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THE TRAUMA OF AWAKENING TO RACISM: DID THE TRAGIC KILLING OF GEORGE FLOYD RESULT IN CULTURAL TRAUMA FOR WHITES?

Angela Onwuachi-Willig*

ABSTRACT

The act of witnessing the killing of George Floyd, a forty-six-year-old, African-American father, brother, partner, and son, at the hands of the police caused many white individuals to experience an epiphany about racism, specifically structural racism, in the United States. Following the horrific killing of George Floyd, many white people began to shift their thinking about the existence and prevalence of racialized police brutality, reconsidering the manner in which they had always viewed the world around them. Indeed, many white individuals began to

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recognize and acknowledge the varied ways in which whiteness worked to privilege them in our society, even if they found themselves disadvantaged on other dimensions. Many also began to acknowledge their responsibility as white citizens of the world to not only identify but also confront racism, which led to an unprecedented number of white people participating in protests across the nation. Although the protests that erupted in the wake of George Floyd’s killing were not the first protests against police brutality and racism, they were different from those of the past. During the protests of summer 2020, white faces filled the crowds that gathered all across the country, even in predominantly white communities.

This Article considers whether white people as a collective experienced a cultural trauma in response to witnessing the killing of George Floyd on video, thereby creating unprecedented opportunities for real, long-term change with respect to policing in the United States. To explore whether white individuals’ widespread viewing of George Floyd’s killing resulted in cultural or group-based trauma, this Article examines accounts by Whites who have offered emotional, social, intellectual, and political responses to witnessing a smirking then-Officer Derek Chauvin kneel on George Floyd’s neck for nine minutes and twenty-nine seconds.

This Article considers whether the response that many white individuals shared in reaction to the George Floyd killing satisfies the components of a cultural trauma narrative. In doing so, the Article applies critical race theory and analyzes decades of polling data to determine whether the white awakening resulting from George Floyd’s killing is the type of permanent group-based trauma that could maintain the momentum needed to produce lasting social, political, and legal reform in the United States. The Article concludes that, due to missing components of the “master narrative” for cultural trauma, no such trauma arose. The Article ends with data showing that the shift in some white people’s thinking about the connection between racism and policing seems to be temporary.

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I. INTRODUCTION

Daryl Austin is a white, male, heterosexual business owner, journalist, and father who works and resides in Utah. He voted for Donald Trump to be President of the United States in November 2016. In an opinion piece published in the Salt Lake Tribune on February 29, 2020, Austin openly debated whether he would vote for Trump again that same year, but he did so without raising any concerns about what others viewed to be racist rhetoric from Trump on the campaign trail and during his presidency.


2. See id.; Eugene Robinson, Opinion, Trump Is Shouting His Racism. He Must Be Stopped., WASH. POST (Sept. 7, 2020, 3:29 PM), https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/trump-is-shouting-his-racism-he-must-be-stopped/2020/09/07/06036768-f13a-11ea-bc45-e5d48e4b4b9f_story.html [https://perma.cc/XE7D-BMYV] (“President Trump is running the most openly racist national campaign since that of George Wallace in 1968 . . .”). For an example of President Trump’s racist rhetoric, consider a July 14, 2019, tweet that President Trump sent about the following four Congresswomen of color in their first year of service: “[Representative] Ilhan Omar of Minnesota, a Somali American; [Representative] Ayanna Pressley of Massachusetts, an African American; [Representative] Rashida Tlaib of Michigan, a Palestinian American; and [Representative] Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez of New York, a Puerto Rican.” Ibram X. Kendi, The End of Denial, ATLANTIC, Sept. 2020, at 48, 50. The tweet read: “Why don’t they go back and help fix the totally broken and crime infested places from which they came. Then come back and show us how it is done. These places
Instead, in his *Salt Lake Tribune* piece, Austin focused his concerns on President Trump's name-calling, bemoaning how the official had not been a "kinder president."\(^4\)

However, on June 14, 2020, Austin, a self-identified Republican, published another opinion piece, sharing the epiphany he had recently experienced about racism, specifically structural racism, in the United States after the horrific killing of George Floyd.\(^5\) Austin wrote about how he had begun to think differently about race and racism—at least when it came to his responsibility to identify and confront racism as a white person.\(^6\) He further acknowledged that he had “[f]or far too long . . . lived the life of a privileged white man, unable or unwilling to believe that racism still exists in the world around” him and “[w]orse . . . [that he for far too long had] never confronted any of the prejudices that . . . live within” him.\(^7\) Horrified by the brazen
manner in which former Minneapolis police officer Derek Chauvin, a white man, had killed George Floyd, a forty-six-year-old black father, son, brother, partner, and friend, in broad daylight in the middle of the street, Austin penned a piece for *NBC News* in which he proclaimed the following:

Like many other people, I watched in horror and with anger when I saw former Minneapolis police Officer Derek Chauvin kneeling on the neck of George Floyd for nearly nine agonizing minutes as Mr. Floyd pleaded for air to breathe and two additional officers used the weight of their bodies to push Mr. Floyd’s body into the filthy concrete. I could not help but wonder how everyone could participate in such an act of sheer inhumanity; I didn’t understand how it could have come to pass that they somehow saw George Floyd as being less.

Seeing it unfold before my eyes—or maybe seeing this act unfold after seeing so many other, similar acts unfold in a similar fashion over the last few years—has had a profound effect on me. George Floyd’s death was a tipping point, not just for the Black Lives Matter movement or the movement to reform policing, but even for many white Republicans like me who once chose to believe—perhaps were taught to believe—that the fight to end institutionalized racism had already been won. Something inside me had been reluctant to believe the system was still being perpetuated today. No more.

