



BRILL

SOCIETY & ANIMALS (2022) 1–19

Animals
& Society
Institute

brill.com/soan

Nonhuman Animals as Symbols in the #BlackLivesMatter Protests of 2020

Tiamat Warda | ORCID: 0000-0001-7949-7520

Exeter Anthrozoology as Symbiotic Ethics (EASE) Working Group,
University of Exeter, Devon, UK

Corresponding author

tw445@exeter.ac.uk

Thomas Aiello | ORCID: 0000-0003-2766-0271

Exeter Anthrozoology as Symbiotic Ethics (EASE) Working Group,
Department of History and Africana Studies Program,
Valdosta State University, Valdosta, GA, USA

taiello@valdosta.edu

Kristine Hill | ORCID: 0000-0002-3429-5818

Exeter Anthrozoology as Symbiotic Ethics (EASE) Working Group,
University of Exeter, Devon, UK

kh458@exeter.ac.uk

Abstract

Racial uprisings often include animalized commentary and symbolic use of non-human animal bodies. This paper highlights some of the nonhuman animal bodies observed during the #BlackLivesMatter protests within the United States in 2020 – specifically, the use of pig, horse, and dog bodies during street protests. Displays of pigs carry with them a racially rife past in the United States. This history harmed protesters during #BlackLivesMatter protests, being described as suffering “like animals,” and the use of “pig” as an epithet for the police is explored. For the Black Cowboys who joined the protests on horseback, the physical presence of their horses amplified their message, symbolized a shift in their freedom, and positioned them eye-to-eye with the mounted police officers. The use of dog bodies within politics, how they amplified political messages as “sign-carrying vehicles,” and the dangers for them and others in protests are addressed.

Keywords

#BlackLivesMatter – African American History – Interspecies protest – Black Cowboys – Dogs in protest – Police brutality

On Tuesday, June 9, 2020, George Floyd, a victim of a public police murder in Minneapolis, was buried in his hometown of Houston, Texas. The following day, his brother, Philonise Floyd, traveled to Washington, D.C., to testify in a congressional hearing designed to respond to the global protest movement sparked by Floyd's death and the broader racial violence present in American policing. "I just think about that video over and over again," a weeping Philonise told a Congressional panel. "You don't do that to a human being, you don't even do that to an animal" (Gambino, 2020).

A week prior, former President Donald Trump ordered a variety of policing groups in Washington, D.C., including the Secret Service, to move a group of peaceful protestors from Lafayette Square (Leonnig et al., 2020). They used chemical irritants like tear gas and pepper balls. They threw flash grenades and smoke canisters. And they did so on the backs of horses without any real protection from such irritants (Bender & Gurman, 2020; Woodward, 2020). Many participating in that peaceful protest, and in protests across the country, brought their companion animals with them, some even dressing them with signs to demonstrate support for the #BlackLivesMatter movement.

Nonhuman animals (henceforth "animals") have played an integral, if often unacknowledged, role in the police reform uprisings of 2020. They have been employed by various human groups as broader symbols, agents of policing, victims of violence, and representative stand-ins for victims of that violence. These roles are not new. They often manifest themselves at times of racial unrest. This paper contextualizes the human use of animals as symbols, police, and victims in the wake of the killings of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Rayshard Brooks, and Ahmaud Arbery. This work is in no way intended to diminish the value of those protests or the lives that have been lost to police violence. Instead, it seeks to fold in the lives that often go unnoticed in such tumultuous and traumatic moments.

By no means a comprehensive account, this brief essay describes the three most visible ways that animals have played a role in the police brutality protests. It begins with the comparative use of animal language and bodies to make the case that law enforcement diminishes the lives of African Americans, before moving on to the most public celeb of the protests: the forced participation of horses in the protests by Black Cowboys in Oakland, Houston, and other

cities, which inverted narratives about Black urbanity and the criminality that supposedly accompanied it. Finally, the paper tracks the companion animals that often accompany protesters and, in the process, become billboards for the messages the protests attempt to convey. While it does not discuss in depth the role of K9 dogs, horses, and other animals pressed into service as agents of policing (see Boisseron, 2018), the account of the role of animals on the side of the protesters demonstrates the fraught relationship between animalized humans and animals themselves. Animals have been integral in various ways to the protests, benefitting the argument for Black Lives while often serving as a detriment to the human relationship with animals.

Animals as Symbols

Racial uprisings have almost always included animalized commentary. One of the most prominent came from Harlem in 1964, following the police shooting of an African American boy (Flamm, 2016). During this uprising, protesters described police culture as hunting culture, one policeman telling them, “I’m going to get me a nigger tonight.” (Edstrom, 1964, A1, A6). That hunting ethos, then, turned its subjects into animals. Even among the advocates of the victims of racial policing, humanity became the standard by which decency was judged. “How could the city expect the Negro to behave sensibly?” asked civil rights leader Bayard Rustin. “He behaved desperately because of the desperate situation” (Edstrom, 1964, A1, A6).

That kind of framing, from both the hunters and hunted, is repeated in modern manifestations of such violence. Ahmaud Arbery was murdered in Brunswick, Georgia in February 2020, but his killers were not arrested until the wave of #BlackLivesMatter protests drew new scrutiny to his case. Arbery’s grieving father told the media that his son’s killers “came at him” as if they “were hunting an animal” (Vavra, 2020). In describing the police murder of Breonna Taylor after a no-knock warrant led to indiscriminate police gunfire, the organization Occupy Democrats argued that “no American deserves to be gunned down like an animal without charge or trial” (Taylor, 2020). Rayshard Brooks, whose June 2020 murder by Atlanta police in a Wendy’s parking lot spurred more activism, had given an interview in February in which he made a similar comparison: “I just feel like some of the system could, you know, look at us as individuals,” he said. “We do have lives, you know,” but they treat “[us] as if we are animals” (Kaye, 2020).

