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The Language of Riot: Examining the Legibility of Unrest

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The death of George Floyd and the ensuing unrest spread over the matter of weeks to become a global protest movement. The question is how? How did people not even present in Minneapolis come to understand the events there as impelling them to action? This research approaches this question through the lens of discourse as a practice of meaning and knowledge construction, by which people could become aware of, and be impelled to action by, those events. Specifically, this research analyzes online news articles by CNN, FOX, and Washington Post—chosen for their political and social relevance—covering the 2020 violent unrest in Minneapolis as media discourse implicated in a wider practice of making rioting understandable or 'legible.' It argues that discourse generally is incoherent and any single discourse must engage in legibility to render coherence. Constructing legibility is shown to be a process by which thematic links are constructed between different objects of discourse—something used discursively; i.e., words, webpages, or images. The result is a transcript, or discourse presented as legible. This framework informs a view of the media as an ecology of many discursive practices including articles, video segments, ads, and social media activity. Individual articles are analyzed via a grounded, manual coding process and were chosen in batches based on emergent themes and patterns used to determine relevance. After a study of different theories of rioting, cross-comparing both as practices of legibility, the media is analyzed by how they characterize and explain rioting and the violent unrest in Minneapolis over time. CNN develops a transcript outlining good and bad leadership qualities, using the rioting to highlight their criticism and support of various political figures; FOX News thematically disconnects the protest from their justification as a reaction to injustice; and The Post fails to stabilize around any coherent, non-contradictory themes at all. It is found that all three transcripts define rioting exogenously, denying 'rioters' a status as self-conscious agents by portraying them solely reacting to some triggering stimulus which is the true 'cause' of a riot. These and other discourses do not study their political relationship with the riot, or how they systematically deny it understanding on its own terms. In order to continue, a theory of riot must understand its political implication and active role in constructing riots in discourse — if riot is to be understood, riot must be enabled to speak for itself.

Acknowledgements

This research would not have been possible without the patience and enthusiasm of my ur and adopted advisors Dr. Jane Saffitz and Dr. John Soderberg, without whom I would not have developed this project at all, least of all in the direction that it went. I doubt this project could have even gotten off the ground without Dr. Saffitz at its beginning, or had any of its theoretical depth without the multiple hours of discussion with Dr. Soderberg. Their insight and experience guided me every step of the way.

I must also acknowledge that without my parents and family, I would not even have been here—either existing or at Denison—to write this project. I assure that at no point in my writing do I confess myself as a 'bearded marxist', leaving my sure future career in politics unthreatened.

I would also like to thank each and every person who has listened to me rant, ramble, rage, and excitedly explain every minute detail of my research. I thank especially my close peers for helping me complete this research, Danny Norris, Lena Hanrahan, and Sophie Berger.
The ability to voice one's thoughts rather than stewing them endlessly in one's head was one of the most important aspects of this research, and the surprisingly oft repeated suggestion that I use disgruntled members of the student body as subject matter for my 'riot project' lent itself to stimulating and insightful academic thinking.

A Transcript of Events in Minneapolis

"or, how the media makes sense of a senseless discourse."

On May 25th, 2020, George Floyd (46) was violently restrained by police officer Derek Chauvin responding to a store owner's accusation that Floyd had used a counterfeit twenty-dollar bill.[1] A civilian present recorded how Chauvin knelt on Floyd's neck and back for 9 minutes and 29 seconds, as he begged for them to stop.[2] Floyd died, his last words being "I can't breathe."

The next day protests started. A memorial had been set up where Floyd was killed; organized protests were set up by midday; with people carrying signs reading "Black Lives Matter," "Stop Killing Black People," and "I Can't Breathe;" by dusk the protests roared to a fever-pitch, transitioning into riots. Protests continued for the next two weeks and, as June began, spread outside of Minneapolis to almost every state in the U.S. By the end of June, demonstrations reached Berlin, kicking off the shift from an American to a *global* protest event.

These events are marked by their cultural relevance. A confrontation of an African American Man by a Police Officer over an alleged crime; a violent detention; a man struggling to breathe — its relevance to themes of racism and police violence provides intense demand for a coherent explanation of 'what happened.' For example, an initial autopsy report states "cardiopulmonary arrest", i.e. heart failure, is what killed Floyd; the next day an independent autopsy stated "asphyxiation," i.e. Derek Chauvin leaning on his neck is what killed him.[3] The first report also stated fentanyl and methamphetamine were detected but "didn't say how

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[1] Chris McGreal, Lois Beckett, Oliver Laughland and Amudalat Ajasa, "Derek Chauvin found guilty of murder of George Floyd," *The Guardian*, April 2021.

[2] Holly Baily, "George Floyd died of low level of oxygen, medical expert testifies; Derek Chauvin kept knee on his neck 'majority of the time'," *The Washington Post*, April 2021.

[3] Maxouris, Holly Yan, Steve Almasy,Christina. "As America Sees Another Night of Protests and Curfews, Families of Those Killed Plea for No More Violence." CNN, June 1, 2020.

much of either drug was in Floyd's system or how that may have contributed." Later, even after Derek Chauvin is convicted in court, the protests that started seemingly because of Floyds death, continued.[4]

The question, then, is how? How exactly did so many people become wrapped up in the effects of a death tens, thousands, and hundreds of thousands of miles away? How did they not only come into contact with those events, how did they come to understand them? Discourse. People came into contact with those events through discourse, but specifically, they must have engaged in a specific discursive practice of legibility meant to make the unrest in Minneapolis coherent and so understandable.

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"Discourse and Legibility."
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This question—*what is the process by which events in Minneapolis came to be made understandable*—is a question about **discourse**. Most people came to in some way make sense of the events spilling out from George Floyds death. Few actually encountered any degree of mass, civilian violence. Fewer still were actually present in Minneapolis-St. Paul. Instead, they came to understand both the death, its consequences, and the ensuing calls to action through some practice of discourse.

When talking about discourse, I follow Foucault to mean those practices which produce knowledge and meaning.[5] Spoken and written language, art, theater, in short, any human practice embedded in, and generative of, meaning. Hurling a brick is discursive. Like a word, it

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[4] Barnini Chakraborty and Dom Calicchio. "Minnesota Governor Authorizes 'full Mobilization' of State's National Guard, Says Protests No Longer about Death of George Floyd." Fox News. Fox News, May 30, 2020.