I’ve accepted that something in my white heart still needs to change. I am pushing myself to come to terms with my own heritage, my white privilege and my flawed beliefs, as well as to develop a better understanding of the experiences that people of color have living in America today.8

As even Austin noted in his *NBC News* opinion piece, he was not alone among Whites9 in this awakening to the prevalence of


9. Throughout this Article, I capitalize the terms “Black” and “White” only when used as nouns to describe specific racial groups. I generally prefer the term “Blacks,” rather than the term “African-Americans,” when referring to the entire group of people who identify as part of the black race in the United States because it is more inclusive. However, when I refer specifically to blacks who descend from slaves in the United States, I may use
institutionalized racism after the tragic slaying of George Floyd. Indeed, as protests around the nation during summer 2020 revealed, the very act of witnessing the killing of George Floyd helped to shift many Whites’ thinking about policing—specifically, racialized police brutality—across the United States and around the world. For instance, Pulitzer Prize-winning author Richard Russo described how the “murder” destabilized the ways in which many Whites had always viewed the world around them. Russo asserted,

For many white Americans, George Floyd’s murder is the falling beam that “takes the lid off,” that makes it impossible for us to see life as operating the way we once imagined. . . . [W]e feel that we will “never know peace again” until we adjust to this new reality. We’ve glimpsed the way life works for Black people and feel “impacted.”

Even for white individuals with a daily connection to black people, the killing of George Floyd jolted them into another reality. Consider these words from Arick Wierson, a forty-five-year-old white man married to a black woman, with whom he has two biracial, black-white, children. Speaking of how the video clip of George Floyd’s death had forever changed him, Wierson declared:

That cry [George Floyd’s cry, “Mama”] pierced the bubble of my own White blindness, awakening me to the reality of


what it means to be a parent to Black children. For too many years—my entire life, in fact—I had failed to realize that by and large law enforcement has one set of rules for dealing with White citizens and another for people of color.

... I'm also angry and extremely disappointed with myself for never having seen things for what they were before Floyd’s death. I understand why so many White Americans are in denial about the racial bias of law enforcement; like me, they probably have never had a single disagreeable interaction with cops beyond the occasional traffic violation. White America was and still is largely brought up to venerate law enforcement.12

Polling data suggests that many other Whites experienced an awakening to the realities of racism after the sickening killing of George Floyd. Although Blacks and Whites continue to report divergent views about the connections between race, racism, and policing in our society, the percentage differences between the views of Blacks and Whites have meaningfully decreased since the brutal slaying of George Floyd.13

Additionally, media reports either intimated or argued that the protests that were inspired by the tragic death of George Floyd were different. For example, a New York Times article entitled One Big Difference About George Floyd Protests: Many White Faces highlighted how “large numbers of white and highly educated people” were not only joining the protests against police brutality and racism, but also “going through a wave of self-examination, buying books about racism, talking to black friends, and arguing within their own families.”14 Similarly, on June 8, 2020, a BBC article proclaimed: “[T]his time seems different, with the responses more sustained and widespread,” with “sports and businesses . . . reader to take a stand,” “with the Minneapolis city council pledging to dismantle the police department,” and with


13. See infra Section III.A.

“Black Lives Matter protests . . . more racially diverse.”15 Along the same lines, an August 9, 2020, CNN article entitled _George Floyd’s Death Ignited a Racial Reckoning That Shows No Signs of Slowing Down_ declared that the “George Floyd police brutality protests [were] different” from past protests.16 The article explained that, although Black Lives Matter “was for years unutterable among swaths of the White population,” in summer 2020, Black Lives Matter protests were “erupt[ing] not only in cities with vibrant Black communities (Detroit, Baltimore, Atlanta, et al) but also [in] the largely White enclaves of Prairie Village, Kansas, Northfield, Minnesota, Pullman, Washington, and notably, Portland, Oregon.”17 In that same article, Emory University Professor George Yancy asserted that even he “would have to grant something bigger is happening here.”18

Looking at the experiences of Austin, Wierson, and many other white Americans whose polling results reveal a shift in Whites’ overall perceptions about the connections between racism and policing, this Article considers whether Whites may have experienced a cultural trauma in response to witnessing the killing—or to many, the murder—of George Floyd on video. For nearly two decades, cultural sociologists have explored the idea of “cultural trauma” or group-based trauma, as opposed to individual or psychological trauma, by focusing primarily on the experiences of marginalized peoples across the world.19 Specifically, Professors Jeffrey C. Alexander, Ronald Eyerman, Bernhard Giesen, Neil J. Smelser, and Piotr Sztompka have built on Professor Kai Erikson’s groundbreaking scholarship on collective trauma,20 to construct a


17. Id.

18. Id.

19. _See, e.g.,_ RON EYERMAN, CULTURAL TRAUMA: SLAVERY AND THE FORMATION OF AFRICAN AMERICAN IDENTITY 1–2, 18 (2001) (examining the formation of African-American identity through the theory of cultural trauma as it relates to slavery and the Civil Rights Movement); Jeffrey C. Alexander et al., _Toward a Theory of Cultural Trauma, in CULTURAL TRAUMA AND COLLECTIVE IDENTITY_ 1, 24 (2004) (“The victims of Western traumas have disproportionately been members of subaltern and marginalized groups.”)

20. _See generally_ KAI T. ERIKSON, EVERYTHING IN ITS PATH: DESTRUCTION OF COMMUNITY IN THE BUFFALO CREEK FLOOD (1976) [hereinafter ERIKSON, EVERYTHING IN ITS PATH]; Kai Erikson, _Notes on Trauma and Community_, 48 AMERICAN IMAGO: STUDIES
framework for understanding when a disorienting tragedy becomes a cultural trauma. In so doing, these scholars have sought to explain the pattern to this form of collective trauma. Out of their work, a definition of cultural trauma has emerged. As these scholars have explained, a cultural trauma "occurs when members of a collectivity feel they have been subjected to a horrendous event that leaves indelible marks upon their group consciousness, marking their memories forever and changing their future identity in fundamental and irrevocable ways." And, a cultural trauma is a socially mediated process that arises out of an unexpected tragedy, whether real or imagined, that produces a meaning that forever alters the perceptions of the group. According to Alexander, Eyerman, and their colleagues, what most determines whether a tragic occurrence results in a cultural trauma is the trauma process: how the tragedy is understood, interpreted, and communicated by the carrier group.

To explore whether white Americans' widespread viewing of the killing of George Floyd resulted in cultural or group-based trauma for them, thereby creating unprecedented opportunities for real, long-term change with respect to policing in the United States, this Article examines accounts by Whites who have offered emotional, social, intellectual, and political responses to witnessing former Officer Derek Chauvin kneel, with a smirk on his face and under no duress and threat at all, on George Floyd's

IN PSYCHOANALYSIS & CULTURE 455, 460–61 (1991) [hereinafter, Erikson, Notes on Trauma and Community].