Thus, animals are coded as entities to hunt, to shoot, to lock away. Animals are not individuals. Those metaphors, however, as problematic for animals as

they are, are used in these contexts to correct human wrongs toward other humans. When they are marshalled instead in the opposite direction, they become even more problematic. In 2016, Seattle Mariners' catcher Steve Clevinger lost his baseball career after claiming that #BlackLivesMatter protesters "should be locked behind bars like animals" (Associated Press, 2016). In June 2020, in response to the new wave of protests, Chicago bar owner Maureen Sullivan risked losing her business after claiming that protestors "should only be allowed in zoos because they act like animals" (Hernandez, 2020).

It was a demonstration of the declension inevitable in animal metaphors. Comparisons of police brutality to hunting led to claims of inhumanity, which led to comparisons of inhumanity to desperation, which then ended in racist comparisons of Black behavior to that of animals, and the consequences of that behavior requiring acts of punishment performed on animals. The reason that association existed was because human society had been conditioned to see any behavior that skirted societal norms as nonhuman, as animalistic, despite the lack of any real resemblance to actual animal action. It was not, then, a metaphor based on realistic comparisons. It was a metaphor based solely on bigotry, against the human or human group in the comparison, and to all animals. And the only group in that paradigm without the ability to push back against such framing were the animals.

Midgley (1994) has explained:

When human beings behave really badly, they are said to behave 'like animals,' however unlike their acts may be to those that any other species could perform. This is a way of disowning the motives concerned and distancing them from the rest of us.

p. 192

In these cases, the effort at moral superiority and political superiority trumps the need for one-to-one correlation.

"Animal" is an epithet reserved for the most "horrible human beings" and "heinous criminals," Mason (2007) argues, particularly when "we want to describe their egoism, insatiable greed, insatiable sexuality, cruelty, senseless slaughter of other beings, and the mass slaughter of human beings" (p. 38) – behavior that is rarely the product of nonhuman beings. Animalizing such behavior, then, has nothing to do with the actual relationship to animals. It is instead an effort to reduce "the power/status/dignity of animals and nature and so aids and abets the supremacy of human beings" (Mason, 2007, p. 38).

This lack of direct correlation, in the words of Hurn (2012), "goes some way towards explaining why human characteristics and actions such as rape and murder at one end of the spectrum, and sexual promiscuity or bad table

manners at the other, are often labelled as animalistic” (p. 14). By framing select humans as animals, the framers “chastise and censure those others” considered outside of socially constructive norms (Hurn, 2012, p. 14). Animality, then, becomes a signpost of difference rather than the correlative comparison assumed by most metaphorical work.

The history at the intersection of race and animality only exacerbates such associations. Recent works by Bennet (2020) and Iman Jackson (2020) argue that African Americans deploy animal metaphors in direct response to historical White claims of Black animality and the long colonial project of treating Black experience as a meaningless non-entity (see also Ko, 2019). Johnson (2019) goes farther, describing a “fugitive humanism” among African Americans that maintains significant animal relationships in pushing back against the animal associations created by white supremacy.

Such signposts of difference can be seen in the Floyd protests of 2020. “To watch my baby nephew suffer like an animal until they put him out of his misery,” said Floyd’s uncle, Selwyn Jones, “he didn’t deserve to die in the middle of the street like trash.” Jones equates animals with trash to make his point about police brutality (Matzen, 2020). A protestor at a march in the aftermath of the killing told a reporter, “George Floyd was killed like an animal. And we’re tired. This is the norm. This is not something that’s new” (Sarai, 2020). The refrains of 2020 echoed those of the protests of the 1960s.

The other predominant echo of animal symbolism in the protests is the use of “pig” as an epithet for the police. One of the most searing images from the protest movement, in fact, is that of a man holding a severed pig’s head (*Sus scrofa domestica*) toward a police barricade in Minneapolis. Such references also have a significant historical precedent. As early as 1546, pigs were being used as derogatory terms for boorish men, and the epithet has continued through the centuries (*Oxford English Dictionary*, 2006). Beginning in 1811, the term first appeared in print as an insult for police officers (Grose, 1811), and spread across the ocean, in regular use as synonymous with American police through the Progressive era (*Oxford English Dictionary*, n.d.).

The concept of such epithets is Cartesian at heart. The division between human and beast proposed by thinkers like Descartes was a project of defining the human self against the Other, an Other who, of necessity, had to be animalized (Thomas, 1983; see also Noske, 1989; Ritvo, 1987). “In each constructed world of nature,” explains Douglas (1975), “the contrast between man and not-man provides an analogy for the contrast between the member of the human community and the outsider” (p. 289).

Baker (1993) has produced the most systematic analysis of animal imagery as human insult. Such actions, he argues, “will call on common knowledge and received ideas,” but will also “offer unexpected insights into embedded but

unstated cultural assumptions regarding the object-status of animals, and into how such assumptions are deployed either to bolster our own sense of identity or to undermine that of others" (p. 91).

When that animal is a pig, the objectification and inferiority claims are of a specific trajectory. "The object of man's peculiar cultural disdain for the pig," Kearney (1991) has argued, "is less the beast itself than man's own speckled soul" (p. 322). Soper (1995) agrees: "The vilification of the pig can be attributed to the need to assuage the guilt of killing and eating such a commensal associate" (p. 88). Some of that vilification in the second half of the twentieth century can be laid at the feet of George Orwell's (1945) *Animal Farm*, in which a group of farm animals rebel against a human farmer, only to see their rebellion usurped by a porcine cabal (Byers, 2018). Pigs are, in other words, symbols of repressive authority as were members of American law enforcement for so many in the decades following the book's publication.

