Defendants Bobby Seale, Chairman of the Black Panther Party and Erica Huggins, New Haven Chapter Leader, for conspiracy to commit the murder of Alex Rackley





Source: New Haven Museum



FREE BOBBY!

FREE ERICKA!

SPEAKERS ...

Michael Tabor
Penny Jackson
(sister of George and Jonathan Jackson)
Elaine Brown



SPEAKERS ...

Dave Dellinger
One of the
New Haven 9

Source: Connecticut Historical Society

THE BLACK PANTHER

Black Community News Service

MANIFESTO

**THE FASCISTS HAVE ALREADY
DECIDED IN ADVANCE TO
MURDER CHAIRMAN
BOBBY SEALE IN
THE ELECTRIC CHAIR**



BLACK PANTHER PARTY
4000 CENTRAL AVENUE, SUITE 200
SAN FRANCISCO, CALIFORNIA 94112





Source: New Haven Museum



Source: The New York Times

Protests against the killing of George Floyd by the Minneapolis Police Department in May/June of 2020



Source: NPR news

Jury selection began on March 9, 2021 at the Hennepin County Courthouse. It was live-streamed, but jurors' faces were not visible.

SPECIAL JURY QUESTIONNAIRE

State of Minnesota vs. Derek Chauvin

1. What do you know about this case from the media?
2. From what you have seen, read, or heard, do you have a general impression of the defendant? Is it [Very negative, somewhat negative, neutral, somewhat positive, very positive, other]? Why do you feel that way?
3. From what you have seen, read, or heard do you have a general impression of George Floyd? Is it [Very negative, somewhat negative, neutral, somewhat positive, very positive, other]? Why do you feel that way?
4. Did you, or someone close to you, participate in any of the demonstrations or marches against police brutality that took place after George Floyd's death? If you participated, did you carry a sign? What did the sign say?

5. Do you have regular contact with any law enforcement agencies, employees, or officers through your work, your neighborhood, or in your social life? If Yes, please explain.
6. Do you think that Blacks and other minorities do not receive equal treatment as whites in the criminal justice system?
7. Do you support defunding the police?
8. Do you think that local police try to cover up excessive force rather than correct it?
9. Do you support Black Lives Matter? Do you support Blue Lives Matter?
10. No matter what you have heard or seen about this case, and no matter what opinions you might have formed, can you put all of that aside and **decide this case only on the evidence you receive in court, follow the law, and decide the case in a fair and impartial manner?**

NEWS

You Can Get Kicked Out of a Jury Pool For Supporting Black Lives Matter

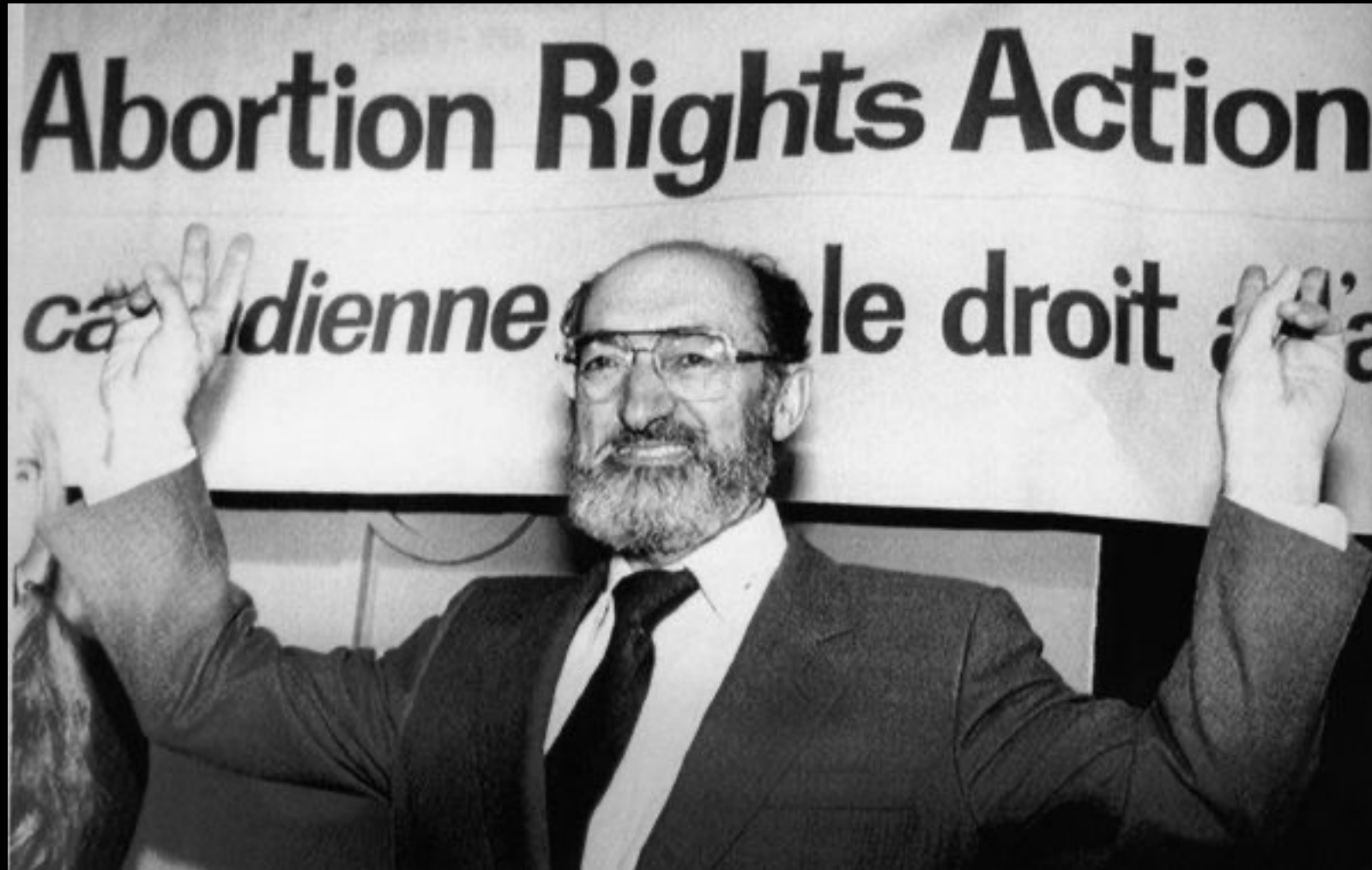
But is it legal? A California appeals court is going to decide.



FILED 6:00 a.m. 07.07.2020



Shadrach Minkins 1814-1874



Henry Morgantaler (1923-1913)