[5] Michel Foucault, Archaeology of Knowledge and the Discourse on Language (1969) (trans. AM Sheridan Smith, 1972), 135-140, 49.

creates meaning. The brick is a declaration of hostilities between the thrower and the target; it is a symbol either of an illicit action or a call to arms for those nearby; and the ensuing shattered store window is a symbolic attack on the webs of meaning that storefront is embedded in (the local community, perhaps, or the normalcy of private property). We cannot separate the material thrown from its symbolic impact. When I say that most people came to understand the events of Minneapolis through discourse, I mean that those who were not there came into contact with the events through some practice of meaning construction: conversations, news articles, live media updates, twitter debates, youtube videos, etc. These people were not static recipients of a 'thing' we call discourse; in fact, there is no 'thing' to call 'discourse.' A book is nothing unless there is someone there to read it. It is not discourse until someone interacts with it. What is meant by discourse is *discursive practice*.[6] To say people engaged with Minneapolis through various *discourses* means that they were *doing* discourse, constructing meanings on Minneapolis in some way. It is this 'some way' that I study here.

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It can be easy, when approaching discourse to assume a kind of homogeneity, in that it's all just one word, "discourse," controlled naturally by those with the loudest voices: Big brands, big names like celebrities or influencers, big politicians, and most importantly big corporations with their oceans of capital. All of them meld together into one spectacle, a *mass* media, a "domain of delusion and false consciousness…an official language of universal separation" serving as a "total justification of the conditions and goals of the existing system."[7]

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[6] Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge & The Discourse on Language*. p.46
[7] Guy Debord. Society of the Spectacle. Princeton: zone Books, 1994. p.7-8

There is a problem, though. All human activity is in some way or another semiotic: embedded in, and generative of, various meanings. *Any* practice which produces knowledge and meaning is a kind of discourse—discourses are everywhere. So, discourse "in-general" (i.e., in totality, the sum of all discourses) must be thought of as unintelligible. If we take two opposing claims—"George Floyd died of heart failure" and "George Floyd died of asphyxiation"—both are discourse and so the discourse in-general is left senseless (cut between discrepant accounts of George Floyd's death).

This is the first component of this project: a constant effect of discourse is discrepancy, what I take to mean incongruence between and within discourses (discursive practices). Comparable discourses themselves, even on the same topic, must diverge. If we take the example of news articles, one article cannot be identical to another without incurring an accusation of plagiarism; likewise, articles have limits to their size and so when reporting on any topic, a reporter must choose between one source to the detriment of others. This is the situation that the news and media reporting on the events in Minneapolis are faced with. Discrepancy is *inevitable*; entropy-like, discourse trends toward incoherence. The question is, how do media and other attempts at 'making sense' of this incoherence operate?

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This brings in the second component of this research: constructing coherency out of discourse in-general entails a practice of **legibility**. Legibility is a term used by James Scott in his *Seeing like a State* and *The Art of Not Being Governed*, referring to the means by which states come to make sense of the societies they govern. The pre-modern state, Scott argues, "knew precious little about its subjects, their wealth, their landholdings and yields, their location, their very

identity."[8] What's more, it lacked the metrics, standards, and measures "that would allow it to 'translate' what it knew into a common standard necessary for a synoptic view."[9] It entails a kind of "flattening" or "relative uniformity," brought on by the interpretation of a diverse and varied world into discrete, simplified categories.[10] There are, for example, many different people within the centermost country in North America, and yet all are referred to with the word 'American.' Even after further specification, 'New Yorkers' vs 'Floridians,' we are still left with flattened categories which homogenize a wide array of distinct people. What is key here is that these practices aren't solely relegated to language and terminology. *People* are flattened. As with the example of naming people within a particular area 'American,' this corresponds to a citizenship status, *or*, the lack thereof and the ensuing sociopolitical consequences.

Legibility is just this synoptic view — the construction of coherent and understandable discourses. Where we must diverge from Scott is that our focus here is not limited solely to the actions of governments. States are not the only things which must make a report on subjects, their location, and identity. What concerns us here is studying how written news media engages in this same process. This is where the problem with discourse comes in. The media (and others), are set up with the task of somehow 'making sense' of a discourse which is for all intents and purposes completely incoherent. This incoherence then structures what practices the media must engage in to *make* the discourse legible. Take our example from before, asking whether or not George Floyd died of heart failure or asphyxiation — given this discrepancy in the account of his death, any given news article must in some way seek to solve this

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[8] James C. Scott. *Seeing Like A State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed*. p.2
[9] Ibid, p.58
[10] James C. Scott. *The Art of Not Being Governed: An Anarchist History of Upland Southeast Asia*. p.155

discrepancy, either by making a case for one or the other, or by explaining that the cause of death is perhaps unknown.

The same goes for any explanation given. Say, in reporting on the growing protests in Minneapolis, a news agency was to make the claim "protesters clashed with police." This is a claim of legibility — images of crowds, and property damage, and columns of police have been explained, made legible, by the phrase "protesters clashed with police." The object of this research, then, is analyzing how this phrase is made *and* how it is then used to 'make sense' of the unrest in Minneapolis.

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Now, what counts as "legible" or "coherent" differs by context (compare a news and scientific article). Similarly, the claim that discourse trends toward incoherence rests on the position that all claims with discourse in-general are of equal weight. In saying, for example, that "discourse is incoherent" because two claims of George Floyd's death are being made, I afford no primacy to either claim.[11] The reason is because this project is studying how different practices of legibility operate and interact. This project is not about epistemology. Instead, I am sketching the broad strokes of how legibility comes to be constructed. I am not looking for when something *is* legible but when those practicing legibility *claim they have succeeded*. I am seeking to answer the question 'what is the process by which something is *sought* to be made legible?'