Graffiti comparing the police to pigs appeared in the early days of the protest movement. The infamous Minneapolis pig's head appeared on screens around the world. On June 8, 2020, a severed pig's head was placed on a spike and left outside the headquarters of the Los Angeles Police Department (Darrah, 2020).

Wrenn (2018) has described a similar, less violent phenomenon in relation to the 2017 Women's March protesters, who wore "pussy hats" and used feline imagery as part of a performative act of gender solidarity without any considered account of the human relationship to cats themselves. Whether in comparative animal phraseology or in using porcine or feline naming to deride police and government officials, the symbolism of animals has loomed over recent protest movements and the police brutality protests of 2020. But that symbolism is just one element of the animal role in the uprising.

"We Are Still Here": Black Cowboys and Equine Pedestals

The horse (*Equus ferus caballus*), the free-roaming American mustang, has often symbolized what the United States (U.S.) represents for many: freedom (Davies & Boyd, 2019). Similarly, the cowboy tends to represent "individual freedom" and "limited government" (Wright, 2001, p. 183). Together, horses and cowboys can be a "beautiful symbol of our pioneering past" (Visser, 2017, p. 708). However, which cowboys are remembered as symbolizing and, indeed, experiencing this freedom? Dominant American culture has portrayed cowboys as being rowdy, lasso-swinging Caucasian men – the horses they ride

representing their own wild, vigilante lives. “Black Cowboys,” however, have been whitewashed from most forms of documentation and recollection in the U.S.’ history books; “Not only were [B]lack cowboys ignored, [B]lack soldiers, ranchers, and farmers went virtually unmentioned in the traditional academic literature” (Goldstein-Shirley, 1997, p. 6; Hardaway, 2001). This is not due to a lack of Black Cowboys, as one-quarter of cowboys were African American (Lorenz, 2020; Thompson-Hernández, 2020a). Indeed, cowboys seemed to be an “international crew” with cowboys of color and those from overseas labeled with “nicknames” such as “Nigger’ Jones,” “Mex’ Garcia,” and “French’ Bateau” in the 1880s, for example (Fishwick, 1952, p. 84). Today, “the heart of the Black cowboy still beats strongly” (Michigan, 2005, p. 2), with rodeo cowgirls such as the Cowgirls of Color (2017) claiming their future, and art exhibits sharing images of their past (i.e., The Studio Museum in Harlem, 2020).

Acknowledging the rich history of Black Cowboys is important when observing how they appear and are perceived in modern times. Black Cowboys and Cowgirls protested across the U.S. during the #BlackLivesMatter movement in the wake of George Floyd’s murder (Thompson-Hernández, 2020b). Amidst mounted police officers, they demanded justice, and, more acutely, their right to live – safe from police brutality. The symbolism of the American horse was not lost on the mounted protesters: “You think about everything that a horse stands for. A horse is about freedom” (Pereira, 2020, para. 10). Brianna Noble, a young, female African American protester, appeared on her horse, Dapper Dan, who wore a “Black Lives Matter” sign draped across his back at a protest in Oakland, California (Allaire, 2020; Thompson-Hernández, 2020b).

Images of the two went viral, inspiring more Black Cowboys in, for example, Houston, Texas (Thompson-Hernández, 2020b). Riding horses together on the street, these Black Cowboys mirrored what Thompson-Hernández (2020a) writes of in his recent, timely book, the *Compton Cowboys*. Thompson-Hernández (2020a) recalls seeing mounted African American Compton Cowboys as a child. They were “show-stoppers” who caused even individuals carrying deep-held prejudice against African Americans, due to gang violence and other racial tensions, to stare at them “in awe,” honk their horns, and wave (Thompson-Hernández, 2020a, p. 4). To this day, seeing Black Cowboys riding through an urban neighborhood, such as Compton, can be “incredibly transformative”:

They seemed ethereal – like superheroes on the backs of mystic creatures ... These weren’t the cowboys I had learned about in my history books or seen on the big screen, and yet ... I recognized something

inherent in the cowboys who existed in every western film and every hip-hop song: these black men were non-conformist, independent, and strong.

THOMPSON-HERNÁNDEZ, 2020a, pp. 4–5

Perhaps the mounted Black Cowboy protesters had a similar effect on protesters and onlookers. Brianna Noble, for example, acknowledged horses as a “medium to inspire change” (Allaire, 2020, para. 3). She hoped that the presence of her horse would move the attention away from the fires and looting, to “give the media something to look at that is positive and change the narrative” (Clayton, 2020, para. 5). Noble recognized that Dapper Dan’s sheer size would draw attention to her and act as her “pedestal”:

When you’re black it doesn’t matter how loud you scream or how deep your words are, nobody would listen,” she continued. “So to now have found this amazing pedestal – my horse Dapper Dan to sit upon – and not have to say a word is amazing.

CLAYTON, 2020, para. 7

To different ends, equine bodies are utilized by mounted police officers to impress the public: “A policeman on a horse is ten feet tall,’ officers say, and this brings special advantages” (Lawrence, 1988, p. 225). The mounted protesters took on a powerful stature as they rode into protests on their horses, positioning them eye-to-eye with the law enforcement (Allaire, 2020). As mentioned previously, mounted police officers used their horses to clear a crowd of predominantly peaceful protesters from Lafayette Square, for example, with tear gas (Leonnig et al., 2020), which put the protesters and horses at high risk of injury. As the intensity of the #BlackLivesMatter protests continued to rise, media shared footage of mounted police officers not merely utilizing horses to impress the crowds to gain control but also treating horses as physical weapons to, at times, exert force and intimidate civilians.