21. See Alexander, supra note 19, at 1.

22. But see Angela Onwuachi-Willig, The Trauma of the Routine: Lessons on Cultural Trauma from the Emmett Till Verdict, 34 SOCIO. THEORY 335, 336 (2016). In my article The Trauma of the Routine: Lessons on Cultural Trauma from the Emmett Till Verdict, which was published in Sociological Theory, I extended these key concepts in cultural trauma theory to explain how a cultural trauma narrative may also arise out of expected and routine subordination that gets affirmed in a public manner, including by and through law, such as a nonindictment or a verdict in a police or quasi-police, e.g., neighborhood watchman, killing case. See id. at 347.

23. See Ron Eyerman, Is This America? Katrina as Cultural Trauma 5–6 (Kai Erikson ed., 2015) ("Katrina was remarkable not only because of its devastation, but also because of how it was experienced, understood, and interpreted. It was described as unprecedented and unexpected, a natural disaster followed by a monumental governmental failure that brought shame to a great nation."); Ron Eyerman, Social Theory and Trauma, 56 ACTA SOCIOLOGICA 41, 42–43 (2013) [hereinafter Eyerman, Social Theory and Trauma]; Alexander, supra note 19, at 8–10; John Hughson & Ramón Spaaij, ‘You Are Always on Our Mind’: The Hillsborough Tragedy as Cultural Trauma, 54 ACTA SOCIOLOGICA 283, 285 (2011); Neil J. Smelser, Psychological Trauma and Cultural Trauma, in CULTURAL TRAUMA AND COLLECTIVE IDENTITY 31, 38 (2004). Alexander explains that carrier groups "are the collective agents of the trauma process," and they "may be elites, but they may also be denigrated and marginalized classes." Alexander, supra note 19, at 11.
neck for nine minutes and twenty-nine seconds, which ultimately caused the death of the forty-six-year-old African-American father and partner. Part II of this Article provides a brief introduction to cultural trauma theory, detailing for readers how cultural trauma differs from psychological trauma and explicating the parts of a cultural trauma narrative.

Part III of this Article considers whether the response of many Whites to the George Floyd killing satisfies the components of a cultural trauma narrative. Before doing so, Part III first looks to critical race theory to understand how and why Blacks and Whites have perceived the links between race, racism, and policing so differently. Part III then examines national polling data over the past fifteen years to see how Whites’ views on racism and policing, especially as compared to Blacks’, changed very soon after then-Officer Derek Chauvin brazenly killed George Floyd on May 25, 2020. Studying this data, along with quotes by various white citizens who explained in newspapers and other interviews how the killing of George Floyd transformed them and their thinking on race, Part III then contemplates whether witnessing the killing of George Floyd on video, as opposed to the many other police killings of black people captured on video, really resulted in the emergence of a cultural trauma for Whites, which is the type of permanent group-based trauma and change that could maintain the momentum needed in the current movement to produce lasting social, political, and legal reform in the United States. Ultimately, Part III concludes that no such trauma arose and ends with data showing that the shifts that occurred in some Whites’ thinking about the connection between racism and policing after the killing of George Floyd seems to be temporary rather than enduring. Additionally, Section III.B details how certain components of the “master narrative” for cultural trauma are not present for Whites in relation to their response to the killing of George Floyd.

II. HOW DOES CULTURAL TRAUMA ARISE?

When lay citizens refer to trauma or the act of being traumatized, they are almost always referring to trauma as an

25. See discussion infra Sections III.A, III.B.
individual or psychological phenomenon. They tend to have in mind people who are suffering from individual psychological conditions like posttraumatic stress disorder or posttraumatic psychosis. Yet, as sociologists like Professors Erikson, Alexander, and Eyerman have highlighted throughout their research, trauma can have not only individual psychological dimensions, but also social or group dimensions. In other words, trauma can be experienced by a collective just like it can be experienced by an individual.

In 1976, Professor Erikson published his seminal book *Everything in Its Path: Destruction of Community in the Buffalo Creek Flood*, a book in which he became the first sociologist to develop a framework for understanding trauma as it is experienced by a group of people. To produce such scholarship, Erikson studied the devastation that a horrendous flood had caused to the land, property, and most of all, the people of Buffalo Creek in West Virginia in 1972. At the end, Erikson developed not only a deep understanding of the trauma experienced by individuals who lived at Buffalo Creek but also critical insight into how the community of Buffalo Creek endured trauma as a whole.

Fifteen years later in 1991, Erikson revisited his seminal book, clarifying the distinctions between individual and collective trauma. Relying on the work of Dr. Cathy Caruth to explicate individual trauma, Erikson declared that “[t]o be traumatized . . . is ‘to be possessed by an image or an event.’”

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26. See Erikson, *Notes on Trauma and Community*, supra note 20, at 456–58 (“The classical symptoms of trauma include periods of nervous, restless activity—scanning the surrounding world for signs of danger, breaking into explosive rages, reacting with a start to everyday sights and sounds—against a numbed, gray background of depression, feelings of helplessness, a loss of various motor skills, and a general closing off of the spirit as the mind tries to insulate itself from further harm. Above all, trauma involves a continual reliving of the original experience in daydreams and nightmares, flashbacks and hallucinations, and in a compulsive seeking out of similar circumstances.” (citations omitted)).


30. See generally ERIKSON, *EVERYTHING IN ITS PATH*, supra note 20.

31. See id. at 156.

32. Erikson, *Notes on Trauma and Community*, supra note 20, at 458 (“[W]hen we are traumatized] our memory repeats to us what we haven’t yet come to terms with, what still haunts us.”).
Erikson declared that psychologically traumatized people suffer a blow to their psyche that is so devastating, "that [it] breaks through [their] defenses so suddenly and with such brutal force that [traumatized people] cannot react to it effectively."

Similarly, he argued, communities or collectives can suffer condition-altering blows to their being. As Erikson explicated, when a "community is devastated, one can speak of a damaged social organism in almost the same way one would speak of a damaged body."

