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“WHEN THEY SEE US”
THE GREAT WHITE AWAKENING TO BLACK HUMANITY

GREGORY S. PARKS*

Why white folks focus on dogs and yoga,
While people on the low end trying to ball and get over.2

In 2015, Damon Young, co-founder of Very Smart Brothas—a website that features essays on pop culture, politics, and humor for African American readers—authored a piece titled Black People Don’t Hate Dogs. We Just Hate When Their Lives Are Valued More Than Ours.3 In the piece, he observed that Whites seemed more outraged by Michael Vick’s history of financing a dog fighting ring. He further observed that “certain types of White people valu[e] the lives of dogs more than the lives of Black people.”4 The idea that Whites, on average, show more compassion toward dogs than Blacks is a narrative that is not unfamiliar among Blacks.5 In this article, I offer some explanation as to why and how Whites—who may fail to see as much humanity in Blacks as they do in dogs—have maybe come to evolve beyond that point in 2020. In the following sections—I and II, respectively—I explore White people’s compassion for dogs and relative lack of compassion for, and fear of, Blacks.6 In section III, I analyze why George Floyd’s death was what triggered the awakening of so many Whites with respect to racism.

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1 WHEN THEY SEE US (Netflix 2019).
2 COMMON, THE PEOPLE (Geffen Records 2007).
4 Id.
6 See infra section I-II.
and White supremacy.\footnote{See infra section III.} I conclude by exploring just how much has changed in White people’s attitudes about racial progress.\footnote{See infra section IV.}

I. WHITE PEOPLE’S COMPASSION FOR DOGS

Anthropomorphism is the application of human qualities and characteristics to describe or explain nonhuman, sentient beings.\footnote{Alexandra C. Horowitz & Marc Bekoff, Naturalizing Anthropomorphism: Behavioral Prompts to Our Humanizing of Animals, 20 ANTHROZOÖS 23, 23–24 (2007); J. Webster, Zoolomorphism and Anthropomorphism: Fruitful Fallacies?, 20 ANIMAL WELFARE 29, 29 (2011).} Sentience is central to evolutionary fitness in complex environments, which implies “feelings that matter.”\footnote{Webster, supra note 9, at 29.} Since humans and most domestic animals are sentient, it follows that some aspects of feeling may be similar; where we differ, those differences may simply be a matter of degree.\footnote{Webster, supra note 9, at 29.} Not surprisingly, it is well documented that pet ownership is beneficial; however, the psychological impact of pet ownership on human subjective well-being is not well understood.\footnote{Nikolina M. Duvall Antonacopoulos & Timothy A. Pychyl, An Examination of the Relation Between Social Support, Anthropomorphism and Stress Among Dog Owners, 21 ANTHROZOÖS 139, 139 (2008).} According to the American Pet Products Manufacturers Association (“APPMA”), Americans spent twenty-one billion dollars on their companion animals in 1996; that number almost doubled in 2007 (forty-one billion dollars).\footnote{Nikolina M. Duvall Antonacopolous & Timothy A. Pychyl, The Possible Role of Companion-Animal Anthropomorphism and Social Support in the Physical and Psychological Health of Dog Guardians, 18 SOC’Y & ANIMALS 379, 379 (2010) (citing Industry Statistics & Trends, Am. Pet PRODS. MFRS. ASS’N, https://web.archive.org/web/20071231181809/http://www.appma.org/press_industrytrends.asp (last visited February 7, 2021)).} This increase is partly because of people’s increased pampering of companion animals, resulting in a range of new products and services provided to human guardians that cater to anthropomorphic behavior.\footnote{Id. at 379–80 (quoting James A. Serpell, Anthropomorphism and Anthropomorphic Selection—Beyond the “Cute Response,” SOC’Y AND ANIMALS 83, 83 (2003)).} This behavior is defined as “the attribution of human states (thoughts, feelings, motivations and beliefs) to nonhuman animals.”\footnote{Id. at 380.}

The relationship between humans and their companion animals is increasingly resembling those between humans, with growing anthropomorphic attributions.\footnote{Id.} In fact, human-animal interactions may serve
as a substitute for human-human interactions.\textsuperscript{17} People who engage in high levels of animal anthropomorphism may use animals as emotional substitutes for family members, such as spouses and children.\textsuperscript{18} Moreover, people who feel lonely are more likely to engage in anthropomorphism to satisfy their need for social connection.\textsuperscript{19} One study found that anthropomorphism and non-human social support predict dog guardians’ physical and psychological health.\textsuperscript{20} Dog guardians with meaningful human social support do not differ significantly in their number of doctor visits or medications according to their levels of anthropomorphism.\textsuperscript{21} However, dog guardians with limited human social support engage in high levels of anthropomorphism.\textsuperscript{22} They also have substantially more doctor visits and take more medication.\textsuperscript{23} In short, people use their companion animals—specifically by humanizing them—as a replacement for unsatisfactory social relationships and to alleviate their feelings of social disconnection.\textsuperscript{24}