This became a stressful and dangerous interaction for both the horses and the protesters. Footage surfaced of a horse carrying a police officer in Houston, Texas, running over a young African American female, who had her back to the police officer – resulting in bruises and swollen joints on her behalf (Zamora-Nipper, 2020). As of writing this, it is unclear whether the horse was intentionally asked to do so, or had gone into a state of panic, resulting in flight behavior which caused blinding adrenaline – ultimately charging into her due to a lack of control from the police officer (Jordan, 2020). The horse did not appear to be acting flighty in the video footage. Indeed, historically,

humans have benefitted from “being stronger and faster on horseback than an enemy” (Philipps, 2017, p. 80) in times of political and racial tension and conflict. Spanish conquistadors weaponizing horses in North America, Moorish invaders bringing Barb horses to Spain, or Scythians and Mongols who “spread the horse through raiding campaigns that ranged from China to Rome” are merely some examples (Philipps, 2017, p. 77). When Spanish peoples came to New Mexico, the native peoples outnumbered them, but they “passed laws banning natives from owning horses or even learning to ride” (Philipps, 2017, p. 80). However, locals decided to “rise up” by reclaiming ownership and use of horses. Horses “enabled the spread of war” and “the side that made best use of horses usually won” (Philipps, 2017, p. 77).

During #BlackLivesMatter protests, comparable power dynamics between mounted protesters and police officers developed. Amanda Hunt described one such scenario:

Somebody had broken away with a police horse. He went live on his cell phone, and he's just exuberant. He's yelling out in the streets, “I took a police horse!” And people were just cheering for him. It was like seeing a [B]lack Paul Revere – that instead of “The British are coming,” it's “Change is coming. Freedom is coming.”

ALLAIRE, 2020, para. 12

Horses undergo intensive training to accompany police officers into protests (Norton et al., 2018). The police officers must control their freedom, so a horse will “never run free when they are on duty” (Norton et al., 2018, p. 68). The ethical concerns of using equine bodies for the benefit of police officers by placing them in situations with a high risk of injury and overall stress are significant. Some, such as Nevzorov (2011) and Hurst (2015), question the mental, emotional, and physical effects of (often involuntary) riding on behalf of the horse.

Protesters took to the streets demanding justice for countless African American individuals who had lost, and continue to lose, their lives at the hands of police officers. In doing so, they fought for freedom from oppression in the past and present. Horses and African American protesters were, naturally, to varying degrees and within contrasting contexts, both subject to extortionate levels of control from police officers who significantly limited their rights, safety, and freedoms. The horse running with the protester could have represented an iconic American freedom. Taking this “freedom,” the horse, from the officer, both physically and symbolically, was an act of reclaiming and displaying the beginning of a hopeful shift of freedom which evolved during these uprisings for all to see. This protester, and the Black Cowboys, took

the narrative about them, their history, and their future, into their own hands, through protest, with the bodies of horses acting as pedestals and mediums to amplify their message. The Black Cowboys and their horses created a display of unity – a declaration of their role in history that came with the message: “*We are still here*” (Allaire, 2020, para. 5, emphasis in original).

“Very Good Dogs Protesting for Justice”

It is no secret that Americans love their companion animals. An estimated one-third of U.S. households include a cat (*Felis silvestris catus*) or dog (*Canis lupus familiaris*), and the majority consider animals to be part of the family (Cain, 2016; Clancy & Rowan, 2003). Therefore, it is unsurprising that these nonhuman family members would participate in family outings, including important political demonstrations. A thread entitled “very good dogs protesting for justice” gained popularity on Twitter by documenting dogs attending #BlackLivesMatter protests (Nguyen, 2020). As sign-carrying vehicles, companion animals are powerful because so many people are subject to the “cuteness response” and/or have an affinity towards nonhuman animals (Borgi & Francesca, 2016). Popular culture uses animals as metaphors for human life and to reinforce dominant cultural values, and, contrary to how farm or wild animals are portrayed, companion animals are most often cast in positive, human-like roles (Hirschman & Sanders, 1997; Paul, 1996). Society relates to companion animals because they embody everything considered “good” and “wholesome,” and, depending on the breed, the presence of a dog can make a person appear more approachable and likeable (Geries-Johnson & Kennedy, 1995; Rossbach & Wilson, 1992). For this reason, it is probably no accident that politicians make a point of being seen with their companion animals (Maltzman et al., 2012). Senator Elizabeth Warren brought her dog Bailey along to join protestors outside the White House, after voicing outrage over law enforcement decisions to fire smoke canisters on crowds in Lafayette Square (Wise, 2020). Whether deliberate or not, the act of bringing along a companion animal signals peaceful intent. A few of these animals became internet sensations. Footage of Buddy the Golden Retriever attending the “Be Heard, Be Safe; Rally for Justice” rally held in Cincinnati, Ohio, on May 31, 2020, went viral on social media (Bakar, 2020; Jain, 2020). Participating with his guardian, Sarah Emrick, Buddy is seen carrying a placard in his mouth that reads “Black Lives Matter.” The footage of Buddy was not without criticism. For example, one Tweet wrote, “Please be safe. Animals don’t really get the concept of social

discourse and protesting, but love us nonetheless. Let's not betray that trust" (Bakar, 2020, para. 4). Emrick replied with the following:

This is my dog. I know him and I know that he could handle this. It was a peaceful protest and no one was hurt. I was aware of my surroundings and was very careful to make sure neither of us got hurt. And I left before the curfew kicked in. He was happy to be there.

BAKAR, 2020, para. 5–6

The notion that Emrick is qualified to speak for Buddy is supported by Sanders (2003), who explored how close relationships and shared experiences lead to a deep understanding of each other. The concern is that those less in-tune with their companions' needs and feelings, or who view them primarily as accessories (Blouin, 2013; Hurn, 2011), may drag them along and overlook their distress.