Although Alexander and his colleagues, Eyerman, Giesen, Smelser, and Sztopka, took issue with what they defined as Erikson’s "naturalistic perspective" about trauma-inducing events, they all admired the "distinctively sociological approach" of Erikson’s work on collective trauma and sought to build on his theoretical innovation. Specifically, the five cultural sociologists wanted to make clear that, although events that induce group-based trauma must have a quality of disturbance or disorientation to create possible narratives of cultural trauma, no event in and of itself produces such a trauma. Sufficiently disorienting events begin only as candidates for cultural trauma narratives; their candidacy beginning after "patterned meanings of a collectivity are abruptly dislodged" or "are destabilized and shocked." In such cases, members of the collective have the opportunity to choose if they want "to represent social pain as a fundamental threat to their sense of who they are, where they came from, and where they want to go" by constructing a cultural trauma narrative.

According to Alexander, such cultural trauma narratives have to flow through an entire process; that process begins with both a "claim" and a "carrier group" or "carrier groups," meaning those who carry the responsibility of making the claim to the public and who, in fact, articulate the claim to the public. And, in all cases, the group claim is "to some fundamental injury, . . . a narrative about a horribly destructive social process, and a demand for

33. Id. at 459. As Alexander explains, "[t]raumatic feelings and perceptions . . . come not only from the originating event but from the anxiety of keeping it repressed. Trauma will be resolved, not only by setting things right in the world, but by setting things right in the self." Alexander, supra note 19, at 5.
34. Erikson, Notes on Trauma and Community, supra note 20, at 460.
35. See Alexander, supra note 19, at 4, 8.
36. Id. at 8.
37. Id. at 10.
38. Id.
39. Id. at 11.
emotional, institutional, and symbolic reparation and reconstitution.’’

The audience for the carrier group or groups has to be “members of the carrier group itself,” as it is these members who must be “convinced that they have been traumatized by a singular event.” But to convince this audience of their traumatic claim, the carrier group or groups must first perform “successful meaning work,” and they must do so through the construction of what Alexander calls a “master narrative” of cultural trauma. This narrative has four distinct components, which consist of the following:

- the “nature of the pain,” which is the injury that the group endured as defined by the carrier group;
- the “nature of the victim,” which is the group of persons who were affected by the traumatizing pain;
- the “[r]elation of the trauma victim to the wider audience,” which is the extent to which members of the audience for the narrative view themselves in relation to the immediately victimized group; and
- the “[a]ttribution of responsibility,” which is the person or entity that caused the trauma or that perpetrated the harm.

The medium that carrier groups use to translate their narrative to the public audience varies from narrative to narrative. In some cases, the institutional arena used to articulate and spread the narrative is religion, and in others it is the law, government, or mass media. Furthermore, as Alexander highlights, in some cases, these very mediums can work to not only narrate their pain but also deepen the hurt caused to the victim group. As Alexander explains, because “local, provincial, and national governments . . . might occupy a position of dominance over the traumatized parties themselves,” they “might whitewash the perpetrators’ actions rather than dramatize them.” Indeed, as I argued in my article The Trauma of the Routine: Lessons on Cultural Trauma from the Emmett Till Verdict, these entities may end up inducing a cultural narrative themselves because of their

40. Id.
41. Id. at 12 (emphasis added).
42. Id.
43. Id. at 13–15.
44. Id. at 15–19.
45. Id. at 21.
action or inaction, much like the trial system in Tallahatchie County, Mississippi, did in 1955 when the all-white, all-male jury in the Emmett Till murder trial acquitted J.W. Milam and Roy Bryant, the two known and admitted white lynchers of the young black child.46

In the end, what matters in determining a cultural trauma is whether the disorienting tragedy is effectively communicated as a trauma to the appropriate audience, whether the event is believed to create a permanent stain on life for the traumatized group or groups, and whether the situation is "regarded as threatening a society's existence or violating one or more of its fundamental cultural presuppositions."47 Moreover, the impact of cultural trauma narratives can also be meaningful in terms of its potential for social change.48 Indeed, as Alexander explicates, "[b]y allowing members of wider publics to participate in the pain of others, cultural traumas broaden the realm of social understanding and sympathy, and they provide powerful avenues for new forms of social incorporation."49 Part III considers whether a cultural trauma narrative arose for Whites in connection to the tragic

46. Onwuachi-Willig, supra note 22, at 337, 341–44. Emmett Till, a fourteen-year-old Chicago area native and resident, was lynched while visiting his family in Mississippi from Chicago after he was accused of whistling at Carolyn Bryant, a white woman, and thus perceived as not only offending the social norms of 1950s Mississippi, but also of dishonoring Roy Bryant, the white man married to the woman. See Angela Onwuachi-Willig, From Emmett Till to Trayvon Martin: The Persistence of White Womanhood and the Preservation of White Manhood, 15 DU Bois REV.: SOC. SCI. RSCH. ON RACE 257, 258, 268–69 (2018) (analyzing the role that the need to maintain dominance over white women and Blacks, particularly black males, played in Roy Bryant’s decision to lynch Emmett Till). In my article The Trauma of the Routine: Lessons on Cultural Trauma from the Emmett Till Verdict, I extended cultural trauma theory to explain how a cultural trauma narrative could also arise out of expected and routine subordination that gets affirmed in a public manner, including by and through law, such as a nonindictment or a verdict in a police or quasi-police killing case. In so doing, I drew from the example of Roy Bryant’s and J.W. Milam’s acquittal for the 1955 murder of fourteen-year-old Emmett Till in Mississippi. Specifically, I demonstrated how a longstanding history of discrimination and injustice left Blacks in 1955, including Mamie Till-Mobley, the mother of Emmett Till, with the expectation that the two murderers of her son, Roy Bryant and J.W. Milam, would be acquitted at their trial’s end, and I explained how, nevertheless, that unsurprising acquittal resulted in a cultural trauma narrative for Blacks across the United States, one that helped to ignite the Civil Rights Movement. Onwuachi-Willig, supra note 22, at 345–52.

47. Smelser, supra note 23, at 31, 44.

48. See Onwuachi-Willig, supra note 22, at 346 (noting how the "post-verdict narrative of injustice" that emerged after the acquittal of J.W. Milam and Roy Bryant in the Till murder trial "helped ignite the Civil Rights Movement, which ultimately resulted in legislation like the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the Voting Rights Act of 1965, and the Fair Housing Act of 1968").

49. Alexander, supra note 19, at 24.
killing of George Floyd, thereby enabling powerful avenues for new forms of social incorporations and change.