The terminology and perspective I construct in this paper is self-aware. In describing legibility, I am myself engaging in a practice of legibility. This research is then set within a

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[11] [**note**] This is not a position to be held outside of this style of research. George Floy died of asphyxiation; he was *murdered* by Derek Chauvin. | McGreal, Chris, Lois Beckett, Oliver Laughland, and Amudalat Ajasa. "Derek Chauvin Found Guilty of Murder of George Floyd." *The Guardian*, April 21, 2021, sec. US news.

broader anthropology of practice, in line with the ideas of Pierre Bourdieu in *Outline of a Theory of Practice*.[12] The theory discussed here is not rigidly proscriptive, i.e., they are not meant to make a statement of what ought to be or to rigidly categorize how the world definitively *is*. Each of these terms have fuzzy edges. I am, in essence, saying "look here at what this person is doing, look at how they are doing it, and look at the consequences of their actions." I am using it to the extent that it is useful, and am going no further.[13] I have incorporated the conclusions of this project into its presentation (I am engaging in a practice of legibility).

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The Public Transcript
"Or, what the different attempts to understand riots have in common."

The media, in seeking to render legibility, must be able to construct a coherent statement of 'what their subject matter is.' That is, they are making what James Scott might call a "public transcript."

The approach taken here is meant as both a defense and reconstruction of Scott *Domination and the Arts of Resistance*. In it, he describes two sets of discourse, the "public transcript," or "the open [discourse] between subordinates and those who dominate,"[14] (the barista and manager), and the subtler "hidden transcript" which "takes place 'offstage,' beyond direct observation of powerholders"[15] (the words spoken behind the managers back or money secretly skimmed from the cash register). There, in short, is a strange discrepancy between people's discourse in public versus their discourses anywhere else. Scott's distinction between

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[12] Bourdieu, Pierre. *Outline of a Theory of Practice*. Translated by Richard Nice. Cambridge Studies in Social and Cultural Anthropology.
[13] Wittgenstein, Ludwig. Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus. Proposition 6.54 "My propositions enlighten in that, they, by he who understands me, are recognized at the end as senseless, when through them – on them – he climbs out over them. (He must, so to speak, throw away the ladder, after having climbed up it.)"
[14] James C. Scott. *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts.* p.2
[15] Ibid, p.4

"public" and "hidden" is not meant to evoke any idealized "private" and "public" space; neither are they understandable as *a priori* "things" divorced from their original contexts. A hidden transcript is understandable only by how it emerges (dialectically) with its public counterpart; it occurs among a "restricted public," and is identifiable by how it excludes certain others. Discrepancy in discourse cannot mean two discrepant discourses exist and *then* conflict; both emerge from each other and exist in contradistinction.[16]

Scott focuses on the 'hidden' transcript and its relationship with its 'public' counterpart from the perspective of the hidden transcript. But, if we zoom out, what Scott is describing is **discrepancy**: discourse is cleaved between two discrepant practices. He has outlined one means by which discourse in-general must be considered incoherent. The division between public and hidden that Scott outlines focuses on the difference in *audience* between either, but they assume equally a difference in *content*. Just as certain things might not be best to say around ones boss, there are then certain things which might be more acceptable and even expected. This, the acceptable and expected, would be the content of Scott's 'public' transcript. The concept implies a specific discursive practice marked by the **inclusion** and **exclusion** of themes and subject matter.

Scott likewise does not explore that the public transcript, too, must be assumed to be riddled with discrepancies; it, too, includes only particular things while excluding others. Discourses on a *micro level* must be thought of as structured by discrepancy, e.x. by their contradistinction from other discourses. Two news agencies might operate in what we could call the 'public' transcript, but be wildly discrepant in audience and content. In a view of

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[16] ibid , p.5

discrepancy from the perspective of specific discursive practices—news agencies for instance—the "public" transcript reveals itself too to be made up of "restricted" publics. Not everyone will read reports by FOX News or be on Twitter. Furthermore, Scott's notion of a 'transcript' refers to a specific repertoire of practices which emerge from discrepancy. He points out, for example, how a 'public' transcript is the official, sanctioned discourse: socially acceptable behaviors, politically correct opinions, official histories or reporting on events. If we refocus his theory onto discrepancy itself, implicit in the notion of a 'public transcript' is the idea of a set of discourses that seek to establish their own coherency and to *deny* discrepancy.

To explore this idea further, I will be treating a **transcript** as a specific discursive practice with the aim of establishing legibility by compounding different basic themes into a broader, coherent narrative. It will be analyzed as a discourse that emerges from discrepancy and seeks to resolve that discrepancy by rendering legibility. The task now is to outline what it means to understand a transcript as a practice of legibility structured by discrepancy.

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"Objects of Discourse."

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Analyzing how a transcript both is made and renders legibility, entails a discursive analysis. That is, in any given practice of legibility, we must take its statements "in the exact specificity of its occurrence; determine its conditions of existence…establish its correlations with other statements that may be connected with it, and show what other forms of statements it excludes."[17] We cannot tell the intent of a writer by what they have written,[18] neither can we conclude that "protesters are violent" is what any person reading that phrase might think. What

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[17] Michel Foucault. The Archaeology of Knowledge & The Discourse on Language. p.28
[18] [**Note**] The intention of a joke can be wildly different from how the joke *lands*.

we *can* do is observe how any given word is being used discursively (such as grammatically or positionally within a sentence) and the ensuing relations it has with other objects of discourse—such as the relationship created between the words "protester" and "police". We can parse out the emergent *logic* of a discourse.

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Discourses are "practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak."[19] In order to make something legible, it must be made into an **object of discourse**, *used* discursively. We objectify (use discursively) high winds and rain with the word "storm", for example.[20] Events in Minneapolis are often objectified with the word "riot", "protest", or perhaps "unrest." But an object of discourse need not be a word. What defines an object of discourse is its ability to be *used* discursively. Video evidence, pictures, or quotations from other sources are all objects, e.x., a video of a woman calling the police on a black man in Central Park can be used to construct a particular meaning.[21]

What is important, then, is noting what objects of discourse are included within a transcript, and "what other forms of statements it excludes."[22] Topics must be established within the transcript in order to be talked about. Let's say, for example, that something was said yesterday and is referenced in a conversation today — even though that something was said 'already', it does not exist within the active practice of discourse unless it is repeated (even by simply saying "remember what I said?"). Unless something is being *actively* included in a transcript, it is excluded from the transcript.

