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Racial thinking in a post-racial society as a backdrop for social movements

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Abstract

Racial thinking has been a problem in the US for several decades where the idea presented within the theory focuses on the worth of people based on the color of their skin or other features which gives an indication to their heritage, and grouping them together. These ideas are perceived differently amongst different people based on which of these traits they have inherited. Because of this there have over time accumulated to discontent within these groups causing people, who are seen as inferior, to want to protest against these notions, which have led to the emergence of social movements. Analyzing how these protests emerged by using Jonathan Christiansen's theory of the Four Stages of Social Movements can give an indication as to how racial thinking has contributed to the emergence of these protests. By looking into two incidents, the Los Angeles riots of 1992 and the Black Lives Matter movement of 2020, where racial thinking is the backdrop of police misconduct and where the incidents sparked protests, we can see how they follow Christiansen's theory. From the analysis of the two incidents, there can be drawn a line between racial thinking and social movements, and by carrying out a comparative analysis of the two it can be seen that similar events of police misconduct lead to similar outcomes. This indicates a bigger problem in the US, where notions of racial thinking creates unrest and discontent, which emerge into social movements.

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Introduction

The US has for several decades had an ongoing struggle with race and racism which have led to numerous instances of police misconduct, which have affected and caused distress in the African American communities, and in the country as a whole. These notions of distress have over time increased and over the years they have caused several protests, demonstrations and riots to break out all over the US. Many shared the notion that Obama's election as the first African American president was evidence that the dream of equality of the Civil Rights Movement had been achieved and that the US was now a fully equal country (Redlawski, 2010, 143). However, during Obama's campaign many Conservatives and Republicans were anxious, this indicates that US is in fact not fully equal, and this study shows how our society is still in need of change. We can still see the evidence of a racial bias existing in what has been classified as a post-racial society, which would indicate that the society is not post-racial at all as the same struggles are still present as an effect of the way we think and act in regards of race. However, based on statistics from a study published in September 2020 it is shown how acts of police brutality against African Americans are still higher than against White Americans, and that violent hate crimes are on the rise (Kishi, 2020, 2). This Bachelor (BA) thesis will look into two protests that have developed as a reaction to acts of police brutality, the Los Angeles riots of 1992 and the Black Lives Matter (BLM) protests of the summer of 2020. These are two movements who were sparked because of similar notions of discontent in the US based on police officers unfair treatment of African Americans.

While a great number of articles have been written on the themes explored in this BA thesis, the gap I am going to attempt to close with my BA thesis is the indication that the idea of racial thinking is still present in a post-racial society and how these perceptions caused social movements. This will be shown by looking at two similar events of police brutality that happened in the US and that sparked social movements. By looking into the Los Angeles Riots of 1992 and the Black Lives Matter Movement of 2020 and comparing and contrasting these two events, as well as analyze them we can see that the idea of racial thinking and its significance is still very present. To do this we will analyze the two events and look at the way social movements develop by using the two first steps of Jonathan Christiansen's theory of the four stages of social movements, and answer the question: In what ways did perceptions of racial thinking contribute to discontent, fueling social movements in 1992 and 2020? My BA project will address this question by comparing and contrasting these two incidents, focusing on theories on the first two stages of social movements. One can see an indication that racial thinking has played a part in both of the beatings that we will look into,

as both are examples of multiple white police officers either standing by or partaking in an act of police misconduct towards African American men. We rarely see such behavior towards White Americans, indicating a hierarchal mindset in incidents like these which in turn has impacted society. Also the movements themselves show how racial thinking over time has lead up to movements caused by unrest amongst people who feel unequal in regard to White Americans. To start off we will look into the theoretical framework of Christiansen's four stages of social movements, followed by the idea of racial thinking. Then we will look into the two incidents, the Rodney King beating and the following Los Angeles Riots of 1992 as well as the murder of George Floyd and the BLM movement protests of 2020, and analyze the impact of racial thinking in these two events. While looking at these two protest they will be analyzed further in the comparative analysis by comparing and contrasting both beatings and the protests that followed.

Theoretical framework

With help from Jonathan Christiansen's theory of social movements we form one of the key sections of the theoretical framework that will be used for analyzing the two incidents. In Jonathan Christiansen's article on the theory, he goes into great detail on the four stages: Emergence, Coalescence, Bureaucratization and Decline, and how these emerge, develop and decline over time. This BA thesis will only look into the first two stages as neither of the movements have reached the third and fourth stages yet. Based on Christiansen's theory of the four stages it gives a great basis of our ability to study social movements despite "variances in movement ideology and scope.", meaning that most movements will develop in the same order regardless of the ideology behind the action, and this can be helpful when we look into instances of social movements in relation to each other (Christiansen, 2009, 15).