III. DID A WHITE CULTURAL TRAUMA NARRATIVE EMERGE AFTER THE KILLING OF GEORGE FLOYD?

Arguably, what the public has seen many white people experiencing and expressing about racism after the killing of George Floyd portends a change in how Whites view themselves, Blacks, other people of color, and the police in relation to race, racism, and policing in the United States. Indeed, a *Los Angeles Times* article from June 28, 2020, addressed how the killing of George Floyd was forcing many Whites to rethink their racial privilege and offered a few examples of such changes in racial perspective and attitude. For example, the article discussed how Shawn Ashmore, a white Independent voter who lives in Dallas, Texas, was beginning to understand how even well-intentioned white people like himself could and did contribute to racism in our society. The article read in relevant part:

He [Shawn Ashmore] keeps thinking about the detached look on the police officer's face as he knelt on Floyd's neck.

"The eyes," he said. "It seemed so cold-blooded, lacking heart."

Ashmore said he can't fathom ever treating a Black person that way.

"I'm a nice person; I can't be racist." Ashmore has said those words to himself in the past, and he knows other white people say them, too.

"But do I have parts that are buried somewhere in me that I've kept protected?" he's thought to himself.

"What are my blind spots" as a white man? "What am I tuning out?"

Ashmore has learned that he can be a good man and great father and aspire to make the world a better place, yet still benefit from a racist system that values his life more than that of the Black men, women and children captured in those wrenching scenes of mistreatment and death.

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51. Id.
“This is serious surgery we’re going through,” Ashmore said of the self-examination among whites.\textsuperscript{52}

As the \textit{Los Angeles Times} article made clear, Ashmore was not alone in his awakening to the realities of racism for Blacks and, more so, to his role as a white person in perpetuating that racism. Other white citizens like Dallas Mavericks owner Mark Cuban and Mike Sexton, a Republican voter who lives with his family in an affluent suburb of Fort Worth, also found themselves looking at the world with a fresh new lens for examining race, racism, and policing.\textsuperscript{53} Days after the killing of George Floyd, Cuban tweeted this message to his followers: “Dear White People: We are the ones that need to change. This is not one man’s story [referring to a letter from Emerson College President M. Lee Pelton]. Which is why the problem is ours. We need to find OUR way to change what we do. There is no quick fix. It’s a moral imperative.”\textsuperscript{54}

Much like Cuban, Sexton had arrived at a new conclusion about the role that Whites have to play in dismantling racism in the United States. Sexton explained that his new outlook on and understanding of racism was precisely due to the video that revealed the horrific killing of George Floyd.\textsuperscript{55} Although Sexton’s black acquaintances and friends had all shared stories with him of being racially profiled by the police prior to the killing of George Floyd, Sexton had not “realize[d] the powerlessness and sheer panic that Black people often experience in the presence of officers” until “the video of Floyd’s killing, which captured him crying out ‘I can’t breathe’ and calling out for his dead mother.”\textsuperscript{56} Sexton explained, “[F]or us [meaning Whites], we wouldn’t have understood were it not for the video.”\textsuperscript{57} “Now,” he said, we are “listening.”\textsuperscript{58}

Sexton and Ashmore’s failures to even begin to understand the realities of black people’s experiences with, and resulting perceptions of, the police before the killing of George Floyd are not surprising. As Professor Barbara Flagg has long explained, unlike people of color, white people have the privilege of not consciously

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\bibitem{52} Id.
\bibitem{54} Gaydos, supra note 53.
\bibitem{55} Beason, supra note 50.
\bibitem{56} Id.
\bibitem{57} Id.
\bibitem{58} Id.
\end{thebibliography}
having to think about race and racism each and every day.\textsuperscript{59} In fact, as white scholars like Professors Flagg, Harlon Dalton, and Stephanie Wildman have explained, most white people do not think of themselves in racial terms at all; in their eyes, it is not them who have a race, but instead people of color who are raced.\textsuperscript{60}

The invisibility of whiteness, coupled with the use of whiteness as the dominant measure of racial norms in our society\textsuperscript{61} and aided by the structural and individualized racism that shapes life and opportunity outcomes for people of color, have resulted in perceptual differences, or what Professor Russell Robinson calls “perceptual segregation,” concerning a variety of issues and social and legal experiences ranging from employment discrimination to general societal discrimination to government discrimination.\textsuperscript{62} As Professor Robinson explicates, his “theory of perceptual segregation predicts that blacks and whites, on average, will interpret allegations of racial discrimination through substantially different perceptual frameworks and often will reach different conclusions about whether discrimination has occurred” because “blacks and whites on average find different aspects of an event salient” due to their differing life experiences.\textsuperscript{63}

A. Do the Polls Reveal a Shift in Whites’ Thinking on Issues of Race, Racism, and Policing?

For years, perceptual segregation has persisted in how Whites and Blacks have viewed the connection between racism and policing. Indeed, a series of polling results from similar questions conducted by the Pew Research Center from 2007 to 2020 expose this stark racial divide, which is also captured in Table 1.\textsuperscript{64} Despite


\textsuperscript{63.} Id. at 1117–18.

\textsuperscript{64.} See infra notes 65, 69–70, 81 and accompanying text.
this persistent racial divide, recent polling numbers have revealed a shift in how Whites have come to view the connections between race, racism, and policing since the brutal killing of George Floyd by former police officer Derek Chauvin.

Looking at polling data from the past fifteen years, this Section of the Article reveals how Whites' views on the connections between race, racism, and policing remained largely stagnant until the tragic killing of George Floyd. As proof, this Section relies on polling data from the Pew Research Center from 2007 to 2020 and the Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research (AP-NORC) from the University of Chicago from July 2015 and June 2020; specifically, it uses the data to show how Whites' views on police brutality and racism have changed since the killing of George Floyd on May 25, 2020.