Pet anthropomorphism also works conversely, redounding to the benefit of pets as well. In recent years, a number of grassroots organizations have lobbied United States’ municipalities to mandate that pet owners be referenced as “pet guardians” on official documents.\textsuperscript{25} While some have dismissed the movements as misguided, other municipalities have adopted these measures, reasoning that changing the language used to describe human-animal relationships will improve animal treatment.\textsuperscript{26} Research on the topic examines whether such linguistic cues could improve animal (e.g., dogs) welfare.\textsuperscript{27} Given that dehumanization is often associated with the mistreatment of fellow humans, theoretically the reverse might also be true—anthropomorphic, humanizing language might encourage kindness toward non-humans.\textsuperscript{28} Indeed, this is what social scientists find. People are more willing to help humans than dogs but are more willing to help dogs when they are described with

\textsuperscript{17} Id.
\textsuperscript{18} Id.
\textsuperscript{19} Antonacopoulus & Pychyl, supra note 13, at 380.
\textsuperscript{20} Id. at 387.
\textsuperscript{21} Id. at 387–88.
\textsuperscript{22} Id. at 388.
\textsuperscript{23} Id.
\textsuperscript{24} Id.
\textsuperscript{26} Id.
\textsuperscript{27} Id.
\textsuperscript{28} Id.
anthropomorphic language. Similarly, people who rate dogs on anthropomorphic qualities are more willing to help dogs get adopted.

While there is little research on the intersection of race and dog ownership, two things are clear. First, Whites tend to own dogs more than Blacks. Second, Whites are more likely to feel protected by dogs than Blacks. Historically, there tends to be large racial and ethnic differences among pet owners; these disparities are especially apparent when considering dog ownership. Whites are about three times more likely to own a dog than non-Whites, and Blacks are half as likely to own a dog than other people. In 2016, the highest rates of pet ownership was seen in White households with 64.7%. By way of comparison, 36.9% of Black households owned dogs.

Where racial boundaries can be said to be a result of gentrification and/or differing economic interests, dogs have now become another vehicle of social segregation. In a study of Creekridge Park—a multicultural neighborhood in Durham, North Carolina—pet ownership often enforces racial boundaries among White, Black and Latino residents. White residents are able to create ties to the community simply by walking their dogs—these interactions do not occur across racial boundaries. In fact, non-White residents often receive complaints about the treatment of their dogs. White Creekridge Park resident Tammy stated that her Latino neighbors tether their dog outside, and so she repeatedly reported them for suspected animal abuse. Tammy’s accusations are only one example of the hostile racial divide enforced by pet owners. As the U.S. becomes more diverse, one would expect dogs to bridge social differences between White residents and their Black and Latino neighbors. Yet, while White residents allow their pets to facilitate

29 Id. at 958.
30 Id. at 959.
33 Herzog, supra note 31.
34 Herzog, supra note 31.
35 AVMA Pet Ownership and Demographics Sourcebook: Executive Summary, supra note 31.
36 Mayorga-Gallo, supra note 32, at 511–12.
37 Mayorga-Gallo, supra note 32, at 515–16.
38 Mayorga-Gallo, supra note 32, at 515–16.
39 Mayorga-Gallo, supra note 32, at 517–18.
40 Mayorga-Gallo, supra note 32, at 515–19.
community-based relationships, such relationships are between same-race individuals.41 This reinforces a homogenous White and middle-class habitus and protects interracial boundaries and feelings of safety.42

The construction of safety and danger within contemporary urban spaces helps to understand the normative ideas surrounding race. “Danger” incorporates a larger social context of who and what is dangerous, and considers what persons are immoral or violent.43 Those who exist outside of this logic—residents of color—are suspect. As such, dogs define the parameters for a “safe” neighborhood space; those who do not feel safe walking around their neighborhood at night will bring their dogs to protect themselves, and so their dogs are integral to the characterization of a “safe” neighborhood. In this case, White residents of Creekridge Park, generally women, feel safe in their immediate area but will not walk, for example, downtown without their “hound[s].”44 Yet, none of the Black dog owners in the same neighborhood mentioned feeling safer with their dogs.45 Here, White womanhood is tied to vulnerability and the need for protection in “multiracial urban spaces.”46 The breed and size of a dog also play a role in making “ferocious” dogs.47 Such breeds are typically associated with non-White masculinity, and considered “outside the boundary” for a White, urban and middle-class spaces like Creekridge Park.48 It is apparent dogs present a foundation to inter-neighbor, racial boundaries.49

In conclusion, many people attribute human-like qualities to their dogs, generally, and dogs, specifically.50 Whites tend to be dog owners at higher rates than Blacks—almost double.51 As such, it would not be surprising if Whites, at higher rates than ethnic minority groups, were more likely to anthropomorphize dogs. Accordingly, this gets to part of Damon Young’s question: Why do Whites value dogs’ health, safety, and lives so much? In the following section, I address the second part of Damon Young’s question: Why do Whites value Blacks’ health, safety, and lives so much less than that of dogs?