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[19] Ibid. p.49
[20] Ibid. p.44
[21] Booker, Brakkton. "Amy Cooper, White Woman Who Called Police On Black Bird-Watcher, Has Charge Dismissed." NPR, February 16, 2021, sec. Live Updates: Protests For Racial Justice.
[22] Michel Foucault. *The Archaeology of Knowledge & The Discourse on Language*. p.28

The same can be said for the presence of other discourses. As mentioned, a news reporter must choose to exclude certain quotes, sources, and details from their work based on certain writing constraints.Inclusion and exclusion embody the relationship that transcripts take on in relation to discrepancy: what is excluded is effectively nonexistent from the perspective of the transcript and the transcript itself is in a way distanced from discourse in-general and its incoherency. *But*, these excesses don't vanish from discourse. This contradictory relationship, where a transcript must deny discrepancy while simultaneously adding to it, becomes all the more apparent when we cross-compare multiple transcripts. Oftentimes a majority of claims or statements within a news article are either made by a quoted source or is done in relation to said source. However, a heavy reliance on quoted material does not mean that information presented by different news agencies is at all the same. Differences between news networks also entail differences in how quoted material is presented alongside direct statements and interpretations of that material. Likewise, even relying on similar sources does not guarantee overlapping material in what is said.

To take another example, historical connections and claims are particularly common in providing context. The killing of George Floyd, an African American man, by Derek Chauvin, a white police officer, has clear cultural historical precedent. The same can be said for peaceful and violent protest in African American history. History itself is a practice of legibility. What "history" is and what "histories" apply to the present is something directly constructed as a means to provide context and legibility. Some details are included, even emphasized, while others are excluded. Perhaps George Floyd could be compared to Eric Garner, perhaps events in Minneapolis could be compared to the calls of MLK for nonviolent protest (or alternatively,

statements by MLK criticizing the "white moderate…more devoted to 'order' than to justice.")[23]

The rule is the same regardless: understanding a transcript means understanding what objects of discourse are present within it.

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What the presence of discursive objects doesn't do is explain where these objects *come from*. FOX News cannot fabricate whatever narrative they like, instead working with a limited economy of discursive material in order to base their claims. This is the discursive material with which a news transcript comes to be constructed — FOX or CNN or the Washington Post must all 'work with what they're given.' This must be thought of as particularly apparent for news reports, which must make sense of events as they occur. In the case of Minneapolis, for example, not only must George Floyd be explained, the actions of protesters, police, local officials, and public figures must all be rendered legible for an audience. Even in other kinds of transcripts, an academic paper for example, providing source material is necessary to avoid the claim of plagiarism. In any transcript, then, we should be able to differentiate between three kinds of statements: direct statements, claims made directly by an author as well as attributed and quoted statements, such as direct quotations and paraphrasing. That is, we can expect to see a practice of **platforming**, of providing space or visibility to certain figures by including them within a discourse. There are two conclusions we can draw from this:

First, platforming implies the presence of other discourses. Discourse is not produced solely by news agencies. Instead, news agencies actively support, criticize, modify, misconstrue, or otherwise spread the work of other sources engaging in their own practices of discourse and

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[23] King, Martin Luther. "Letter from Birmingham Jail," n.d.

legibility. This implies that news sources are implicated in rendering not just their own transcripts legible, but the discourses of others. To report on Minneapolis, for example, the statements made by public officials, explanations for police activity to quell unrest, and the voices of protesters must all be explained, contextualized, and rendered coherent. This sets a discourse in relation to what it explains. If a police organization is openly claiming that "George Floyd died of heart failure", it might be beneficial to exclude statements or evidence to the contrary simply by not reporting on them — alternatively, *highlighting* that evidence by including it might be more beneficial of the relationship between the news agency and question and the police is not necessarily favorable.

Second, structuring a transcript around quoted and attributed material sets up relationships between that material, direct statements within the discourse, and the discourse's practitioner (e.x. the author of a news article). For example, quotation enables a degree of plausible deniability on behalf of the organization writing an article. Let's bring back the phrase "protesters clashed with police." If this is stated by, say, CNN, it is CNN who is responsible for that claim — but, if CNN is simply reporting on an official police report or a public statement by a local mayor, they are disconnected from that claim. "CNN" and the claim "protesters clashed with police" are both objects within the discourse that can either be connected or disconnected.

What we see in all of these instances though, is that more is being done in a transcript than the simple inclusion or exclusion of material. In order for a transcript to render legibility, it must *use* this material in some way. Some relation must be built up between all the objects included in its repertoire.

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"Objects build into Themes."

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Just as important as noting the presence of particular objects is noting how they relate to other objects. To call events in Minneapolis a 'riot' is only a first step; the word 'riot' must also have a meaning (even if implicit). In order for objects to be used in a transcript to construct legibility, they form **themes**—*an idea about a subject matter*. The word "theme" is colloquially used to mean a particular idea or topic (within a written work) — that 'particular idea,' structurally, is the using and relating objects of discourse.[24] Objectification itself is *thematic* in that it implies a particular use of that object (how it is objectified) and a relating of that object with others. That is, "each of these discourses in turn constituted its object and worked it to the point of transforming it altogether."[25] A discourse of "riot" is implicated within the discourse in which it is situated. The term riot, upon being used to refer to some empirical event, is a *particular* use of the object 'riot', with that word taking on thematic elements local to the discourse in which it is situated. Its meaning is locally constructed *each time* it is used. It's not that "a" riot is talked about, but that a "riot" is *created*.

Let's bring back the phrase "protesters clashed with police." This claim is not just an object itself; instead, we have three objects: "Protesters", "police", and the act of "clashing with" (it just so happens here that the objects come in the form of words, but this need not be the case). Now, take that statement and instead say "protesters and police clashed." In this second phrase, the use of each of the objects (protesters, police, and clashing) in the sentence is different. In the first phrase, protesters are the subject *doing* the clashing, i.e. responsibility is

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[24] Michel Foucault. The Archaeology of Knowledge & The Discourse on Language. p.44
[25] ibid. p.32

on them. In the second claim, both police and protesters are clashing. But even this statement is not truly equal, something we can see in the phrase "police and protesters clashed;" placing "police" at the beginning of the phrases can be thought of as placing greater emphasis and subjecthood on them in relation to the act of clashing. The result of either is a "theme:" an idea not just about the subject matter—a clash between protesters and police—but also about the relation between protesters and police.

If, in the previous section, we noted that CNN, in included a statement attributed to someone else, can disconnect themselves from that statement. In this sense, we also have three objects—"CNN", the claim, and its source—with a relationship being formed between them.