In the article Christiansen defines the first stage of emergence as preliminary. There is not yet any form of organization, but rather a widespread discontent in a community (Christiansen, 2009, 16). The community may collectively be unhappy about a social condition, which was the case of the BLM movement in 2020. At this stage there has not actively been done anything to prevent the discontent from spreading and Christiansen writes that at this stage people may discuss their discontent with family and friends. Their discontent is growing, but they have not yet taken any action in order to address their grievances. In the emergence stage some choose to write to the newspaper or post on social media to express their discontent. It is also pointed out that at this point the situation will have an increase in media coverage. For the BLM movement there has been an increase in media coverage, both

in mainstream media and social media, as it is a movement that relies heavily on the use of social media to reach as many people as possible (Woodly, 2016).

When a movement has formed a more defined sense of discontent, it has reached the second stage of Christiansen's movement theory, coalescence. Christiansen indicates that the movement has reached a "popular stage" where a more distinct discontent can be seen and people are more aware of who and what is the reason behind this unrest (Christiansen, 2009, 17). At this stage the movements will start to make demands for change, as we can see from the BLM movements, where people collectively expressed a discontent of the acts of police brutality towards African Americans (Woodly, 2016). There is also an emergence of leadership in this period and strategies of how the movement can achieve their goal. Some protests have begun and a general sense of wanting to change the social condition is growing amongst protestors. In the third stage there a stronger sense of organization has developed and they have become successful to some extent, and people have at this stage partaken in mass demonstrations. The social movements who have reached this stage must now rely on organization by trained staff rather than rallies and protests. In the fourth stage there is a decline, which can be caused by several different things. Whether a movement is successful or whether it has failed, whether they have associated themselves with the authorities or a political party or maybe the movement has been established within the mainstream, which is any ideology's main goal (Christiansen, 2009, 18-19). These last two steps will be excluded from the analysis as neither movement reached or has yet to reach this stage, making them irrelevant for this BA thesis.

While Christiansen's theory does propose a straightforward theory for categorizing social movements, it does however have some flaws and limits. As social movements differ greatly in the cause they are fighting for and the number of people participating, there can therefore be challenging to place them within the four stages. In addition to this, not all social movements develop in the "right" order, but may skip some steps and some may even not reach the Coalescence stage (Christiansen, 2009, 23). The theory does however present scholars and sociologists with a simple step by step model to place social movements and analyze their inner workings for a better understanding of how these movements affect society.

The second theory that forms the key sections of the theoretical framework is the concept of Racial thinking. The concept is defined by S. O. Y. Keita and Rick A. Kittles as "the belief that visible human variation connotes fundamental deep differences within the species, which can be packaged into units of near-uniform individuals. This belief leads to the

construction of types that by definition must have certain traits.” (1997, 534). What Keita and Kittles suggests with this definition is a deep, subconscious racial bias based on features and abilities that are connoted with a certain race, (e.g. facial features or cultural rituals). The racial thinking theory creates an indication that these traits and variations makes humans separate into different groups, and that these groups indicates this race’s ability to do certain things. The idea of racial thinking bases itself in the indication that some groups are more worth than others based on qualities that cannot be predetermined, but are inherited and passed down from generations. Some even rest on the belief that there is a power balance between groups as it ranks differences as better or worse than each other, superior or inferior (Nash, 1962, 286).

For a long time, and to some extent today, it was believed that Africans were underdeveloped compared to Europeans and Americans, based on the fact that their features were different (Keita, 1997, 535). This idea of underdevelopment of African countries is further explored in Manning Nash’s *Race and the ideology of Race* (1962). He proposes the idea that we have all been given the same opportunities, but that yet “pure blood” black communities have had a lesser chance of development than European cities, and that European cities have had the advantage of developing with the help of poetry, art and culture. For this reason they are therefore viewed as greater cities (Nash, 1962, 286). From this theory we get an idea of how racial thinking creates an idea that African people are underdeveloped and less cultured than “Western” civilizations. In its simplest form, one could say that racial thinking is the notion of placing different races into groups and ranking their ability to perform based solely on their race.

The US has long history of racial thinking, and its presence is still evident. While many would classify the US as a “post-racial” society, we can find many examples that contradict this idea. For many, the election of Obama as the first African American president was a proof that the struggles of the Civil Rights Movement in the 1950’s – 60’s had been successful, and that some sort of goal had been reached. This according to the article “Voters, Emotions, and Race in 2008: Obama as the First Black President” by Redlawsk, Tolbert and Franco, which concluded after a list experiment that there is still a heavy racial bias in the US (2010, 875). From this experiment they found out that 30 percent of Americans show concerns about voting for a Black, hypothetical candidate, they did however also find out that about 85 percent had expressed that they would support an African American candidate when asked openly, without the ability to hide behind an anonymous experiment (Redlawsk, 2010,

876). This indicates that there are still some thoughts of separating groups into more worth or less worth based on race.