For instance, a review of Pew Research Center polling data from 2007 to 2020 reveals that the percentage disparities between Blacks' and Whites' perceptions of the racism in policing practices and actions and in the fairness of the treatment of individuals of different races remained largely the same for that thirteen-year period, and even widened in some instances, until after the killing of George Floyd on May 25, 2020; at which point, the percentage disparities in perceptions began to decrease between Blacks and Whites. In November 2007, the Pew Research Center asked subjects in a national poll study whether they had confidence that their local police would treat Blacks and Whites equally.65 That year, a mere 14% of Blacks indicated they have a “great deal” of confidence that their local police would treat Blacks and Whites equally compared with 42% of Whites, while 23% of Blacks stated that they had a “fair amount” of confidence that their local police would treat Blacks and Whites equally compared with 32% of Whites.66 In summary, only 37% of Blacks indicated they had “a great deal” or “fair amount” of confidence that their local police would treat Blacks and Whites equally compared with nearly three-quarters of Whites, or 74%.67 On the flip side, 31% of Blacks asserted that they had “very little” confidence that their local police would treat Blacks and Whites equally compared with just

66. Id.
67. Id.
10% of Whites, which is three times fewer than the percentage of Blacks.\textsuperscript{68}

In November 2009, approximately one year after the country had elected Barack Obama the first black President of the United States, the Pew Center for Research conducted another poll study that examined views on race and racism in the nation, including about race, racism, and policing.\textsuperscript{69} That year, only 38% of Blacks indicated they have a “great deal” (14%) or “fair amount” (24%) of confidence that their local police would treat Blacks and Whites equally compared with 69% of Whites, with 38% of Whites asserting they had a “great deal” of confidence and 31% indicating that they had a “fair amount” of confidence.\textsuperscript{70} On the other end of the spectrum, the differences were once again stark, with 34% of Blacks noting they had very little confidence that their local police would treat Blacks and Whites equally as compared with just 9% of Whites who had very little confidence, almost four times fewer than the percentage for Blacks.\textsuperscript{71} And it is worth noting that the title of this particular Pew Research Center Report clearly suggested that its findings signaled progress in the country, as it read: \textit{Blacks Upbeat About Black Progress, Prospects: A Year After Barack Obama’s Election.}\textsuperscript{72}

By August 2014, a year and a half after George Zimmerman killed Trayvon Martin, slightly more than a year after a jury acquitted Zimmerman,\textsuperscript{73} and the same month that Officer Darren Wilson shot and killed eighteen-year-old Michael Brown,\textsuperscript{74} the Pew Research Center conducted another poll that focused entirely on policing.\textsuperscript{75} In that poll, the percentage of Blacks who had a

\textsuperscript{68} Id.
\textsuperscript{70} Id. at 43.
\textsuperscript{71} Id.
\textsuperscript{72} Id.
\textsuperscript{73} See Angela Onwuachi-Willig, Policing the Boundaries of Whiteness: The Tragedy of Being “Out of Place” from Emmett Till to Trayvon Martin, 102 Iowa L. Rev. 1113, 1157, 1161, 1166–67 (2017).
\textsuperscript{74} Julie Bosman & Joseph Goldstein, Timeline for a Body: 4 Hours in the Middle of a Ferguson Street, N.Y. Times (Aug. 23, 2014), https://www.nytimes.com/2014/08/24/us/michael-brown-a-bodys-timeline-4-hours-on-a-ferguson-street.html [https://perma.cc/96FB-BS K2]. Michael Brown was killed on August 9, 2014. Id.
“great deal” or “fair amount” of confidence that their local police would treat Blacks and Whites equally slightly decreased from 2007 and 2009 levels, while it slightly increased for Whites from 2009 levels; only 36% of Blacks indicated that they had a “great deal” (17%) or “fair amount” (19%) of confidence that their local police would treat Blacks and Whites equally compared with nearly double that for Whites (71%), with 35% of Whites asserting they had a “great deal” of confidence and 36% indicating that they had a “fair amount” of confidence. And the disparity between Blacks and Whites’ views of the police in 2014 significantly worsened for those who held less confidence in the police, with 46% of Blacks having very little confidence in police treating Blacks and Whites equally as compared with just 12% of Whites, more than three times as few.

Just a month before the murder of George Floyd, the disparities in views on policing between Blacks and Whites persisted. Only 16% of Blacks indicated that they had a “great deal” of confidence in police officers to act in the best interests of the public while 27% of Whites did. Similarly, only 41% of Blacks indicated that they had a “fair amount” of confidence in police officers to act in the best interests of the public while 57% of Whites did. In summary, only 57% of Blacks compared to 84% of Whites had a “great deal” or “fair amount” of confidence in police officers to act in the best interests of the public.

After the tragic death of George Floyd, the Pew Research Center conducted a poll that explored how the tragedy affected support for the Black Lives Matter Movement among residents of all races in the United States. In so doing, the Center found that a majority of Americans supported the Black Lives Matter Movement: 61% of Whites, 77% of Latinx and Hispanic individuals, 75% of Asian-Americans, and 86% of Blacks expressed that they “strongly support” or “somewhat support” Black Lives

76. Id. at 2.
77. Id.
79. Id.
80. Id.
Out of those supporters, 31% of Whites strongly supported and 30% of Whites somewhat supported the Black Lives Matter Movement while 71% of Blacks strongly supported and 15% of Blacks somewhat supported the Black Lives Matter Movement. For Asian-American and Latinx individuals, 42% of Latinx individuals strongly supported and 35% of Latinx individuals somewhat supported the Black Lives Matter Movement while 39% of Asian-Americans strongly supported and 36% of Asian Americans somewhat supported the Black Lives Matter Movement.

Table 1. National Views Regarding Whether Local Police Are Trusted to Treat Blacks and Whites Equally

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question and Responses</th>
<th>October 2007</th>
<th>Percentage of Black Americans</th>
<th>Percentage of White Americans</th>
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<tr>
<td>Do you have trust/confidence in local police to treat Blacks and Whites equally?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Great Deal</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>42</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fair Amount</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>32</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Just Some</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very Little</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>10</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question and Responses</th>
<th>November 2009</th>
<th>Percentage of Black Americans</th>
<th>Percentage of White Americans</th>
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<tr>
<td>Do you have trust/confidence in local police to treat Blacks and Whites equally?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Great Deal</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>38</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fair Amount</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>31</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Just Some</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>16</td>
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</table>


82. Parker et al., supra note 81.

83. Id.

84. Pew Rsch. Ctr., supra note 65, at 9, 64. Sample statistics: n = 3,086 total respondents, n = 1,536 White non-Hispanic, n = 1,007 Black non-Hispanic, n = 388 Hispanics of any race. Id. at 65 & n.4.