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"Themes build into Transcripts."

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Transcripts are the product of using many themes and objects in order to render something legible — they are defined by how they connect material. This entails an active **stabilizing** of the discrepant, incoherent discourse in-general by constructing many themes and links between different objects in order to try and deny discrepancy. The theme that we have constructed so far, "protesters clashed with police", must be compounded with other objects in themes in order to become a transcript rendering legibility.

As discussed in the previous section "Objects of Discourse," practices of legibility are *practices*, something which must actively be done. To say that a transcript stabilizes incoherent discourse into a legible transcript, this is to say that it *is stabilizing*. A string of articles by FOX News or The Guardian each claim to provide insight and coherence on their subject matter; they present themselves as providing a legible transcript of events. But the transcript itself is not

itself legibility, it is a desire or attempt at it. This means that a transcript only maintains legibility so long as it maintains its explaining power. That is, a transcript works by continually explaining, by constructing and reconstructing legibility. Just as when discussing inclusion and exclusion of a transcript, if a transcript is not *actively* in the discourse, it is no transcript at all. When looking at a single news article, then, what objects and themes are constructed in one must be reconstructed in others.

Individual themes work toward constructing legibility, but they can only do this as a part of a wider transcript. It is not possible to have a transcript made up of a single theme. In order to construct coherency within discourse, the theme must be anchored to other discursive materials. Simply stating "protesters clashed with police" is incoherent, it leaves out too many details. The phrase must be linked to some other object, by extension creating a greater transcript. If we were to say "Protesters are people who want to destroy America. Protesters clashed with police." then we have linked our initial theme with a new one, "protesters are people who want to destroy America." In anchoring these two themes to one another, a new theme emerges from the two of them, something roughly equivalent to "people who want to destroy america actively tried to destroy america."

The phrase we have so far, though, is still not legible. In order for the stabilizing to occur, abstract ideas of protesting must be contextualized, *connected* to a context. Let's take this one last step by adding the phrase "on Tuesday," so that we end up saying: "Protesters are people who want to destroy America. On Tuesday, protesters clashed with police." Now the combined phrase is referencing a clear event, we can establish some kind of specific period of time. That is, in order to make an event legible, the event itself must be *objectified* and become a part of

the discourse. Any phrase about the event and the event itself must be anchored to one another. Adding in context, then, only makes our phrase clearer: if this claim were in the "Columbus Dispatch" we would know that protesters clashed not only on Tuesday, but most likely in Columbus, Ohio (this then teaches us that "Columbus Dispatch" and also the physical newspaper itself are both objects of discourse, anchoring and anchored *to* other themes).

With the addition of that phrase, "On Tuesday," theme is now a rough transcript: a practice of making some event, some *thing*, legible. Is it an effective transcript? Hardly. In fact, it's terrible, but that's the point: transcripts are practices, not legibility itself.

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A transcript is a discourse — this means that, like all discourses, it is structured by discrepancy, it cannot escape discrepancy (even though it works to). A reporter will only interview some individuals for an article—they physically cannot take every last detail into account. They must include some details and exclude others. This sets the resulting transcript against others that highlight different details, or against conversations spoken between those present at that event. Even on a personal level people discuss certain things with certain people and not others; in the same vein, certain histories are popularized, while others aren't.

Nevertheless, in order to make the claim that something happened—to claim coherency, legibility, what "is"— one must in some sense deny discrepancy. There are many relationships to discrepancy that a transcript can have, but in order to claim any degree of coherence, it must to the same degree deny discrepancy in its account. With this in mind, it becomes clear that, while transcripts seem to be structured in one way, an aspect of that structure is the implicit claim that said transcript is structured completely differently and plays a similarly different role in

relation to discourse in-general. A study of transcript practices, then, must be *both* a study of those practices directly as well how transcripts seek to present themselves.

When looking at transcripts as practices structured by discrepancy, we can see that the same dialectical relations outlined by Scott come to light here. The result is strange: on the one hand, transcripts are defined by discrepancy; things always seem to exceed their descriptions, not every person can be interviewed, not every detail included. At the same time, transcripts must work to obscure discrepancy insofar as they make a coherent claim (in a claim of "what is", if something is not included, it "isn't"). But more paradoxically, transcripts also *highlights* discrepancy insofar as it differentiates themselves from other practices of legibility (articles written by FOX are set apart from, while admitting the existence of, other news agencies—like the Washington Post). Like discourses more generally, we have to conclude that when reporting on a topic like Minneapolis, the practices meant to make Minneapolis legible, conflictingly emerge from one another.

In the very idea of a "theme", the uses of and relationship between objects, we see that transcripts are contradictory. Let's say FOX News quotes The Daily Mail (which they do) — following the theoretical structure we outlined above, that means that the Mail's transcript becomes an object of discourse linked to that of FOX. The reader of a FOX article experiences the Daily Mail as new thematic content in some way linked to FOX even though both the Mail and Fox still asserts themselves as separate, i.e. discrepant in some way. One way to think of this is that either transcript anchors the other; alternatively, we can visualize this as being if streams of thematic content from either source were being pumped into the other. One potential reason might be that the similar political foundations underpinning FOX News and The

Daily Mail on the one hand form the basis for the former quoting the latter; we could argue this points to some kind of overarching transcript into which both FOX and The Daily Mail fit, perhaps some kind of "Conservative Transcript." In this sense, Scott's idea of a broader "Public Transcript" might be more accurate that I have given it credit.

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"Sympathy, or, how transcripts come to relate to their audience and how this relation is necessary for making its subject material legible."

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There is one final aspect of transcripts that has remained largely in the background of this discussion so far: No matter how "well" a theme relates and deploys all its points, if it is incomprehensible to the reader, it is illegible and fails at being a theme. What this means is that a theme actually has two components: first, the "uses and relations" of its objects, but second, its relationship to a *reader*.