While the act of bringing along companion animals signals peaceful intent, dangers are inherent in crowded and politically charged environments. In response to the "very good dogs protesting for justice" thread (Nguyen, 2020), some took to Twitter to plead with others not to take dogs along because they could get caught up in unpredicted violence:

These are great but please don't take your dogs to protests where cops are shooting rubber bullets and tear gas into crowds, if they don't care about human life they certainly won't care about your dog so keep them home and safe please.

Twitter, @KaiFMo

The police are legally permitted to kill nonhumans with impunity (Roudebush, 2002), and dogs could be targeted as a potential threat to public safety. Such a scenario is more likely if an animal becomes distressed and is separated from their guardian, and their caninity may render them more vulnerable.

Research into how dogs make a person appear more likeable or approachable is complicated by the reverse being true in the presence of a larger dog or specific breed types (Rossbach & Wilson, 1992). While bringing along a "friendly looking" dog might signal peaceful intent and uplift marchers' spirits, more "aggressive-looking" breeds could have the opposite effect (Guenther, 2020; Rosenburg, 2011).

Most states have enacted breed-specific legislation, which renders certain breeds more at risk of being shot if they are separated from their human (ASPCA, 2020). Alluding to this, one commenter wrote in response to the

“Good dogs protesting for justice” Twitter thread (Nguyen, 2020): “I’m sad knowing people are bringing their pitbulls [sic] to protests. Please protect your babies. Don’t forget that law enforcement treat them differently because of their breed. Oh wait ...?” (Twitter, @Brrrriley). Pit bulls are subject to discriminatory policies based on allegations of their dangerous behavior, although the idea that they are more dangerous than other breeds is disputed (Duffy et al., 2008; Medlin, 2007). During the Civil Rights era, pit bulls became protectors of African Americans in poor communities who feared violence from both the police and peers (Dickey, 2016). Pit bulls have subsequently been negatively portrayed as companions to African American male “thugs,” and are connected to dogfighting operations involving African American men in poor neighborhoods (Rosenburg, 2011; Weaver, 2013). Guenther (2020) examined how breed advocacy, intended to shift public views about pit bulls, was a form of anti-Blackness being used to make these dogs more appealing to white, middle- and upper-class Americans.

Perhaps, because of the negative images of police dogs being sicced on crowds during civil rights protests (Chapman, 1980), police dog presence is currently less visible. Nonetheless, on June 1, 2020, former President Trump threatened to sic “the most vicious dogs” on protesters outside the White House (Haberma, 2020). Shortly after Trump’s flippant remarks, dogs were set upon an African American man, Joseph Malott, who bit him after he had already been brought to the ground by Bay Area police officers (Borenstein, 2020). These events cast the dogs as the “bad guys,” but they are merely doing what they are trained to do, and many are killed during active service. The Officer Down Memorial Page (n.d.) tracks police fatalities in the line of duty and has a section dedicated to K9 officers. Of the 25 reported fatalities in a six-month period, 15 were involved in an automobile crash, five were struck by vehicles, and five were killed by gunfire. During the summer months, dozens of K9 officers also die of heat exhaustion each year (Ingraham, 2015).

Throughout history, dogs have been employed in various capacities as working animals, kept for protection or as companions, and used as signifiers of social status and identity (see Hurn, 2011). “The history of the dog-human relationship has been marked by racial concepts and advertisers, celebrities, and media representatives, when they portray dogs, tap into those concepts, sometimes knowingly and sometimes not” (Rosenberg, 2011, p. 118). Golden Retrievers are commonly used as representations of white, middle-class, family life, pit bulls as symbols of lower-class African Americans, and Chihuahuas as stereotypes of Latinos (Guenther, 2020; Rosenburg, 2011). Golden Retrievers are popular in mainstream media and advertising, embodying the white, upper-middle-class lifestyle (Rosenberg, 2011). This underlying (subconscious)

bias may have facilitated the rise of Buddy as an internet sensation. Like his guardian, a Caucasian woman, Buddy is protected by his “white privilege.” Arguably, Buddy was safer than his pit bull contemporaries. Not only are pit bulls vulnerable to breed-specific legislation, but subject to racially derived prejudices (Guenther, 2020).

Conclusion

During the #BlackLivesMatter uprisings, footage of animals went viral, though their roles, physically and symbolically, were generally unacknowledged by protesters and the media. There were exceptions, such as Brianna Noble and her horse Dapper Dan, who acted as a physical pedestal for her message and a symbol of freedom. While most protestor companion animals did not play a similar symbolic role, their presence at the protests did entail risks. Beheaded pigs did not make it to the protests alive. Police dogs and horses not only risk minor to fatal injury but may be asked to injure protesters – ultimately embodying the “bad guy” trope. Companion animals, such as the dogs mentioned here, are still at risk, though they act as a stark symbolic contrast to police dogs and mounted police horses. Their presence can signify the peaceful intent of their human partners, but their vulnerability can differ between breeds, with pit bulls, for example, being perhaps more susceptible to brutality than Golden Retrievers.