41 Mayorga-Gallo, supra note 32, at 522–23.
43 Mayorga-Gallo, supra note 32, at 512.
44 Mayorga-Gallo, supra note 32, at 513.
45 Mayorga-Gallo, supra note 32, at 512.
46 Mayorga-Gallo, supra note 32, at 512.
47 Mayorga-Gallo, supra note 32, at 515–16.
48 Mayorga-Gallo, supra note 32, at 513.
51 Mayorga-Gallo, supra note 32, at 1.
II. WHITE PEOPLE’S LACK OF COMPASSION FOR BLACKS

Police violence against Blacks has been multi-generational. Its roots are racialized and emerge from slavery. The origin of the police can be traced from its origin in the Greek polis (meaning city) to the “civil force charged with deterring crime,” particularly in America, where the birth and growth of the police is directly tied to slavery. More specifically, the origin of police is a power relationship. That relationship, however, is not between a government and its subjects, what we might understand as the term “public sphere,” but rather the power of the public over the private, of men over women, children, and the enslaved who were not permitted to be citizens of the polis. In Eighteenth Century England, there was a construction of the nation as being akin to the home and the King the father of the household. This concept is transferred to the American colonies; however, the American Revolution reconfigured the metaphor; the law becomes the father, the rule of law, under which all people are equal. The American Revolution, however, did not alter the power relations between man and family, the origin of police power. Just as in England, the modern police force began with “watches.” Unlike in England, however, these were slave patrols and armed militias intended to fight off natives and quell rebellions. Official police forces came in the Nineteenth Century, where they fell under local jurisdictions and carried guns. Modern American policing, as we know it, began in 1909 with August Vollmer—a veteran elected chief of police in Berkeley, California—who created an often imitated training model based on war tactics used against Native Americans and other colonized people. Vollmer and Progressive Era policing, combined with the Jim Crow laws, criminalized blackness. Black people were disproportionately targeted, harassed, and arrested. This

53 Id.
54 Id.
55 Id. The implication here is that the origin of the police is about maintaining the power of the public over the private through property. Those who are not citizens cannot be subjects, and freedom cannot exist without oppression. For the polis to remain free, there had to be those who were oppressed or owned who were considered to be property.
56 Id.
57 Id.
58 Lepore, supra note 52.
59 Id.
60 Id.
61 Id.
62 Id.
criminalization continued to worsen throughout the Twentieth Century with the war on crime campaign that would become the “tough on crime” mentality that shaped American politics for decades.\textsuperscript{63}

In recent years, there have been a variety of initiatives to capture the extent of unbridled police violence in the United States, highlighting its racial dimensions.\textsuperscript{64} While there has been palpable Black outrage given the disproportionate killing of Blacks, White outrage has been more muted. Just a few years ago, in 2015, nineteen percent of White adults believed that police brutality is an “extremely/very serious” problem compared to seventy-three percent of Black adults who believed the same thing.\textsuperscript{65} Additionally, in 2015, only thirty-two percent of White Americans believed that police officers who caused injury or death were treated leniently by the criminal justice system.\textsuperscript{66} On this same topic in 2015, seventy-one percent of Black Americans believed the criminal justice system was too lenient.\textsuperscript{67} This may be for several reasons.

One reason may be that police killings are often of adults,\textsuperscript{68} and people tend to have relatively less empathy for adults than comparison groups.\textsuperscript{69} For example, as one study showed, people are more empathetic when the victim of an attack is an infant or a puppy than when they are a human adult.\textsuperscript{70} Researchers believe that these results could imply two explanations: species similarity may account for preference of infants over puppies and dogs; and the importance of vulnerability (e.g., youth) may account for preference of infants and puppies.\textsuperscript{71} However, dogs, of any age, are correlated with the same defenselessness of a baby, since adults may be viewed as fully responsible and capable of removing themselves from an abusive situation.\textsuperscript{72}

\textsuperscript{63} Id.
\textsuperscript{65} Kat Stafford & Hannah Fingerhut, AP-NORC Poll: Sweeping Change in U.S. Views of Police Violence, ASSOCIATED PRESS (June 17, 2020), https://apnews.com/article/728b414b8742129329081f7092179d1f.
\textsuperscript{66} Id.
\textsuperscript{67} Id.
\textsuperscript{68} MAPPING POLICE VIOLENCE, supra note 64.
\textsuperscript{69} Jack Levin et al., Are People More Disturbed by Dog or Human Suffering? Influence of Victim’s Species and Age, 25 SOC’Y & ANIMALS 1, 8 (2017).
\textsuperscript{70} Id. at 7.
\textsuperscript{71} Id. at 8.
\textsuperscript{72} Id. at 8–9.
Similarly, where Black youth, like Tamir Rice, are killed by police, many Whites may have little empathy for such killings because they do not see the victims as vulnerable youth. For example, as demonstrated by Phillip Goff and colleagues’ research, Black boys are seen as less childlike than same-aged White peers. After the age of nine, Black children and adults were rated as less innocent than White children and adults. In addition, the characteristics associated with childhood are applied less to Black boys relative to White boys. People inaccurately impute older age to Black boys and perceive them as more culpable for their actions than Latino and White boys. Even for individuals who are more experienced in dealing with criminal suspects, they still overestimate the age of Black and Latino crime suspects. Moreover, these trends are emphasized when people dehumanize Black males by subconsciously associating them—and not Whites or Latinos—with apes.