There are several opinions whether the theory of racial thinking is an actual phenomenon or whether it is a social construct. This idea that race and racial thinking is just a social construct is explored in Ann Morning's "'Everyone Knows It's a Social Construct': Contemporary Science and the Nature of Race" (2007). The concept is defined in the study as "a social invention that changes as political, economic, and historical contexts change" (Morning, 2007, 436). By this it is meant that it changes with our perception of society and is something created by society, rather than pre-determined separation based on human traits that both Keita and Nash indicate in their studies. There have been some contradicting views on the concept of racial thinking, as aforementioned, some believe in the power balance between the different races, while Morning acknowledges the popular of racial groups being "physically distinguishable populations", she contradicts this view and raises the indication that race is a social construct in a study. Based on this study, Morning reached the conclusion that people are divided on the topic, but ultimately reached the conclusion that a biological racial division is still the most likely possibility (Morning, 2007, 351). This study helps show that there are clear indicators of the racial bias within the American society against African Americans. The idea of racial thinking continues to exist in our communities and, as we have seen, it will continue to cause unrest amongst people who are categorized and treated unfairly for this reason.

Rodney King and the Los Angeles Riots 1992

The beating of African American Rodney King in 1991 sparked a violent riot in Los Angeles that lasted for about a week. On March 3rd Rodney King was beaten by four police officers (Rabinowitz, 2015, 143). The incident was video recorded and sold to several news stations which helped the news spread throughout the country. King was beaten after having lead the police on a high-speed chase while driving under the influence. King was ordered out of the car by the police when they finally stopped him. The four officers then proceeded to kick him repeatedly and beating him with their batons for 15 minutes based on the video evidence from the day. About a dozen officers were watching the beating happen, but reportedly did not do anything to prevent it. The injuries that King suffered after the beating were very serious and included skull fractures, broken bones and teeth as well as permanent brain damage. Four of the officers were charged with the beating, but all four were found not guilty on April 29th 1992 (Sastry, 2017).

The riots started almost immediately after the police officers responsible for King's beating were found not guilty in court. The verdict fell at 3:00 in the afternoon, and by 4:15 reports of looting at the intersection of Florence Boulevard and Normandie Avenue. By 5:45 there were several reports of assaults against motorists where people were dragged out of their cars and beaten. Only five hours after the verdict, at 8:15, the first fatality was reported to the police (Bergesen, 1998, 39). The Los Angeles Riots are still today one of the deadliest riots in the US with over 50 deaths and 2383 people were injured during the six days of rioting. The areas where the majority of the protests took place there were also about \$1 Billion in property damage, and close to 1000 businesses were burned to the ground (Bergesen, 1998, 39).

This event had a huge impact on the entirety of the US and made many open their eyes to the state of the police brutality against Black Americans. We can see how racial thinking elevated the impact of the King Beating and the following Los Angeles Riots. As disclosed above, racial thinking rests on the belief of a hierarchal ranking of racial traits and the dominance of one race. This idea is often very transparent in the US and is easy to spot by looking at the way the police treat people of color. When looking at the tape-recording from the incident one could easily see how King was brutally dragged and beaten even though his body language indicated that he was willing to cooperate with the police. Despite the fact that King was lying on the ground, the police officers still repeatedly kicked him and beat him with their batons. Studies have shown that there is a significant racial bias in the police force in the US which gives us an indication that King's beating, and many others, was rooted in the fact that he was black first, and based on his crime second (Radebe, 2020, 237). Black Americans were getting tired of the unfair treatment and their distrust in the police were increasing based on the many acts of police brutality inflicted upon people of color. Many Black Americans have trouble trusting the police because of this visual separation based on race, which in turn has caused this widespread unrest and discontent. The beating itself showcases a hierarchal point of view and misuse of power, that indicates this very theory of racial thinking that caused people to realize the extent of the problem.