Using the #BlackLivesMatter uprisings of 2020 as a lens, this paper examines how the physical bodies of animals, as well as the language and semiotics of animality, can affect protests. Images of animals carrying messages in support of #BlackLivesMatter going viral on Twitter, for example, motivated discussions and debates. While these were often concerned with the safety of the animals, such images and exchanges online acted as another medium to spread support, initiate conversations, provide education, as well as motivate increased participation. Brianna Noble’s appearance on her horse, for example, directly inspired large groups of Black Cowboys to join protests across the United States as a moving display of unity and a shift in positions of freedom and power. The repressive authority, murder, and exploitation that the Black Cowboys were, in part, riding to protest, is a shared experience, to some extent, with that of animals. Pigs’ heads left outside of police headquarters and raised up against police officers during protests, especially, are reminders of this and used as symbols representing the authority of law enforcement. Therefore, the bodies of animals, often involuntarily and perhaps unknowingly at times on behalf of both the animals and the humans who accompany them, made an

entangled, notable impact on the #BlackLivesMatter uprisings in 2020 both physically and symbolically.

Acknowledgements

We are grateful to the Exeter Anthrozoology as Symbiotic Ethics (EASE) working group for the discussions and feedback related to this manuscript. All authors contributed equally. We thank the anonymous reviewers for their time and helpful comments.

References

- Allaire, C. (2020, June 5). "We've been here all along": The lesser-known history of the Black Cowboy. *Vogue*. <https://www.vogue.com/article/bacl-cowboy-protest>.
- Associated Press. (2016, September 23). *Mariners suspend Clevenger without pay for rest of season*. <https://apnews.com/d50c0bdf6db9428684d37ca43000bd61>.
- ASPCA (2020). *What is breed-specific legislation?* <https://www.aspca.org/animal-protection/public-policy/what-breed-specific-legislation>.
- Bakar, F. (2020, June 3). *Very good dog attends protests with Black Lives Matter sign*. *Metro*. <https://metro.co.uk/2020/06/03/dog-goes-viral-attending-protest-black-lives-matter-sign-12796997/>.
- Baker, S. (1993). *Picturing the beast: Animals, identity and representation*. Manchester University Press.
- Bender, M.C. & Gurman, S. (2020, June 2). *Forceful removal of protesters from outside White House spurs debate*. *Wall Street Journal*. <https://www.wsj.com/articles/forceful-removal-of-protesters-from-outside-white-house-spurs-debate-11591125435>.
- Bennett, J. (2020). *Being property once myself: Blackness and the end of man*. Harvard University Press.
- Blouin, D. (2013). Are dogs children, companions, or just animals? Understanding variations in people's orientations toward animals. *Anthrozoös*, 26(2), 279–294. <https://doi.org/10.2752/175303713X13636846944402>.
- Boisseron, B. (2018). *Afro-dog: Blackness and the animal question*. Columbia University Press.
- Borenstein, D. (2020, June 4). *Bay area police sicced biting dog on Black George Floyd protester*. *Mercury News*. <https://www.mercurynews.com/2020/06/04/borenstein-police-siccing-dog-on-black-george-floyd-protester-excessive/>.

- Borgi, M. & Francesca, C. (2016). Pet face: Mechanisms underlying human-animal relationships. *Frontiers in psychology*, 7(298). <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2016.00298>.
- Byers, A. (2018). The biopolitics of totalitarianism in Orwell's *Animal Farm*. In T. Horan (Ed.), *Critical insights: Animal Farm* (pp. 167–179). Salem Press.
- Cain, A. (2016). Pets as family members. In M. Sussman (Ed.), *Pets and the family* (pp. 5–10). Routledge.
- Chapman, S. (1980). Police dogs versus crowds. *Journal of Police Science and Administration*, 8(3), 316–321. <https://www.ojp.gov/ncjrs/virtual-library/abstracts/police-dogs-versus-crowds>.
- Clancy, E. & Rowan, A. (2003). Companion animal demographics in the United States: A historical perspective. In D.J. Salem & A.N. Rowan (Eds.), *The state of the animals II* (pp. 9–26). Humane Society Press.
- Clayton, A. (2020, June 2). *Protesting from a pedestal: "No one can ignore a black woman on a horse"*. The Guardian. <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2020/jun/01/george-floyd-protester-oakland-horse>.
- Cowgirls of Color. (2017). *Welcome | Cowgirls of Color*. Retrieved from <https://cowgirlsofcolor.wixsite.com/cowgirlsofcolor>.
- Darrah, N. (2020, June 9). *Pigheaded move*. The Sun. <https://www.the-sun.com/news/954879/george-floyd-protests-los-angeles-bloody-pig-head/>.
- Davies, K.W. & Boyd, C.S. (2019). Ecological effects of free-roaming horses in North American rangelands. *BioScience*, 69(7), 558–565. <https://doi.org/10.1093/biosci/biz060>.
- Dickey, B. (2016). *Pit bull: The battle over an American icon*. Penguin.
- Douglas, M. (1975). *Implicit meanings: Essays in anthropology*. Routledge.
- Duffy, D., Hsu, Y., & Serpell, J. (2008). Breed differences in canine aggression. *Applied Animal Behaviour Science*, 114(3–4), 441–460. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.applanim.2008.04.006>.
- Edstrom, E. (1964, July 26). N.Y. observer finds rioting had its roots in long pent-up rage. *Washington Post*.
- Fishwick, M. (1952). The cowboy: America's contribution to the world's mythology. *Western Folklore*, 11(2), 77–92.
- Flamm, M.W. (2016). *In the heat of the summer: The New York riots of 1964 and the war on crime*. University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Gambino, L. (2020, June 10). *'Make it stop': George Floyd's brother calls on Congress to act over police violence*. The Guardian. <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2020/jun/10/george-floyd-brother-philonise-floyd-congress>.
- Gilmore, E. (2020). *Brianna Noble is the horsewoman we all need right now*. Heels Down Mag. <https://heelsdownmag.com/brianna-noble-is-the-horsewoman-we-all-need-right-now/>.