If, in the prior sections, my example of a theme was not the phrase "protesters clashed with police" but rather "*Protestanten haben mit Polizisten zusammengestoßen*", the phrase, although it uses and relates objects and is grammatically correct, would be incomprehensible to my audience (because it is German). The practice of objectification, representing high winds with the word "storm" or a violent group of people with the word "riot", cannot be considered random or the will of the one doing the objectifying. The choice of how something comes to be an object in discourse, i.e., how it comes to be used discursively, is structured by the presence of an audience. Word choice, for example, must be understandable by the audience. The transcript and the audience must be speaking the same "language" (literally). The word "storm" or "protester", for example, bring with them certain connotations by virtue of their being situated within a cultural setting. They are not only words, but words with expected uses and

relationships with other words; expectations which can be affirmed or subverted. In this sense, a theme must not only be a practice of using and relating discursive objects, it must also relate to its audience.

Once we acknowledge the audience, the phrase "protesters clashed with police" also takes on another component to the resulting theme than just how the word "protester" is linked to the word "police". On the one hand, the phrase is creating a particular thematic link between "protesters" and "police", but taking the audience and its expectations into account, it becomes a *queue* to think about protesters in a certain way. The word is linked to other words, as well as the audience. Themes are **sympathetic**. Here, by "sympathy" I don't mean "pity." Instead, I mean its other definition of similarity, understanding, connection, or "common feeling." The sympathy of a theme (and by extension transcript) is *the way in which it connects to its audience and queues that audience to feel or think about its subject matter in a certain way*. The audience must also be made to relate to the theme's material in order for it to function as a transcript.

Sympathy is a necessary component of any theme. The objects of that theme must be made not only thematically coherent, but also understandable by the audience. We have already established how transcripts 'are defined by how they connect material', this must logically apply to the audience as well. A transcript must be relevant. There must be some impetus for one to actually read a news article; some connection must exist between them and the content of the article. A reader is included in the discourse, is an object connected to it. There can be no neutral discourse. If a paper discusses riots and its concluding statement is how

useful its observations are for helping with policing technique, this brings with it a relationship not just between the paper and policing, but the *audience* as well.

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The admission of the audience brings with it difficulties. I had mentioned that our phrase "protesters clashed with police" maintained a degree of obscurity, meaning more had to be done for it to be made a statement capable of making something legible. Acknowledging the audience makes this obscurity more important to focus on because the relationship between, say, a news outlet and its audience, might cause that outlet to actually prefer "less legible" statements. Obscurity should be thought of as potentially *intentional*. Vagueness, implication, and euphemism can all allow some claims to be made while disconnecting the claimer from 'saying the quiet part out loud.' Say, for example, Donald Trump says he wants to protect "American jobs" from being taken away by "illegal immigrants." Given Donald Trump's political position and audience, it is most likely that the "illegal immigrants" he has in mind and that his audience are thinking of are not white Europeans or Canadians, but specifically Latin Americans. It also most likely does not matter if any given Latin American is even a migrant at all, they are still being referred to by Trump's rhetoric. "Immigrant" or "illegal" are euphemisms for Hispanic people and people of color. What we can conclude from this is that, even though there is obscurity in his statements, Trump is not speaking nonsense. Instead, his phrases are open ended with the expectation that his audience can 'fill in the gaps', so to speak. In order to claim that hispanic people are a threat to American patriots, Trump can, in being intentionally vague, allow his audience to make those connections themselves. This means that legibility itself is something done *between* both an orator or author, and their audience.

Let's bring back our completed phrase from before: "Protesters are people who want to destroy America. On Tuesday, protesters clashed with police." While it is impossible to determine the exact emotional impact on the audience without analyzing the audience itself, we can determine the potential intended emotion by analyzing the statement. So, what exactly is this phrase trying to make the audience feel?

Say again we find this statement was found in the "Columbus Dispatch". Although Columbus itself is more liberal, this hardly corresponds to any overt anti-nationalism and so claiming anti-American protesters are fighting with police and presumably hoping to destroy America we can imagine might be a largely condemnatory statement. Now, whether a report is "condemnatory" is always up to interpretation. In this instance, though, the extremity of the phrase "Protesters are people who want to destroy America" is so obvious that it is fairly easy to note how such a statement would be condemnatory if stated to a patriotic audience. Alternatively, we could also note how responsibility for the clash is thrusted onto protesters, rather than police, and so an audience who see the police more favorably might also see this statement as condemnatory.

But, in the opposite sense, if this were to be found in, say, "Deathtoamerica.com" (an actual website), what we could come to expect of both the statement itself and its potential intended impact on the audience become very different. The individual writer of any given statement needs to be taken into consideration as a thematic element — 'FOX News' is a discursive object within FOX News' transcript. A claim in a FOX Article is a 'FOX claim.' Even if that claim shows up in an article by CNN, so long as it is attributed to FOX it remains FOX's even though literally the words are being written by a CNN author. A key aspect of a transcript—how

someone comes to understand something—*is* the producer of that transcript and how they come to be a part of their transcript. This entire aspect of discourse stems from the fact that the first link the object "FOX" has within a transcript is to the audience. A claim being a "FOX" claim, then, is a sympathetic aspect of the transcript by establishing relevance to the audience, and connecting that claim to the wider FOX transcript.

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"The news article as a sympathetic medium."

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The sympathetic aspect of a transcript brings us to the final component of discussing transcripts as practices of legibility. Up until now we have worked off of the assumption that people, in order to "come to understand the events in Minneapolis," engaged in some practice of legibility. However, in order to say that someone has *engaged* with a transcript we must answer *how* they engaged with it: we must include the specific **medium** by which they do this as a part of the transcript, too. There is no such thing as a "transcript", no objective space you can enter or thing you can touch, any more than Scott had *a priori* understandings of "public" or "private." A transcript is an *attempt*, a *practice*, of legibility, not legibility itself. By the idea of a discursive medium I refer to the many forms of discourse referenced so far: news articles, books, videos, etc., by which a person engages in a transcript. This is an extension of the previous sections' concept of sympathy, in that a discursive practice like a transcript needs some means by which it can actually connect to its audience and by which we can answer the question of "how people came to understand the events in Minneapolis."

In the case of the transcripts we are dealing with here (news articles), the webpage itself is a medium (and so is an object within the articles' discourse). On the one hand, you have the

actual body text of the article (the subject matter). This body text, being made up of sentences and paragraphs, most likely appears similarly to the examples of objects and themes in Section 2. But no article is *just* its body text, and so the construction of themes goes beyond just the discourse of written language. The practice of making a webpage (the webpage as a discursive medium) is sympathetic, it is the mediation of an audience and a discourse. The appearance of the webpage is equally an object of discourse, maintaining relationships between the themes articulated in that text. Take for example the logo "FOX" or "The Washington Post | Democracy Dies in Darkness" at the top of the page. A paragraph doesn't simply exist as an anonymous paragraph. With a logo always above the text, a paragraph *becomes* a 'FOX' or 'CNN' paragraph by appearing in a 'FOX' or 'CNN' article.