One could also argue that when the verdict came and the officers responsible for King's beating were found not guilty that the decision was influenced by racial thinking. Despite the fact that they were presented with video evidence of the sequence of events, King was still being unjustly treated as the officers responsible for his beating were found free in court. The jury forewoman for the first trial blames King himself for the beating, indicating this hierarchical order of the races, believing that the police officers acted rightfully in beating

a man halfway to death because of petty crime (Grabiner, 1995, 93). While King himself is not innocent as he was caught driving under the influence, the way he and his case was treated in court caused a second trial to be held in a different county. This second trial happened because of the strong notions of racial thinking that was present in the courtroom and because of the unfair treatment that King received by the judges. When we shine a light at the first trial in the Rodney King case and look at the way it was handled, Grabiner and Grabiner (1995, 90) indicates that “The appearance of neutrality is not neutrality, it is neutrality as mask”, indicating that the case on the surface was presented as a fairly balanced trial, but in reality was led with a strong influence of a racial bias. For instance, the video recording of the incident was shown in court 140 times, however by using “freeze frame” it was used to distort the reality of the clip. The technique that was used to present the videoclip made it seem like King was the persecutor, pausing the recording and distorting the images to downplay the significance of the contents of the recorded video (Grabiner, 1995, 93). People became increasingly restless as an effect of the way King was treated in court and in the media, and when the verdict came it caused a five day riot in Los Angeles.

The riots themselves were caused as an aftershock of the trial, and people were fuming as a reaction to the way King was treated in court and the massive riots came as a protest against the way King, and the African American community as a whole, was treated by police officers and the law system. The riots were violent and caused a lot of property damage as a reaction to the years of discrimination of Black Americans. The riots gained a lot of attention and people contributed because African Americans were unhappy with the way the law system had treated them as a lesser part of society. People had already shown notions of discontent, as not only King’s beating had been broadcasted on the news the year before the riots broke out but also because of the unfair portrayal of the incident in media. The riots themselves provide an insight into the notions of racial thinking in the community at the time. While the police responded quickly to the call of riots breaking out in different areas of Los Angeles, they were not prepared enough for the rapid speed in which the riots were expanding, and therefore had to leave the area, and come back later more appropriately equipped (Useem, 1992, 365). In simple terms, this could indicate that the police were underestimating not only the protesters but also the situation as a whole, not realizing how big of an impact the jury verdict would have on the community. The developments of the riots followed Christiansen’s four step model, and as it reached the second step Los Angeles erupted into violent riots where people finally felt like they could appropriately express their

discontent with the way people of color were treated, protesting against the ideas of race and separation and the unfair way King was treated.

George Floyd and the Black Lives Matter Movement 2020

The actions that lead up to the Black Lives Matter protests of the summer of 2020 was the brutal murder of African American George Floyd. BBC have reconstructed the incident, and describes the incident based on video footage from bystanders. On May 25th the police were called by a store employee after Floyd had bought cigarettes with a counterfeit \$20 bill. When the police showed up, Floyd was sitting in a parked car and was approached by two police officers. Officer Thomas Lane pulled Floyd out of the car after he had drawn his gun. Floyd was then handcuffed, and based on the video footage, he was cooperating with the police. According to BBC's article, the struggle started when the officers were trying to get Floyd into the back of a police vehicle, as he fell to the ground and exclaimed that he was claustrophobic. At this point Derek Chauvin had arrived, and he and the other officers once again tried to get Floyd into the police vehicle, and it was during this attempt that Chauvin dragged Floyd away from the vehicle which caused Floyd to fall to the ground again. The video footage from the day show Chauvin kneeling on Floyds neck for over nine minutes while the other three officers were watching. Witnesses and video footage contests that Floyd was repeatedly telling the officers that he could not breath and was begging for help. About six minutes into the video recordings of the incidents, Floyd became non-responsive and one of the bystanders asked one of the onlooking police officers to check Floyds pulse. The officer did that, but could not find one, and yet none of the officers moved. An ambulance took Floyd to the hospital, and an hour after the incident he was pronounced dead. (BBC, 2020)

During this time there had already been other incidents similar to this one where Black Americans had been victims of police brutality, and Floyds public murder and the video recording of it helped contribute to the international riots and mass protestations of the month of June. The riots started the day after Floyd's death in Minneapolis on May 26th and the four police officers present during Floyds beating are fired. Statistics from Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project (ACLED) show that “ Between 26 May, (...) and 22 August, ACLED records over 7,500 demonstrations linked to the BLM movement across more than 2,440 locations in all 50 states and Washington, DC” (Kishi, 2020, 3). Reuters reports that the protests take place around one of the police stations in Minneapolis, where protesters are chanting “No justice, no peace” and “I can't breathe”, Floyds last words. Police officers are

out trying to control the rowdy crowds outside, and are armed with rubber bullets and tear gas. On the day of Derek Chauvin's arrest on the 29th of May the protests start to spread to other American cities, first to New York, and the day after in several others. The protests are similar in these cities, with protests and riots on the streets. And during these days some of the protests turn into violent riots which causes cities to enforce a curfew. In Minneapolis the situation becomes even more disastrous when a truck drives into a mass of protesters (Reuters, 2020).