- Geries-Johnson, B. & Kennedy, J.H. (1995). Influence of animals on perceived likability of people. *Perceptual and Motor Skills*, 80(2), 432–434. <https://doi.org/10.2466/pms.1995.80.2.432>.
- Goldstein-Shirley, D. (1997). Black Cowboys in the American West: An historiographical review. *Ethnic Studies Review*, 20, 6.
- Grose, F. (1811). *Lexicon balatronicum: A dictionary of buckish slang, university wit, and pickpocket eloquence*. C. Chappel.
- Guenther, K. (2020). “Taking the ghetto out of the dog”: Reproducing inequality in pit bull rescue. *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 43(10), 1795–1812. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01419870.2019.1665695>.
- Hardaway, R.D. (2001). African American cowboys on the western frontier. *Negro History Bulletin*, 64(1–4), 27–32.
- Haberman, M. (2020, June 1). *Trump threatens White House protesters with “vicious dogs” and “ominous weapons”*. New York Times. <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/05/30/us/politics/trump-threatens-protesters-dogs-weapons.html>.
- Hernandez, A.V. (2020, June 3). *Lincoln Square bar owner faces backlash after posting racist comments online*. Block Club Chicago. <https://blockclubchicago.org/2020/06/03/spyners-pub-owner-faces-backlash-after-posting-racist-comments-online/>.
- Hirschman, E. & Sanders, C. (1997). Motion pictures as metaphoric consumption: How animal narratives teach us to be human. *Semiotica*, 115(1/2), 53–79. <https://doi.org/10.1515/semi.1997.115.1-2.53>.
- Hurn, S. (2012). *Humans and other animals*. Pluto Press.
- Hurn, S. (2011). Dressing down. Clothing animals, disguising animality? *Civilisations*, 52(2), 109–124. <https://www.cairn.info/journal-civilisations-2011-1-page-109.htm>.
- Hurst, R. (2015). *Riding on the power of others: A horsewoman's path to unconditional love*. Vegan Publishers.
- Iman Jackson, Z. (2020). *Becoming human: Matter and meaning in an antiblack world*. NYU Press.
- Ingraham, C. (2015, November 20). *The surprising reason more police dogs are dying in the line of duty*. The Washington Post. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/wonk/wp/2015/11/20/the-surprising-reason-more-police-dogs-are-dying-in-the-line-of-duty/>.
- Jain, S. (2020, June 2). *Viral video: Dog filmed holding “Black Lives Matter” sign at US protest*. NDTV News. <https://www.ndtv.com/offbeat/viral-video-dog-filmed-holding-black-lives-matter-sign-at-us-protest-2239325>.
- Johnson, L. (2019). *Race matters, animal matters: Fugitive humanism in African America, 1840–1930*. Routledge.
- Jordan, J.R. (2020, May 30). *Police investigating after video shows mounted patrol officer trample protester in downtown Houston*. Chron. <https://www.chron.com/news/houston-texas/article/Video-shows-mounted-patrol-officer-trample-15305527>

- .php?utm_medium=referral&utm_campaign=socialflow&utm_source=facebook.com.
- Kaye, R. (2020, June 17). *Rayshard Brooks opened up about the struggles of life after incarceration in an interview before his death*. CNN. <https://www.cnn.com/2020/06/17/us/rayshard-brooks-interview-reconnect-life-after-incarceration/index.html>.
- Kearney, M. (1991). *The role of swine symbolism in medieval culture*. Edwin Mellen Press.
- Ko, A. (2019). *Racism as zoological witchcraft: A guide to getting out*. Lantern.
- LaBerge, B. [@bethlaberge]. (2020, June 1). *Brianna Noble rides her horse Dapper Dan through Downtown Oakland on Friday joining a protest over the Minneapolis police killing of George Floyd. Photographed for @KQEDnews*. [Image attached]. Tweet]. Twitter. <https://twitter.com/bethlaberge/status/1267383490540007426>.
- Lawrence, E.A. (1988). Horses in society. *Anthrozoös*, 1(4), 223–231. <https://doi.org/10.2752/089279388787058407>.
- Leonnig C., Zapotosky, M., Dawsey, J., & Tan, R. (2020, June 2). *Barr personally ordered removal of protesters near White House, leading to use of force against largely peaceful crowd*. The Washington Post. https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/barr-personally-ordered-removal-of-protesters-near-white-house-leading-to-use-of-force-against-largely-peaceful-crowd/2020/06/02/0ca2417c-a4d5-11ea-b473-04905b1af82b_story.html.
- Lockhart, V.D. (2005, February 2). Black Cowboys: An unforgotten legacy. *Michigan Chronicle*.
- Lorenz, S.F. (2020). Dom Flemons presents: Black Cowboys (review). *Journal of American Folklore*, 133. <https://muse.jhu.edu/article/745712>.
- Mason, J. (2007). Animals: From souls and the sacred in prehistoric times to symbols and slaves in antiquity. In L. Kalof (Ed.), *A cultural history of animals in antiquity* (pp. 17–45). Berg.
- Maltzman, F., Lebovic, J., Saunders, E., & Furth, E. (2012). Unleashing presidential power: The politics of pets in the White House. *Political Science & Politics*, 45(3), 395–400. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1049096512000297>.
- Matzen, M. (2020, May 28). *George Floyd's uncle speaks out about nephew's death, remembers his gentle nature and big smile*. Rapid City Journal. https://rapidcityjournal.com/news/local/state-and-regional/george-floyds-uncle-speaks-out-about-nephews-death-remembers-his-gentle-nature-and-big-smile/article_7d3ef4e0-c157-583b-873a-a2f209a1a89a.html.
- Medlin, J. (2007). Pit bull bans and the human factors affecting canine behavior. *DePaul Law Review*, 56, 1285–1320. <https://doi.org/10.3868/s050-004-015-0003-8>.
- Midgley, M. (1994). Bridge-building at last. In A. Manning & J. Serpell (Eds.), *Animals and human society: Changing perspectives* (pp. 188–194). Routledge.