This type of adultification also takes place with Black girls. As Rebecca Epstein and colleagues demonstrated in their research, people generally perceive that Black girls need less nurturing, less protection, less support, less comfort, and more independence. Black girls are viewed as more adult than their White peers at critical stages of development (starting at five, peaking at ten to fourteen, and continuing to age fifteen to nineteen.) When adults perceive Black girls as less innocent and more adult-like, harsher punishments occur despite their status as a child.

Whites may also see Blacks as a more of a physical threat than Whites, therefore warranting police aggression. In their work, Andrew Todd and colleagues found that people more readily associate guns with Black, than with White, boys. People more readily associate

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75 Id. at 529.
76 Id. at 529, 539–40.
77 Id. at 532.
78 Id. at 535.
79 Id. at 539.
81 Id. at 1.
82 Id. at 8.
83 Id.
threatening words with Black, than with White, boys.85 And people are no less likely to be biased against Black youth than Black adults.86 In their work, John Wilson and colleagues made several interesting findings that underscore why Whites may perceive Blacks as more of a threat than Whites.87 Specifically, people perceive Blacks as bigger and more formidable than Whites.88 They perceive Black men as more capable of harm than White men.89 And while people’s judgments in this regard may not be rooted in anti-Black prejudice, they do emerge from stereotypes associating Blacks with threats.90 And when Blacks look prototypically Black, people view them as more formidable, which points to perceptions of specific race-related appearance cues.91 Not surprisingly, people rate the use of force against Black men as more justified than the use of force against White men.92

As indicated previously in Phillip Goff’s work, Whites dehumanize Blacks by automatically associating them with apes.93 In another of his studies, Goff and colleagues found that people more easily associate ape images with Black male faces than with White male faces.94 Moreover, they found that Whites more easily associate Blacks with apes than with other types of animals—i.e., big cats.95 Even while there is a lengthy and robust history of Whites associating Blacks with nonhuman primates,96 the Black-primate association seems to largely operate outside of explicit cultural knowledge of the association.97 Nonetheless, the association is consequential. When people associate Blacks with apes, they perceive police violence against Blacks as being justified.98

85 Id. at 389–90.
86 Id. at 385, 390–91.
88 Id. at 65.
89 Id. at 65–66.
90 Id. at 67, 69–70.
91 Id. at 71–73.
92 Id. at 70.
93 Goff et al., supra note 74, at 526–28.
95 Id. at 301.
97 Goff et al., supra note 94, at 301.
98 Goff et al., supra note 94, at 301–02.
What may make it more likely that Whites could see Blacks in their fullness and their humanity would be more meaningful relationships with Blacks. Noted psychologist Gordon Allport’s 1954 intergroup contact thesis states that intergroup contact under the correct circumstances can effectively reduce prejudice between majority and minority group members. There are four conditions that must be met in order for intergroup contact to be effective in reducing bias and prejudices. The first is, within a given situation, equal status. Equal status must be expected and perceived by both groups in the situation. Next, a common goal must underlie the group’s efforts. Each person relies on one another to complete the goal. The third condition requires intergroup cooperation in order to see a reduction in prejudices. Lastly, effective intergroup contact is achieved when all groups support authorities, laws, or customs. All four of these conditions must be met within a situation to see an effective reduction of prejudice from intergroup contact. In his work, Christopher Smith found that interracial contact among Black and White neighbors that met Allport’s conditions reduced prejudice.

The problem is that most whites lack any meaningful friendships with Blacks. In their research, Deborah Plummer and colleagues found that “a racial divide exists in having cross-racial friendships, most notably among Blacks and Whites.” White Americans are less likely to have friends of another race than non-White Americans, as forty percent of White Americans reported having only White friends and only twenty-five percent of non-White Americans reported only having friends of their own race. A 2015 study from the Pew Research Center found that eighty-one percent of “adults who are White with no other race in their background” say that all or most of their close friends are

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100 Id.
101 Id.
102 Id.
103 Id.
104 Id. at 66–67.
106 Id. at 67.
109 Id. at 479.
White. Plummer and colleagues attribute White Americans’ lack of Black friends to three factors: “Spatial racism, cultural encapsulation, and personal choice.” Spatial racism refers to the layout of cities “in which racially and economically segregated suburbs or gentrified areas of cities are created.” Cultural encapsulation, which results from spatial racism and lack of workplace diversity, “may lead to ethnocentrism and limited understanding of another’s worldview.”