In the days leading up to Floyd's funeral, the streets of American cities were filled with protests, rioters and police forces. The national guard has been called in to control the protesters. There are huge numbers of innocent protesters who are killed, and in Seattle a man drives a car into a crowd as well as shooting and injuring a protestor. Statues and monuments of slave-owners are being teared down by BLM protesters in the US, and the street leading up the White house is decorated with "Black Lives Matter", and later a street in Brooklyn, New York is also decorated with a "Black Lives Matter" mural. The violent riots that occurred were the cause of several more lives lost and the police is at this point agitated at the situation that has arisen, causing even more incidents of police brutality. On June 12th we see the evidence of this rising agitation when a "Black man is killed by a police officer after falling asleep in a Wendy's restaurant drive-through lane", causing rioters to burn the Wendy's restaurant to the ground the day after in protest (Reuters, 2020).

The significance of racial thinking as a buildup to the protests were evident in both the murder of George Floyd and in the protests themselves. Floyd's cruel murder was fueled by a racial bias as his beating could not be justified by the crime he committed, but rather seen as an overreaction by the officers. Some would even argue that his punishment did not fit the crime, but rather took a vicious turn when he would not cooperate with the police at the beginning of his arrest. By looking into the fact that the police officers that were standing by looking at Chauvin kneeling on Floyd's neck and how they did not do anything to prevent this action, shows a strong indication of their unwillingness to save a life despite their own personal beliefs. The significance of racial thinking is also evident in the video recording, as Chauvin is kneeling on Floyd's neck while simultaneously telling him to get up and get into the car, displaying his authorial power, which can be seen as this hierarchal power balance introduced in the theory of racial thinking (The New York Times, 2020). This evidently shows the authorial power that Chauvin himself believed himself to have. By this we can see how Chauvin, and the other officers viewed themselves more worth than Floyd. Chauvin as the one who committed the action of misconduct and the officers standing by watching, and

their display of power is for many aggravating. It also works as a reminder for African Americans to not trust the police, creating an ever greater barrier between the two.

During the protests the public got an outlet for their pent up anger that had been building up for years. The constant notions of a racial hierarchy and the power balance presented in media, created a severe discontent and an unwillingness to trust the police amongst African American communities. This, in addition to the several murders and beatings of innocent Black American men and women over the last decade is ultimately what caused the BLM movement to break out in 2020, gives a reason to the extensiveness of the protests. All the unrest and discontent that had been accumulating amongst the public, and with the use of social media the discontent spread and ultimately led to a social movement. These notions, who similarly to the 1992 LA Riots, had plagued people for years and African Americans were at this point tired of being treated as inferior to White Americans. Which caused the BLM protest to break out as a response to the severe unequal treatment of not only George Floyd and the other victims of police misconduct, but towards people that, defined by Keita and Kittles, have different traits. The notions of racial thinking is transparent in the way the protests unfolded, the police acted as though they were inferior to the protesters, this we can see by the amount of protesters lives were lost at the hands of police misconduct during the protests. One of these acts of misconduct was the aforementioned murder of a man who fell asleep in his car. He lost his life without having even committed a crime, and the police officer responsible for the murder displays this idea that some are inferior to others.

The movement that took place in 2020 was also distinguished by how it was non-violent, as most protests associated with the BLM movement are reputable to dissociate from violent and destructive activity (Kishi, 2020, 5). During the first few days of protesting police officers showed their support by joining the protestors in marches or taking a knee, indicating a support of Floyd rather than the officers responsible for his murder. While participating in these protests, officers show their support for the movement, however these attempts may seem transparent when there are reports of acts of police misconduct happening in the same areas only days later. A news report from Buffalo, New York came during this time, showing a police officer violently pushing an elderly protester to the ground, fracturing his skull (Kishi, 2020, 7). This once again showing the unwillingness of police officers to change their ways, and rather keep on living in the state of mind where they are viewed as more powerful than the people they are supposed to be protecting.