- Nevzorov, A. (2011). *The horse crucified and risen*. Nevzorov Haute École. Nguyen, R. [@jasminericegirl] (2020, June 6). *Thread of very good dogs protesting for justice*. [Images attached]. [Tweet]. Twitter. <https://twitter.com/jasminericegirl/status/1269116026890969090>.
- Norton, T., Piette, D., Exadaktylos, V., & Berckmans, D. (2018). Automated real-time stress monitoring of police horses using wearable technology. *Applied Animal Behaviour Science*, 198, 67–74. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.applanim.2017.09.009>.
- Noske, B. (1989). *Humans and other animals: Beyond the boundaries of anthropology*. Pluto Press.
- Officer Down Memorial Page. (n.d.). *Fallen K9s*. <http://www.odmp.org/k9>.
- Orwell, G. (1945). *Animal farm: A fairy story*. Secker and Warburg.
- Oxford English Dictionary (n.d.). *OxfordEnglishDictionary.com dictionary*. Retrieved from <https://www.oed.com>.
- Paul, E. (1996). The representation of animals on children's television. *Anthrozoös*, 9(4), 169–181. <https://doi.org/10.2752/089279396787001400>.
- Pereira, I. (2020, June 6). *Black riders join George Floyd protests on horses to spread message of justice*. ABC News. <https://abcnews.go.com/US/black-riders-join-george-floyd-protests-horses-spread/story?id=71066676>.
- Philippis, D. (2017). *Wild horse country: The history, myth, and future of the Mustang*. W.W. Norton & Company.
- Ritvo, H. (1987). *The animal estate: The English and other creatures in the Victorian Age*. Harvard University Press.
- Rosenberg, M. (2011). Golden Retrievers are White, Pit Bulls are Black, and Chihuahuas are Hispanic: Representations of breeds of dog and issues of race in popular culture. In L. Kalof & M. Montgomery (Eds.), *Making animal meaning* (pp. 113–126). Michigan State University Press.
- Roszbach, K. & Wilson, J. (1992). Does a dog's presence make a person appear more likable?: Two studies. *Anthrozoös*, 5(1), 40–51. <https://doi.org/10.2752/089279392787011593>.
- Roudebush, P. (2002). *Detailed discussion of police shooting pets*. *Animal Legal & Historical Center*. <https://www.animallaw.info/article/detailed-discussion-police-shooting-pets>.
- Sanders, C. (2003). Actions speak louder than words: Close relationships between humans and nonhuman animals. *Symbolic Interaction*, 26(3), 405–426. <https://doi.org/10.1525/si.2003.26.3.405>.
- Sarai, E. (2020, May 31). *For many, George Floyd death not a solitary incident*. Voice of America. <https://www.voanews.com/usa/many-george-floyd-death-not-solitary-incident>.
- Soper, K. (1995). *What is nature? Culture, politics and the non-human*. Wiley-Blackwell.

- Taylor, C. (2020, May 13). *Wrongful death lawsuit is filed against Louisville police for killing Black EMT in her home*. Occupy Democrats. <https://occupydemocrats.com/2020/05/13/wrongful-death-lawsuit-is-filed-against-louisville-police-for-killing-black-emt-in-her-home/>.
- The Studio Museum in Harlem. (2020). *Black Cowboy*. <https://www.studiomuseum.org/exhibition/black-cowboy>.
- Thomas, K. (1983). *Man and the natural world: Changing attitudes in England, 1500–1800*. Allen Lane.
- Thompson-Hernández, W. (2020a). *The Compton Cowboys: The new generation of cowboys in America's urban heartland*. William Morrow.
- Thompson-Hernández, W. (2020b, June 11). *Evoking history, Black Cowboys take to the streets*. New York Times. <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/06/09/us/black-cowboys-protests-compton.html?auth=login-google>.
- Vavra, K. (2020, May 10). *'AMBUSHED' Ahmaud Arbery's dad says he was 'hunted like an animal.'* The Sun. <https://www.the-sun.com/news/809683/georgia-doj-investigate-ahmaud-arbery-case-hunted-animal/>.
- Visser, E. (2017). The continuing saga of wild horse management: Finding balance in the case of one of America's iconic symbols. *William & Mary Environmental Law and Policy Review*, 41(3), 683–710. <https://perma.cc/RQ8J-TMV8>.
- Weaver, H. (2013). 'Becoming in kind': Race, class, gender, and nation in cultures of dog rescue and dogfighting. *American Quarterly*, 65(2–3), 689–709. <https://doi.org/10.1353/aq.2013.0034>.
- Wise, J. (2020, June 2). *Warren and dog Bailey join protests outside White House*. The Hill. <https://thehill.com/homenews/senate/500808-warren-and-dog-bailey-join-protests-outside-white-house>.
- Woodward, C. (2020, June 4). *AP FACT CHECK: Trump denies tear gas use despite evidence*. Associated Press. <https://apnews.com/2aa7979e6fb88948895407f127e5e5b6>.
- Wrenn, C. (2018). Pussy grabs back: Bestialized sexual politics and intersectional failure in protest posters for the 2017 women's march. *Feminist Media Studies*, 19(6), 1–19.
- Wright, W. (2001). *The wild west: The mythical cowboy and social theory*. SAGE Publications Ltd.
- Zamora-Nipper, B. (2020, May 31). *VIDEO: Mayor Turner apologizes to woman knocked over by mounted officer during protest*. Click 2 Houston. <https://www.click2houston.com/news/local/2020/05/30/watch-video-captures-moment-police-horse-tramples-woman-during-houston-rally/>.