III. GEORGE FLOYD AND THE GREAT WHITE AWAKENING

George Floyd was arrested on May 25, 2020 in Minneapolis, Minnesota after a convenient store employee called 911 to report that Floyd had used a counterfeit twenty dollar bill to buy cigarettes. According to the 911 transcript, the employees said that Floyd had given them a fake twenty dollar bill and appeared “awfully drunk” and believed he was “not in control of himself.” Shortly after, the first police officers, J. Alexander Kueng and Thomas Lane, arrive on the scene to approach Floyd in his car. A few minutes after arriving, Officer Lane takes out his gun and orders Floyd to put his hands on the wheel. Then, Officer Lane begins to yank Floyd out of the car. They continue to handcuff Floyd’s hands behind his back, and after approximately six minutes, move Floyd back to the police vehicle. As they approach the car, Floyd falls to the ground and states that he feels claustrophobic and repeats that he cannot breathe.

111 Plummer et al., supra note 108, at 480.
112 Plummer et al., supra note 108, at 479.
113 Plummer et al., supra note 108, at 479.
116 Hill et al., supra note 112 (referencing the New York Times video reconstructing the events leading up to George Floyd’s fatal encounter with Minneapolis police officers and showing the events that occurred during and after police confronted Floyd).
117 Hill et al., supra note 114.
118 Hill et al., supra note 114.
119 Hill et al., supra note 114.
120 Hill et al., supra note 114.
Nine minutes into the arrest, police officers Derek Chauvin and Tou Thao arrive, both of whom have recorded complaints on their files. As they try to get Floyd into the car, Officer Chauvin pulls him onto the street. All four officers are gathered around Floyd as he is placed face-down with three officers applying pressure to his body. Floyd continues to shout that he cannot breathe as the officers call an EMS Code 2 to report an injury to Floyd’s mouth. Then, the code is quickly updated to level three for emergency medical assistance. Despite the calls for medical help, Officer Chauvin is seen with his knee on Floyd’s neck and he keeps it there for over eight minutes. The officers prompt Floyd to get into the car while Chauvin’s knee is on Floyd’s neck, and within five minutes, Floyd is heard saying he cannot breathe sixteen times. Twenty minutes into the arrest, an ambulance arrives on the scene and Floyd is loaded into the vehicle. The officers request the fire department delaying the ride to the nearest hospital, and as they are doing so, Floyd goes into cardiac arrest. After Floyd arrives at the hospital, he is pronounced dead at 9:25 p.m.

In the wake of George Floyd’s death, there has been an awakening of sorts with respect to race and policing. In June 2020, the majority of both Black and White Americans believe that Black people are treated less fairly when dealing with the police and by the entirety of the criminal justice system. According to polls from PEW Research Center, eighty-four percent of Black adults believe that Blacks are treated less fairly than Whites by the police. Additionally, sixty-three percent of Whites reported the same thing. Looking at the criminal justice system and their treatment of police officers, an AP News poll stated that eighty-four percent of Black Americans believe the criminal justice system is too lenient to police officers who cause injury or death.

121 Hill et al., supra note 114.
122 Hill et al., supra note 114.
123 Hill et al., supra note 114.
124 Hill et al., supra note 114.
125 Hill et al., supra note 114.
126 Hill et al., supra note 114.
127 Hill et al., supra note 114.
128 Hill et al., supra note 114.
129 Hill et al., supra note 114.
130 Hill et al., supra note 114.
132 Id.
133 Id.
compared to sixty-two percent of White Americans.\textsuperscript{134} The AP News poll compared changes in views on police violence from 2015 to 2020.\textsuperscript{135} This comparison demonstrated how dramatic a shift in public opinion had occurred from 2015 to 2020.\textsuperscript{136} More Black and White Americans believe police brutality is a more serious problem.\textsuperscript{137}

But why was George Floyd’s killing the trigger? After all, there were factually analogous police killings of Blacks caught on camera,\textsuperscript{138} with many onlookers,\textsuperscript{139} and with the victim indicating that they could not breath.\textsuperscript{140} Arguably, George Floyd’s death was the catalyst simply

\textsuperscript{134} Stafford & Fingerhut, \textit{supra} note 65.
\textsuperscript{135} Stafford & Fingerhut, \textit{supra} note 65.
\textsuperscript{136} Stafford & Fingerhut, \textit{supra} note 65.
\textsuperscript{137} Stafford & Fingerhut, \textit{supra} note 65.
\textsuperscript{140} Eric Garner (July 2014), Al Baker et al., \textit{Beyond the Chokehold: The Path to Eric Garner’s Death}, \textit{N.Y. TIMES} (June 13, 2015), https://www.nytimes.com/2015/06/14/nyregion/eric-
because it came at just the right moment in our country’s history, where a confluence of factors opened many Whites’ eyes to racism and White supremacy. Those factors included: the impact of cell phones and social media on public perception about race and policing, American’s attentional focus that came with the social isolation associated with the pandemic, and realizing the peril brought by Trump’s presidency.