Comparative Analysis

As evidently showed in the sections above we can see how these similar episodes of police brutality caused a parallel outburst from the public. Both the beating of Rodney King and the brutal murder of George Floyd caused the public, who had already been living in a state of unrest for some time as notions of discontent had been on the rise, to erupt into mass protests. Before the Los Angeles Riots of 1992, there was a widespread discontent in California as a result of the video recording of King's beating. This had already caused people to become agitated and these notions became heightened when the police officers who beat King was found not guilty during the first trial. Similarly with the Floyd incident, he was only one of many victims of police brutality that were unfairly killed and beaten during the spring and summer of 2020, and the fact that the incident was videorecorded was for many an important factor for protesting and participating in riots throughout the summer. These preliminary notions of unrest are what we can define as the first stage in Christiansen's theory on four stages of social movement. As previously introduced the first stage is the emergence stage, and we can see in the case of the Los Angeles riots there were as aforementioned already discontent in the community. This as a result of the recording of the incident being broadcasted throughout the country, meaning that there were people who were already talking and wanting something to be done with the situation. The discontent became more and more visible, and people were openly voicing their discontent in the streets.

When looking at the BLM movement of the summer of 2020 much of the same could be said. People became increasingly more restless about the situation that was going on and people were looking for things they could do to contribute to a more equal community. However, in contrast to the Los Angeles Riots the BLM movement has been an ongoing movement since 2013. This does however only strengthen what Christiansen displays in his four step theory, as it indicates that the notions of discontent can fume for years before something more drastic happens, like the 2020 Movement. During the development stages of the BLM protests there had been a few smaller protests against police brutality, however the protest that broke out after the murder of Floyd were a significantly bigger and reached far more people. We can for this reason see that the 2020 BLM movement, in contrast to the Los Angeles Riots, contained these notions of unrest for a significantly longer period of time, indicating a long stage of development. This could also be a contributing factor to why the BLM Protests developed into such a major and extensive movement, as people had been more quietly voicing their distress for several years, especially through social media using the hashtag (#) Black Lives Matter.

Following the idea that the BLM movement had been in the emergence stage for quite some time and seeing as its notions of unrest spread, it got a huge following even before the 2020 protests started. One of the main differences between the two protests is the fact that the 2020 BLM movement became a widespread protest, where people in the different areas showed their support for Floyd. One main reason for this was the fact that the BLM movement made use of Social Media (Mundt, 2018, 1). This gave the shared discontent and people's views a chance to spread further, and as the discontent for the way police officers treated Black Americans were common in many places in the US. The increased use of Social Media contributed to a more widespread notion of unrest. This could also be an explanation as to why the protest lasted as long as they did, as people had cumulated more information on the topic and could have formed an opinion that ended with people wanting to participate in protests. Differently from the Los Angeles Riots who only lasted for five days, the protests of 2020 lasted for several months. Also, taking into account that the 1992 riots were much more violent in the six days it lasted than the 2020 protests, that were still violent to some extent. However, during the 2020 protests people protested more peacefully. Differently from the BLM movement, the Los Angeles Riots did not have the advantage of sharing their discontent and participate in an online protest. However, the media coverage of the riots that took place in 1992 still reached the entirety of the US and this way the notions of discontent still got shared on a more extensive scale.

Perhaps one of the biggest differences between the two mass protestations, and in a sense between Rodney King and George Floyd, is the fact that the officers responsible for Floyd's murder were held accountable for their actions. While both incidents concluded in the officers responsible for the misconduct were fired as punishment, Chauvin was found guilty on three charges and is expected to spend up to three decades in jail during the first trial (Wamsley, 2021). Though Chauvin is most likely to request a new trial, it will most likely not be granted to him. In the instance of Rodney King's beating the officers were found not guilty, which ultimately caused the massive riots. The fact that police officers are now, in the instance of the 2020 murder of Floyd, being charged and held responsible for their actions indicates a change in the American justice system, seeing as police officers who commits acts of police brutality rarely have been held accountable in the past. If we look back at the King trial, the media indicated that King himself "controlled the action" as he at any point during the beating could have put his hands down and let the police place him in handcuffs (Grabiner, 1995, 93). However, by looking at the video footage of the beating of King, he can be seen lying on the ground and at some points trying to get away from his prosecutors, but

they are surrounding him and hitting him from all angles (CNN, 2017). This shows us that King had no control over the situation and that he was wrongfully blamed. Paula Rabinowitz writes that regardless of the video footage he was blamed, as previously stated, and some even justified this as in the recording “his leg is cocked” and his “arm is triggered”—while the of officers, fearing for their lives, benignly administer “strokes” to his “bear- like body” (2015, 144). Indicating that King would never have won the first trial as both the court and the media was against him. This could be seen as quite a big difference from the Floyd case, which as aforementioned ended with Chauvin facing close to thirty years in prison. It is also an indicator to the steps of change in the law system, as it can now be seen as an institution that is no longer as controlled by racial thinking, but rather as a more equal establishment.