Much like the Pew Research Center data, data from AP-NORC, which is displayed in Table 2, also reveals a shift in how Whites began to think about race and the criminal law system when it came to police brutality from summer 2015 to summer 2020, which immediately followed the killing of George Floyd.89 In 2015, a year after Eric Garner was killed by Officer Daniel Pantaleo, almost a year after former Officer Darren Wilson shot and killed Michael Brown, and several months after former Officer Timothy Loehmann shot and killed Tamir Rice, the AP-NORC data showed that Blacks and Whites held deeply divided views on whether the criminal law system treated police officers who kill civilians too leniently, fairly, or too harshly.90

In July 2015, in a survey conducted on 1,223 adult subjects, AP-NORC sought answers to the question: "How do you think police officers who cause injury or death in the course of their job

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86. PEW RSC. CTR., supra note 75, at 2. Sample statistics: n = 1,501 total respondents, n = 1,082 White non-Hispanic, n = 153 Black non-Hispanic, n = 140 Hispanics of any race. Id. at 8.
87. Gilberstadt, supra note 78. Sample size: n = 10,139 total respondents. Id.
88. PARKER ET AL., supra note 81. Sample statistics: n = 9,654 total respondents, n = 6,602 White non-Hispanic, n = 737 Black non-Hispanic, n = 1,646 Hispanics of any race, n = 278 Asian-Americans. Id. at 23.
are treated by the criminal justice system?" The question allowed for three different replies: (1) too leniently, (2) fairly, or (3) too harshly. Only 32% of Whites believed that such officers were treated too leniently while more than twice as many Blacks, 71%, believed that the officers were treated too leniently. Similarly, more than twice as many Whites than Blacks believed that police officers who kill civilians are treated fairly, with 46% of Whites seeing the treatment as fair while only 20% of Blacks did. Finally, Blacks and Whites differed greatly on whether they viewed the treatment of officers who killed civilians as too harsh, with nearly three times as many Whites, 21%, than Blacks, 8%, viewing the treatment as too harsh.

But, after the killing of George Floyd at the end of May 2020, the differences in the responses of Blacks and Whites to the same question decreased in meaningful ways. Whereas more than twice as many Blacks than Whites viewed the treatment of police officers who kill civilians to be too lenient in July 2015, only 1.35 times as many Blacks than Whites viewed the treatment of such officers to be too lenient in June 2020. More critical than this difference is the difference in the increase in the percentage of Whites and Blacks who responded that such officers are treated too leniently in July 2015 and June 2020. Whereas the percentage of Blacks who viewed the treatment of officers who kill civilians to be too lenient increased by only thirteen percentage points between July 2015 and June 2020, the percentage of Whites in this category nearly doubled, increasing by thirty percentage points. Similarly, the percentage of Whites who viewed the treatment of police officers who kill civilians to be fair also meaningfully decreased by thirty percent from 46% of Whites in July 2015 to 32% of Whites in June 2020. Although the percentage of Blacks who viewed the treatment of police officers who kill civilians to be fair dropped by a higher percentage—an approximately 55% decrease—from 20% in July 2015 to just 9% in June 2020, that significant drop does not detract from the fact that there was significant change among white respondents in the same category.

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92. Id.
93. Id.
94. Id.
95. Id.
96. Id.
97. Id.
as well as in other categories. Finally, the percentage of Whites who viewed the treatment of police officers who kill civilians to be too harsh significantly decreased. Specifically, the number dropped by 76%, from 21% to a mere 5%, which was actually one point below the percentage of Blacks who viewed the treatment of police officers who kill civilians to be too harsh in June 2020.

Table 2. AP-NORC Graph and Chart Concerning the Treatment of Officers Who Kill Civilians

![Graph and Chart]

Question: How do you think police officers who cause injury or death in the course of their job are treated by the criminal justice system?

Source: AP-NORC Polls, the latest conducted June 11-15, 2020 with 1,310 adults.

POL4. How do you think police officers who cause injury or death in the course of their job are treated by the criminal justice system?

[HALF SAMPLE ASKED OPTIONS IN REVERSE ORDER]

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>AP-NORC 06/11-15/2020</th>
<th>AP-NORC 07/17-20/2015</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Too leniently</td>
<td>Fairly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All adults, N=1,310</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Whites, N=634</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blacks, N=377</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

98. Id.
99. Id.
100. Significant Shifts in Attitudes on Race and Policing, supra note 89. Sample statistics: n in 2020 = 1,310 respondents; n in 2020 = 634 White non-Hispanic; and n in 2020 = 377 Black non-Hispanic. AP-NORC, supra note 91.
As the polling data from both the Pew Research Center and AP-NORC reveal, for many Whites, watching and reckoning with the brazen way in which former police officer Derek Chauvin killed George Floyd left an “indelible” mark upon their consciousness, perhaps marking their consciousness in lasting ways and shaping the ways in which they understand themselves and others.\textsuperscript{101} Still, questions remain about the extent to which this impact or indelible mark was a blow that affected a large portion of the group, about the manner in which the tragedy may have changed the group’s identity, and about the messages, if any, that group members communicated to one another about the impact of the killing on their identity and being.\textsuperscript{102} In other words, referring back to the definition of cultural trauma, a question remains as to whether the tragedy forever changed Whites, or a large enough group of Whites, in “fundamental and irrevocable ways.”\textsuperscript{103} Section III.B grapples precisely with this question by examining whether the elements of a cultural trauma “master” narrative have come together to form a type of reform-inducing narrative for Whites in a post-May 25, 2020 world.

B. Does a Master Narrative for White Cultural Trauma in Relation to the George Floyd Killing Exist?

Although the widespread viewing of former Officer Derek Chauvin’s brutal and inhumane killing of George Floyd resulted in Whites as a group taking markedly different actions during the summer and fall of 2020 than they have taken in any other race-related civil rights protest, and even though the horrendous slaying pushed many Whites to engage in self-reflection and examine their privileges as white people, it did not result in the construction and emergence of a cultural trauma narrative for Whites. Although some of the elements of a cultural trauma narrative—namely the nature of the pain and the nature of the victim—could be defined and articulated by individuals who are set on identifying a cultural trauma narrative for Whites due to the horrific killing of George Floyd, a good portion of this cultural trauma narrative for Whites would remain undefined and unfulfilled.