A. Cell Phones, Social Media, and the Policing of Black Bodies

With respect to race and policing in the United States, “[t]he truth is finally coming out. And it’s ugly.”\(^{141}\) The death of Oscar Grant, Trayvon Martin, Eric Garner, Michael Brown, Walter Scott, Sandra Bland, Breonna Taylor, George Floyd, and many others brought attention to the systematic racism in the United States.\(^{142}\) The twentieth Century Civil Rights Movement grew in conjunction with technology. Televised broadcasts helped gain support and disseminate momentum for the movement, by exposing a system of racial injustice, which was manifested in the moral justification and foundation of the movement.\(^{143}\) Televised broadcasts helped gain support and disseminate momentum for the movement, by

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showing the nation the need for legislative and social reform.\textsuperscript{144} Contemporarily, the cellphone provided the platform for anyone to distribute content, which removed the influence and control that main stream media and major corporations had on the truth.\textsuperscript{145} The filter was finally lifted for the current or twenty-first century Civil Rights Movement, as social media platforms have served as a system of accountability.\textsuperscript{146} The images that aid the reform movement were captured at the convergence of chance and purposeful efforts by citizens, which effectively supply documentational testimony to help change the narrative.\textsuperscript{147} Today’s accessibility to cellphones and social media has generated a revolution of public empowerment.\textsuperscript{148} The platform created by the evolution of technology during the first Civil Rights Movement to the current Civil Rights Movement, is still working to “turn a paradigm dependent on trust, which can be confounded by racism and institutional authority, into one founded on synthesis and witness.”\textsuperscript{149}

B. A Worldwide Pandemic, A Time to Focus

Social science would suggest that people who are engaged in multiple tasks at the same time do not, or cannot, focus on a single important issue.\textsuperscript{150} Here, that issue is racism/white supremacy. When people try to perform multiple tasks at once, execution of one of those tasks typically leads to postponement of others. This is the “response selection bottleneck” where the brain has to decide to adjust to the new task and time is lost in the process of that decision, ultimately leading to less efficiency and productivity.\textsuperscript{151} Therefore, when trying to perform more than one task at once, the brain’s limited ability to process information results in an “interference between the tasks.”\textsuperscript{152} Similarly, mind wandering—which makes up roughly half of our daily thoughts—has been proven to hinder our performance on everyday tasks, resulting in “increased risk of injury and death while driving, difficulties in educational

\textsuperscript{144} Id. at 24.
\textsuperscript{145} Id. at 22.
\textsuperscript{146} Id. at 24.
\textsuperscript{147} Meyer, supra note 141.
\textsuperscript{148} Turner Lee, supra note 142.
\textsuperscript{149} Meyer, supra note 141.
\textsuperscript{150} Paul E. Dux et al., Isolation of a Central Bottleneck of Information Processing with Time-Resolved fMRI, 52 Neuron 1109, 1109 (2006).
\textsuperscript{151} Id.
\textsuperscript{152} Id.
settings, increased response variability in tasks assessing sustained attention, and impaired performance in everyday life.¹⁵³

It comes as no surprise that mindfulness—which reduces such wandering thoughts—positively impacts our ability to complete focus-oriented tasks.¹⁵⁴ Mindfulness is a conscious awareness of thought, emotion, and the present moment. Mindfulness impacts behavior in four ways: attention, awareness, presence, and acceptance.¹⁵⁵ Considerable research supports these claims, linking the practice of mindfulness to “an increase in attentional control and cognitive flexibility…, [a reduction in] automatic processing…, de-centering…, and [the embrace of] thoughts and feelings as they are, without attempting to suppress them.”¹⁵⁶ Results of relevant mindfulness studies have reported more on-task thoughts, fewer mindless actions, and improved test scores in general populations post-treatment.¹⁵⁷

The United States finally found the urgency to break the deadly cycle of being temporarily outraged by an unjust killing at the hands of police. Although its history of systemic racism is nothing new, the global pandemic, record-breaking unemployment rate, isolation, and even lack of professional sports to enjoy created the perfect storm to focus people’s attention.¹⁵⁸ As more and more Americans were ordered to shelter in place,¹⁵⁹ it allowed Whites to focus and become more educated about police brutality and our country’s history of racism. Pro-Black and anti-racist podcasts, New York Times bestsellers, and social media accounts have spiked in the weeks after the video of George Floyd’s death went viral, forcing Whites to think more critically about race in the United States.¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁴ Id. at 158.
¹⁵⁶ Id.
¹⁵⁷ Xu et al., supra note 153, at 158.
¹⁵⁹ Demby, supra note 138.
¹⁶⁰ Demby, supra note 138.
C. Trump Comes into Focus