But with this in mind, is an individual article itself a transcript? In a way, yes, in that it is a product of many themes which seek legibility. But when we conclude that an article is an instance of a transcript, we also have to conclude that it is not. In the previous section I mentioned how there is no real way to point at something and say "this is a transcript!" If we zoom in on FOX, we will see a 'FOX transcript,' but zoom out and we might see a 'conservative transcript,' or perhaps a 'major media transcript,' and so on; even an individual theme resembles a transcript, just on the smallest scale. A news article is the same way in that it attempts to make a topic legible for its audience but, insofar as an article is a 'FOX Article' we can also 'zoom out' to a FOX transcript made up of many articles.

This leads us to another concept: themes both structure and break down transcripts (in that, if we 'zoom in' on a single FOX article we might see a ; but if we 'zoom out' we might see a broader FOX transcript, or perhaps an even larger conservative or public transcript). In the same

way, individual webpages are never *just* the webpage itself. Every news article is **porous**. No article is ever just the "article". As discussed already, a news article's own text is produced through a mixture of direct and platformed material. But at the same time, a single webpages is also structured around a maze of embedded links, advertisements, video segments, and portals to other written pieces or recorded segments. These are the medium by which the themes, the relating of objects discussed earlier, is actually performed. When I have discussed themes, I have in the context of sentence or paragraph construction, showing the development of relationships between discursive objects which are words or phrases. Themes, the linking objects, are often literal in the sense that key terms within a news article are themselves embedded hyperlinks to content by other producers. Constructing thematic relationships between objects, then, must not only be thought of as a linguistic practice. In a discursive sense, themes constitute the literal medium of a transcript.

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Taking porosity into account, when looking at a single news article it seems to be structured via its links to other discourses or, more accurately, by its ability to control its links to other discourses. Porous transcripts seem to act like a classic, alice-in-wonderland-style rabbithole. All of those hyperlinks lead *somewhere* and that somewhere is a complex web of articles, videos, news agencies, and quoted personalities. Each article is one organism integrated within a twisting and overlapping **discursive ecology**. The discursive ecology is my way of describing this complex web where one article links to the next, one speech appears (perhaps edited) across news agency after agency, and where a stray reference to Twitter gives a reader access to an entire rabbit hole of tweets and facebook posts. Each aspect of this

ecology compounds to create the evolving narrative we recognize as a "transcript". It is the medium of a transcript beyond just a single news article, or even a collection of news articles. Moreso, it expands our focus on webpages to the website that page is on and, from there, to that site's relationship to other websites and other mediums and discourses.

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Distinct news networks at first seem to entail discrepant transcripts. This discrepancy is structural, down to the name "The Washington Post" as opposed to "CNN". The name of either agency, as described, constitute oftentimes juxtaposing discursive objects which cause any piece of information or subject matter to become coded as "Post" or "CNN" information. But when one links to the other, either's line of discursive content is mixed. The website a CNN article is hosted on is itself a medium, one which orders articles by presenting them as organized by date and subject matter in different "places" on the site. The website is the first component of a discursive ecology, a means of producing, compiling, organizing, and linking individual articles; we can think of it as a practice of collecting and maintaining both content—articles, videos, soundbites, advertisements—and an audience. Audience engage with CNN's transcript by going to the site. In linking *to* a CNN article, say, by posting a share link on twitter—CNN can almost be thought to take an audience "in" and move them around from article to article. But, when two news agencies come into contact, their two practices of legibility become linked. The effect is linking their themes and audiences, linking more comprehensively to the extent that either links to the other. This is the discursive ecology: constructing legibility across many different discourses by linking them together.

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The discursive ecology comes from the need to establish coherency not only within a transcript, but to make other discourses legible. If we set out at the beginning by saying that discourse in-general is incoherent, the discursive ecology seem to act almost like a taming that chaotic, incoherent discourse in-general by creating links and anchoring relationships between different discourses through porosity and platforming. However, this is logically a fools errand. Porosity appears as a means by which to direct an audience member "out" of, say, a FOX article but "in" to an article by the Daily Mail, or some section of Twitter, or Youtube, or archived Cable Television. It means constructing relationships between discourses — porosity is *controlled*, not simply present. But, like all discourse, discrepancy and incoherence cannot be avoided. Even though FOX can draw both discursive objects and an audience *in*, and by extension construct a safe, coherent ecology for them to make sense of things, it has trouble *keeping them there*.

What does it mean when FOX links to The Daily Mail? What about if The Daily Mail links to Facebook? Each producer of content within this hypothetical ecology (FOX → Daily Mail → Facebook) can be thought to be engaging in a practice of legibility; but they cannot entirely control where their audience finds themself in engaging with their practice. For example, posting a link to a FOX article on twitter leads someone *into* FOX's ecosystem, but that very ecosystem is constructed of links which lead back *out* into other discourses. If, as we established, FOX leads to the Daily Mail, which leads to Facebook, then eventually the reader within this ecology will find their way out of it. There is no true way to control what content someone sees on a platform like Facebook, eventually they will encounter the discrepancies that FOX has worked so hard to minimize and obscure (although, with changes in algorithmic recommendations and user-catered feeds, this might not be as easy a statement to make).

Nevertheless, this above look solely on social media as one "out" from an ecology is only one focus. In reality, discourse in-general will always exist to be interacted with. Even something as simple as interacting with a family member engaged in a different ecology can be thought of as an "out", and should social relations cause friction between any members of an ecology, then that too might be an "out". The ecology is something artificially constructed to resist a structural pull toward incoherence, it is by definition fragile and tenuous.

Following this contradiction is also why I have argued that Scott's idea of a "public transcript" should not simply be discounted. What exactly a transcript "is", in reality, is determined by how the practice of transcript-making presents itself. If you zoom in, FOX seems to be presenting itself as a 'FOX' transcript of events that they report on. But, as we've discussed, if you zoom out so to speak, there appears what might be more of a "conservative" transcript, or perhaps a broader "major media" transcript (how else do we come to develop notions of what "the media" is doing — however correct it might be to say that kind of statement, the fact of the matter is that people seem to think the "media" exists as-such).