When looking at the riots through Christiansen’s four step model on social movements in comparison to each other, we can see that there had already been some sort of incident previous to the breakout of the Black Lives Matter Movement in 2020. When looking at the BLM movement that broke out we could easily see this discontent with the public and the want for a more equal community. The American public had been fuming for years as numerous Black Americans have wrongfully lost their lives at the hands of police officers, and the BLM movement has been protesting against these acts of police misconduct on a smaller scale since 2013 as previously mentioned. But in the decade leading up to the riot of 2020 several lives were lost, many who were innocent and unarmed, and we can see that police killings are still increasing (Kishi, 2020,1). For the BLM movement, the emergence stage can be said to have had its start in 2013 and became popular when the hashtag “#BLM” was trending on social media and people were showing their discontent for the US and the situation by posting and reposting slogans and pictures on Social Media. By participating in this emerging community, people shared their support by using the hashtag (Mundt, 2018, 9). The main goal of the organization is to “to eradicate white supremacy and build local power to intervene in violence inflicted on Black communities by the state and vigilantes” (BlackLivesMatter, 2020). This meaning that the growing organization is focusing on creating a safe and equal environment for Black Americans.

For the 1992 LA Riots we can also see how Christiansen’s first step of emergence played its part in a similar way. If we leave out of account the fact that the 2020 BLM movement showed their discontent with help from Social Media, both of the incidents share similar notions of discontent. If we think about the extent of the riots of 1992, we get the sense that the people were also quite weary as a consequence of the level of inequality in the Country. By the way the King trial was presented in the media and the attitudes toward Black

Americans over the last decades, we get the sense that people were willing to go to drastic measures for a change. People were still stunned after the brutal beating, and the community were growing more and more agitated by the way King was treated by the media in the period before the verdict came, and the notions of discontent that had formed during this period reached its limit. At the time before the riots broke out and the movement reached the second stage, the community were already talking and sharing their unrest, and many may have been fed up seeing as many white Americans played into the view that King could have prevented the beating. In comparison to the George Floyd incident and the BLM movement it sparked, in the instance of the LA Riots, there were also some notions of unrest between police officers and the anticipation of the trial of King's perpetrators and Black Americans, which added onto this discontent in the way that the police treated African Americans.

During the spring and summer months of 2020, when the BLM protests broke out, the notions of unrest that troubled the US erupted and we have now moved onto the second step of Christiansen's four step model, the popular stage. More people are now aware of the unrest and one of the ways that the BLM movement helped spread this awareness of the discontent was through the internet. After the murder of Floyd, people became more aware of the many instances of police brutality and the notions of unconscious racial thinking that many people have. At the second stage, Christiansen indicates that the movement has reached a "popular stage" where a more defined sense of discontent can be found. A more distinct discontent can be seen and people are more aware of who and what is the reason behind this unrest. The BLM movement caused more people to protest against police brutality and interestingly it became a global phenomenon. The way the 2020 movement developed is chronological according to Christiansen's four step model, the next steps focuses on developing a sense of structure and organization. However, seeing as the movement itself is rejecting hierarchy and centralized leadership, the future of the BLM movement is a mystery, as their focus on equality works against these hierarchical management formations (Mundt, 2018, 3). Since the beginning of the BLM movement it has popularized the use of social media and the internet, the growing organization is able to spread their message and goals further than previous mass protests because of their use of the internet, we can see this based on previous protests under the BLM organization where social media has played an important role in spreading knowledge (Mundt, 2018, 9). One of the reasons why the #BLM movement has become so popular and well known globally could be that with the help of the internet, it has made it easy for everyone to participate. Since the "hashtag" became popular, it has given many the opportunity to share their own experiences and show their support, as well as "create their

own stories and discourse around the term and its meaning” (Mundt, 2018, 4). Meaning that the Black Lives Matter movement have created a worldwide network where people can discuss and share and fight for equality.

When looking at both of the protests we see how this deep rooted racial bias is presented as one of the major factors as to why the incidents happened. As previously disclosed racial thinking has been and is still very present in our society, and will likely persist for several years in the future, and one prominent area where this deeply rooted racial thinking is visible to the public is in the American police departments, which is also reflected in the ways King and Floyd were mistreated by police officers. Based on the ideas presented in an article from December of 2020, Patrick Radebe proposes that racism is taught to police recruits at the police academy, and could therefore be an explanation as to why these incidents in most cases happen to Black Americans. The article plays into the theory of racial thinking discussed above, as well as it takes into account that this separation of races is taught to people and not an inherent ability. The article mainly focuses on the American police academy, and how introducing an antiracist education can help police officers “understand the humanity and decency of African-Americans as well as their many contributions to American life. (Radebe, 2020, 237). There have been a lot of talk of defunding the police as a way of improving the situation and as a way to ensure a more equal way of punishment, especially after the extensive Black Lives Matter protests of 2020. However, as Radebe proposes as a different solution. In his own words, he proposes an antiracist education as:

Incorporating antiracist education in the context of police training and professional development is one way to help police officers understand the humanity and decency of African-Americans as well as their many contributions to American life. Helping racist police officers check their racist views at the door and learn that skin color does not make one less human could help “rupture [the racist philosophy that sustains, however subtly,] the dominant power structures that continually exclude people of color”

Simply helping police officers from the beginning of their training to understand the significance of African American life and steering them away from these ideas of racial thinking. If this way of educating coming officers were introduced, many would also get the justification why many African Americans end up in poverty, which in many cases has driven many to a life of crime. (Radebe, 2020, 237) If we look at the two incidents, we can see an

indication that they could have been avoided or handled better if the police were taught using an anti-racist educational method. It has already been indicated that many Black Americans are having difficulties trusting the police as a series of incidents of police brutality have haunted the US for several decades. Put into perspective, in the almost thirty years separating the two incidents, Black Americans are still having trouble trusting and relying on the police. If we start checking peoples racist thoughts and beliefs before they become police officers, chances are that African Americans' trust in the police would increase, and incidents such as the beating of Rodney King and the murder of George Floyd could have been avoided.

Conclusion

Views of racial thinking has over the years sparked social movements. Particularly the view of African Americans as inferior to other races based on their cultural heritage and their features. We can summarize by saying that majority of police officers in the US use their authorial power to viciously beat African Americans during or instead of arrests. This has created a barrier between the police and Black Americans, where people are now feeling discontent with the situation and are struggling to trust the police. This in turn have created a social unrest within the US, where years of pent up anger have exploded in to riots and movements such as the 1992 Los Angeles Riots and the BLM movement of 2020. The first two steps of social movements as defined by Jonathan Christiansen focuses on the emergence of a movement where people talk amongst themselves in smaller communities voicing their discontent of a social condition. This in addition to the theory of racial thinking, which proposes the idea that there is a hierarchal order of races based on the traits and abilities, has been the the theories that this thesis is built upon. Rodney King, who was chased by police officers for driving under the influence, and then brutally beaten as a punishment for his crime, as well as the vicious murder of George Floyd after he was caught paying with a counterfeit bill and killed by choking as Derek Chauvin was kneeling on his neck for over nine minutes are both examples which displays these two theories. Both of these incidents were fueled by notions of racial thinking amongst police officers and fueled these movements as an effect of these notions as the officers responsible acted with an attitude that indicated that their victims were inferior. This caused the BLM protest break out, as the US had for years been fuming after several beatings of African Americans, and the videorecording of Floyds murder was for many the final stroke and people openly showed their discontent. The Los Angeles riots broke out after the trial of the officers responsible for King's beating where

King was blamed and his persecutors were free-found, even after the videorecording of his beating was shown in court.

While the movements advanced differently both in extensiveness and scope, both were fueled by acts of police misconduct where officers displayed their power in a way that by many is viewed as an overreaction to the crime committed. This is also an indication to the ideas racial thinking integrated into people, and as aforementioned is taught to many officers at the police academy, which creates an environment where some believe they are superior to others. These acts and the discontent they have accumulated could be seen as the reason why movements and riots break out, as people feel the need to express their discontent with the social conditions created by the public. By looking at the Los Angeles Riots and the BLM movement and their way of emerging, we can draw a line between racial thinking and the social unrest it creates and Christiansen's four step model on social movements. Both of the movements analyzed in this thesis share the commonality of being fueled by discontent as a lasting effect of police brutality, and also as to having developed chronologically according to Christiansen's theory. For this reason we can conclude, as the two movements analyzed in this thesis show, that racial thinking and actions fueled by these ideas can potentially lead to social movements where people demand change. By this analysis one can see how the theories, racial thinking and social movements, are linked together as one lead to the other in many instances, as seen in both the King and the Floyd cases, where actions based on racial thinking lead to the emergence of social movements. This can indicate that how people view the ideas presented within the theory of racial thinking can have different outcomes. Many African Americans have the perception of being inferior and experiencing discrimination based on the color of their skin or facial features, and these experiences are creating these notions of discontent. On the other side of the spectrum we have White Americans, who subconsciously teach or are taught that they are superior, like the police officers who commit these incidents of police misconduct. Both parts experiences these notions in different ways, which creates an environment where social movements are viewed by the minorities as the most direct way of fighting back against their oppressors.

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