The pandemic enlightened many, allowing Americans to deconstruct and reflect on their personal values and purpose in society. This experience, called mortality salience, has taken precedence over the fear of contracting the virus from large crowds of protestors, proving that Americans value achieving racial equality and justice more than the virus itself.\(^1\)\(^6\) Trump’s response, or lack thereof, regarding the pandemic also made people think critically about his administration. COVID-19 prompted a larger response in support of the Black Lives Matter (“BLM”) and civil rights movements because it increased people’s vulnerability and has re-sensitized their views, pushing more White Americans to spark conversation, donate to organizations that benefit people of color, and sign petitions to demand justice.\(^1\)\(^6\)\(^2\) But many still feel guilty or conspicuous by not protesting or posting on social media because of the pressure from their peers, another important factor in the ever-growing movement.\(^1\)\(^6\)\(^3\)

More specific to attitudes about Trump, in an Emerson college survey, only thirty-six percent of respondents approved of Trump’s handling of Floyd’s death and the ensuing protests.\(^1\)\(^6\)\(^4\) On the same question, a Reuters survey found only thirty-three percent approval.\(^1\)\(^6\)\(^5\) We see a similar picture from a CBS News survey which finds a minority thirty-three percent approval rating for Trump’s handling of race relations, with fifty-eight percent of respondents explicitly disapproving.\(^1\)\(^6\)\(^6\) A Monmouth University poll found that, beyond the aftermath of Floyd’s killing, sixty percent of respondents had almost no faith in Trump’s ability to handle race relations at all.\(^1\)\(^6\)\(^7\) With near universal condemnation of Floyd’s killing, Trump’s militaristic response to the protests which followed clearly left many Americans wanting. Where Trump’s hostile tweets and calls for “law and order” fueled racial tensions, the Floyd protests against systemic racism demanded a leader who could demonstrate understanding, call for unity, and assist the nation in finding

\(^1\)\(^6\) Demby, supra note 158.
\(^1\)\(^6\)\(^2\) Demby, supra note 158.
\(^1\)\(^6\)\(^3\) Demby, supra note 158.
\(^1\)\(^6\)\(^5\) Id.
\(^1\)\(^6\)\(^6\) Id.
\(^1\)\(^6\)\(^7\) Id.
healing.\textsuperscript{168} According to polling on Trump’s impact on race relations, in the eyes of most respondents, this leader could not be Trump. Polling showed that sixty-seven percent of respondents said Trump had mostly increased racial tensions, including ninety-two percent of Democrats, seventy-three percent of independents, eighty-eight percent of Blacks and sixty-three percent of Whites.\textsuperscript{169} Only eighteen percent of respondents claimed that Trump had decreased tensions, a minority which only includes forty percent of Trump’s own party membership.\textsuperscript{170} In the midst of an anti-racist revolution, Trump positioned himself as a proponent of law and order even at the expense of racial justice and national unity.\textsuperscript{171} Divisive and inflammatory, his history of racialized remarks “held a mirror to society” and revealed the systemic, racialized violence prevalent long before his term as president began.\textsuperscript{172}

Added, the psychological stress of the virus and its implications also exposed a new concept called the terror management theory, when people have innate defense mechanisms that help ease rising levels of anxiety and fear which appears when our mortality is threatened.\textsuperscript{173} But, when our defense mechanisms fail, we are more willing to connect to a broader social entity that creates purpose.\textsuperscript{174} Joining the collective to fight against systemic racism and the evident police brutality towards people of color has increased activism by mobilizing more people for the cause and by encouraging more people to take to the streets.\textsuperscript{175}

CNN’s Van Jones referred to the massive global force as the “Great Awakening,” the cultural tsunami that is impacting the empathy and solidarity of White people and people of color alike.\textsuperscript{176} The notion


\textsuperscript{170} Id.


\textsuperscript{172} Id.


\textsuperscript{174} Id.

\textsuperscript{175} Id.

that “racism is over” has been vehemently disproven now more than ever. An impressively extensive list of achievements spanning from big corporations like Target and our justice system that charged the officers for George Floyd’s murder have taken action and proven that this movement will shake the status quo in this country.  

Not only have the effects of the pandemic, the protests, and Donald Trump impacted Americans, but the movement has moved internationally as well. The fury of America has sparked protests in Berlin, London, Copenhagen, Toronto, and many more, instilling an outrage that proves that no one is above the law and each country has their own struggles in the fight for equality, whether it regards race, sex, or other denominations.

IV. CONCLUSION

In certain segments of the Black community, there is the notion that Whites recognize the “humanity” in dogs more readily than they do Blacks. This is at least related to—may be driven by or resulting from—the fact that Whites have more meaningful engagement with pets, dogs in particular, than Blacks. In the summer of 2020, the police murder of George Floyd caused many Whites to finally and in large numbers recognize Black humanity. That is because of the confluence of three things—(1) the stark image of Floyd’s murder on social media and television, (2) a worldwide pandemic that almost forced people to take notice of issues of race in ways that their busy lives otherwise militated against, and (3) a deeper appreciation for how poorly Donald Trump handled issues of race and the pandemic.