\textsuperscript{101} Alexander, supra note 19, at 1, 10; see McLaughlin, supra note 17.
\textsuperscript{102} See Ron Eyerman, The Past in the Present: Culture and the Transmission of Memory, 47 ACTA SOCIOLOGICA 159, 160 (2004) (“[T]he trauma need not necessarily be felt by everyone in a group or have been directly experienced by any or all.”).
\textsuperscript{103} Alexander, supra note 19, at 1, 22.
Indeed, the very beginning of every cultural trauma narrative, which is the claim itself, would be missing in this case. For some Whites, the claim would be the harm of vicarious trauma, a trauma caused by seeing someone else endure atrocious treatment.\textsuperscript{104} For other Whites, the claim of injury would come through knowing that they, whether knowingly or unknowingly, have helped to perpetuate racism. Professor Janet Helms, a scholar of counseling and psychology at Boston College, observed that “Whites, too, experienced trauma, and Floyd’s killing helped humanize Black people in the minds of Whites, especially White women.”\textsuperscript{105} She explained this particular injury to Whites as related to the killing of George Floyd, stating:

George Floyd turned Black men into human beings for White people, and he did that by calling out for his mother . . . Covid made White people sit and look at the murder of George Floyd. They couldn’t get away from it, especially White women . . . They became aware they were allowing this to happen.\textsuperscript{106}

Another reason a cultural trauma narrative has not emerged for Whites in relation to the killing of George Floyd is the varying levels at which Whites understand race and racism as well as Whites’ different levels of comfort in engaging these topics, particularly when coupled with policing. Given the general discomfort that people in the United States experience when talking about race, in light of our general silences about racism in this country, and due to the invisibility of white skin privilege to so many Whites, Whites move forward with their lives in such wide-ranging places with respect to their knowledge and comprehension of the complexities of race and racism that it would be difficult to develop a shared claim among a large enough group of Whites to construct a common cultural trauma narrative. Furthermore, no carrier group or groups have emerged as the leaders to construct a cultural trauma narrative for Whites in relation to the killing of George Floyd.

Additionally, quotes from many Whites reveal that Whites neither see themselves as directly harmed by the racism that results in the deaths of Blacks by police nor view themselves as

\begin{footnotes}
\item[104.] See McLaughlin, supra note 16.
\item[105.] Id.
\item[106.] Id.
\end{footnotes}
directly being in relation to such Blacks. Indeed, a number of white protesters from summer 2020 spoke passionately, and quite understandably, about protesting on behalf of Blacks, but none spoke about how greater racial justice would improve all of our lives.

Finally, recent polling data suggests that the shifts that occurred in the perspectives and thinking by Whites on issues of racism and policing after the killing of George Floyd were not lasting. These data indicate that Whites were not forever changed in “fundamental and irrevocable ways” by the brutal killing of George Floyd. Indeed, journalist Renée Graham reported that support for Black Lives Matter began to drop among Whites as soon as one month after the tragic death of George Floyd. In a September 2020 article, Graham wrote, “In June, 45 percent of white people surveyed by YouGov/The Economist said racism was a big problem; by early August, that number had fallen to 33 percent.” Furthermore, a March 2021 USA Today/Ipsos poll exposed retrenchment in the views of Whites on the George Floyd killing. Although 60% of respondents to the USA Today/Ipsos poll on the George Floyd killing indicated in summer 2020 that they considered the killing to be murder, by March 2021, that percentage had dropped to 36%. Similarly, although 4% of respondents had no idea how to describe the killing during the summer of 2020, by March 2021, the percentage of those respondents had grown to 17%. White respondents have played a significant role in the shifts in these percentages. Nearly two-thirds of black respondents, 64%, consider the former police officer Derek Chauvin’s killing of George Floyd to be murder, compared

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109. Alexander, supra note 19, at 1, 10, 22.

110. Graham, supra note 107.

111. Id.


113. Id.

114. Id.
to just 28% of white respondents. Similarly, Whites were more than twice as likely to describe the killing as the result of Chauvin's negligence, with 33% of Whites indicating as much, compared to only 16% of Blacks. Differences even remain among Blacks and Whites regarding any hopes of a conviction of Chauvin, with only 54% of Whites desiring a conviction of any crime compared to 76% of Blacks. Perhaps Cliff Young, the President of Ipsos, explained the disparities best when he noted how Blacks, unlike Whites, cannot look away from these issues. He explicated,

Unless we have acute crises bringing racial injustice to the forefront, like the killing of George Floyd, our collective default is 'law and order.' Yet this is . . . the tale of two nations, the memory of last year's events have not receded for Black Americans. Such inequalities are always there and thus top of mind.

IV. CONCLUSION

In the end, the brutal killing of George Floyd has brought our society both tremendous grief and hope. His tragic death sent yet another reminder of the ways in which black people are dehumanized and devalued in the United States. It revealed the structural dimensions that make black people vulnerable to overpolicing in black communities as well as increased interaction with the police, both of which increase the chances of a tragic ending for black individuals, particularly when the very work, training, and policies that undergird policing reinforce the racial biases that can work to dehumanize and devalue black bodies and minds.

At the same time, the tragedy left us with hope for change as protestors helped to ignite social and legal reforms that were once deemed unimaginable in cities across the nation. It brought hope through a multicultural protest movement that was partly motivated by a new awakening to, and reckoning with, racism by many Whites who had to bear witness to George Floyd's execution by former Officer Derek Chauvin.

115. Id.
116. Id.
117. Id.
118. Id.
What it did not bring was a cultural trauma narrative for Whites, one that could promise lasting changes in today's civil rights movement, because of the ways in which Whites' identities, thinking, and feelings had not been forever changed by witnessing racialized police brutality. As Professor Hakeem Jefferson of Stanford University proclaimed,

All of these white people on the front lines of these protests go back to their white neighborhoods and their overwhelmingly white and better schools. . . . They protest alongside [Blacks], but they don't live alongside them. . . . As much as people really want that progress narrative, I don't think it exists yet.120

But the fact that a cultural trauma did not emerge for Whites following the horrific killing of George Floyd does not necessarily portend more of the same in terms of racism, both structural and individualized, and racialized policing. An uncontroverted truth is that a greater awareness exists, and some are awake to the realities of racism for the first time. Being awake is a long way off from being woke, but it is the necessary first step.

120. Harmon & Tavernise, supra note 14.