While statistics initially reassured that this movement would not be temporary, the desire for social change was short-lived for many. In a June 16 poll, Americans were more troubled by the brutality of police than the protests that turned violent. This was a striking contrast to the riots in 1968 regarding Richard Nixon and the Rodney King riots in

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177 Id.
178 Id.
179 Id.
180 Id.
181 Demby, supra note 158.
Similarly, comparing the public opinion about the death of Eric Garner and George Floyd, who were killed in the same manner but six years apart, the majority of Americans were convinced in 2020 that racism and discrimination is a major problem. The difference between the past and 2020 is the number of videos surging the media that disproves the theory that there are just a few “bad apples” in the police force and proves that the disproportionate violence towards people of color is a problem on the systemic level and, therefore, is in need of reform.

A closer look reveals that the shifting of attitudes towards denouncing racism and acknowledging racial disparities following the murder of George Floyd are disparate between Republicans, Democrats, Black people, and White people. For each of the identities, views towards the BLM movement and the recognition of racial injustice increased, though to different degrees. There was also a change in the prevalence of those values immediately following the presence of protests in the spring into late summer and early fall.

Overarchingly, the protests enacted a wave of support among American voters in which Civiqs data notes a twenty-eight point margin in support of the BLM movement over two weeks as opposed to a seventeen point margin before the protests began. “About two in three Americans (sixty-five percent) support the nationwide protests about racial injustice that followed the death of George Floyd at the hands of Minneapolis police in late May… a slim majority say the protests have changed their views on racial justice “a lot” (twenty-one percent) or “a little” (thirty-three percent), while nearly half (forty-seven percent) say the protests haven’t changed their views “at all.”

However, this increase in support is mostly attributed to White Democrats as Black people have fairly consistently held the same views towards race. As one study points out, “This change has come entirely among supporters of the Democratic candidates: [Seventy-four percent] of Biden supporters say it is a lot more difficult to be Black than White, while a smaller majority of Clinton supporters ([fifty-seven percent]) said this in 2016. Among Trump supporters, there has been virtually no

\[ \text{id.} \]
\[ \text{id.} \]
\[ \text{id.} \]
\[ \text{Nate Cohn & Kevin Quealy, } \text{How Public Opinion Has Moved on Black Lives Matter, N.Y. Times (June 10, 2020), } \text{https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2020/06/10/upshot/black-lives-matter-attitudes.html.} \]
\[ \text{Steven Long & Justin McCarthy, } \text{Two in Three Americans Support Racial Justice Protests, GALLUP (July 28, 2020), } \text{https://news.gallup.com/poll/316106/two-three-americans-support-racial-justice-protests.aspx.} \]
change since 2016. Currently, [nine percent] say it is a lot more difficult to be Black than White; [eleven percent] said this four years ago.¹⁸⁸ As of June 2020, PRRI data indicates that seventeen percent of Democrats believe that the killing of Black Americans are isolated instances rather than consequences of systemic racism which is a change from twenty-six percent believing so in 2018.¹⁸⁹ For Republicans, seventy-eight percent believe they are isolated incidents which have not changed since 2018 where the percentage sat at seventy-seven percent.¹⁹⁰ When factoring in race, seventeen percent of Black Americans believe the killings are isolated in 2020 when the percentage was at sixteen percent in 2018. For White Americans, that percentage has dropped from sixty-five percent in 2018 to fifty percent in 2020.¹⁹¹ Roughly ninety-percent of White Democrats (eighty-eight percent) express at least some support for the BLM movement, compared with sixteen percent of White Republicans.¹⁹² And while more than half of White Democrats (fifty-one percent) say they strongly support the movement, only two percent of White Republicans say the same.¹⁹³

As the media attention from protests died down entering late summer and early fall, so did attitudes of support. “Overall, Americans are now less likely than they were earlier this summer—when protests sparked by the death of George Floyd began—to say that racism is a big problem in society ([sixty-seven percent] said so then, [fifty-five percent] feel that way now). And while there has been some decline across party lines in that sentiment, the drop has come most sharply among Republicans. In June, [forty-three percent] said racism was a big problem in society; now, just [twenty-two percent] say the same. Among Democrats, [eighty-four percent] feel that way, compared with [ninety

¹⁹⁰ Id.
¹⁹¹ Id.
¹⁹³ Id.
percent] in June.” 194 As mentioned before, Black Americans have maintained consistency as, “Support for the Black Lives Matter movement remains particularly widespread among Black adults. Some [eighty-seven percent] of Black Americans say they support the movement, similar to the share who said this in June. However, the share of Black adults expressing strong support for the movement has decreased [nine] points, from [seventy-one percent] to [sixty-two percent].” 195

195 Thomas & Horowitz, supra note 192.