— 3 —
The Evening News
"or, developing a methodology to understand major media."

In the previous section I discussed the practice of legibility through a theoretical lens I have developed over the course of this project. But the object of this project has not been discourse broadly; in order to understand my starting — *how most people came to understand the events in Minneapolis* — I have focused my attention on one specific discourse: news articles.

These are not the only discursive practices by which people came to understand Minneapolis, neither is it the largest. News reports, both local and national, social media

conversations, advertisements, and personal conversations both face-to-face and through the internet or phone all deserve their own study. I have chosen news articles, though, for a few reasons: they are easily accessed and quoted; they occur in large numbers and can be easily cross-compared and studied over time (even over hours in the same day); and they have shareability, meaning they most likely have wide impact or at least reach.

In this section, I will outline first the observational methodology by which I collected and analyzed the selection of articles I am dealing with in this paper; second, I apply the theory outlined in Section 2, detailing how it appears in the articles as a specific practice of legibility.

— 3.1 —
"Observational Methodology, or, how and why this Methodology has come to be developed."
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Over the course of two semesters, I analyzed articles released by three news agencies—CNN, FOX News, and The Washington Post—over the course of the final two weeks of May and the first two weeks of June (roughly corresponding to the start and end of violent civil unrest in Minneapolis in the wake of George Floyd's Death). In total, I reviewed 133 articles: 47 from CNN; 34 from FOX, and 52 from the Washington Post. This was not a comprehensive study but rather represents a selected cross-section meant to observe the practice of legibility in action.

These articles were collected over two batches as my methods were refined. The first 'batch' of articles chosen were those located within the time frame of May 25th to June 9th. This is the broad timeframe coinciding with the death of George Floyd, the start of violent civil unrest, and its steady dissipation. The specific articles chosen were those dealing with events only in Minneapolis, targeting articles whose titles featured terminology such as "protest", "riot", "George Floyd", "looting", "chaos", and "unrest". I had hoped that these articles alone

would serve as a broad cross-section of the ideas being constructed by each of the three news agencies. This first approach was not as effective, as often news agencies would discuss the topic of rioting and unrest alongside other topics which were given priority. Rather than affording it its own article, CNN, for example, detailed the burning of the Third Precinct in an article titled "George Floyd's family says four officers involved in his death should be charged with murder." This means that there is more fluidity in how themes are constructed and how they construct a transcript than a simple statement of "riot means X and X happened here".

These problems led me to collect a second batch of articles based on my study of the first. It was by studying these articles that the theory I have discussed so far, and will come to discuss, was developed. As will be discussed in the next section, individual articles are situated in relation to other articles, literally linking to them with in-text hyperlinks, clickable headlines, and further-reading selections before, during, and after the main text of any article. FOX News, for example, doesn't just quote the Daily Mail, they link directly to their content. When I said that relations between discursive objects "link" those objects, often the word "link" is *literal*.

The second batch of articles after modifications to how I was choosing articles to analyze based on my analysis of the initial batch. First, the initial batch showed several key themes and ideas, emphasis on the George Floyd family, police brutality, and investigations into Derek Chauvin and his accomplices. These inform my choice in further articles to study. Articles linked to by the first batch came to also be included in my research, providing yet new themes—the activation of the national guard, statements by local and federal politicians, or specific actions and statements by protesters—that could inform my choice of yet further articles. This was so as to effectively map out a good cross section of the three transcripts. As mentioned earlier, a

transcript construct legibility through the connections and themes it articulates, as well as the reconstruction of those connections and themes over time. Choosing articles then had to be based on their own emergent links over a coherent time-scale, by which the aforementioned stabilizing of the transcript around its themes could occur.

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Analyzing content within the articles was done by a grounded manual coding process. Grounded coding is a form of categorization, consisting of "codes" or "tags" which are manually placed into data where particular features are identified; this method allows notable themes and patterns emerge from the document themselves rather than relying on *a priori* codes applied onto the text. My annotation scheme, like my observational scheme for choosing articles to study, was originally *a priori* and based around the tagging of key terms in each piece, such word usages like "riot" or "loot" (and their derivatives), or more abstract cases, such as instances of condemnation (such as saying 'this should never have happened').

Studying my initial batch informed my annotation scheme, which led me to take on a grounded approach in order to better understand the practice of legibility employed within each transcript. From here, I engaged in axial coding, whereby thematic categories across many articles were compared to discover common patterns and relations.[26] My new annotation scheme coded for attributed statements versus direct statements, key terms and phrases ("loot", "riot(er)", etc.), reports (the phrase reporting "buildings set on fire" would be coded as "arson"), and thematically charged statements (the statement by Philonise Floyd "I understand …why a lot of people are doing a lot…because they have pain," is coded as referencing a

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[26] Grbich, Carol. (2013). "Qualitative Data Analysis" (2nd ed.). The Flinders University of South Australia: SAGE Publications Ltd.

common theme of trauma and emotional pain or anger). Coding was thus used to determine the presence of, and relations between, discursive objects within the developing transcript.

In order to study the construction, reconstruction, and stabilization of themes within the transcript by which it attempted to make the events in Minneapolis legible, I periodize each transcript into three phases: **Period 1** involves news agencies gathering their audience, what I have called the sympathetic aspect: the killing itself as catalyst and underlying reason for all events in Minneapolis. **Phase 2** is when each news agency begins to sculpt their respective transcripts. These stem directly from smaller discrepancies between each agency reporting in Period 1. Using the practices I have so far discussed, each of the three transcripts will begin to diverge in content. This secondary phase is when each transcript comes to further explain the riots as they are underway, meaning that their transcript is steadily evolving and unstable (specific themes come to see rapid articulation and re-articulation rather than being defined and statically reiterated). Finally, **Phase 3** is when the transcripts seem to stabilize around a set identification of what has happened in Minneapolis and what that 'means.' At this stage, clear discrepancies between different themes have apparently ceased. This three-part periodization is in large part artificial and is meant only as a conceptual tool to help demarcate the specific practices of introducing a topic, constructing and reconstructing themes to explain it, before stabilizing those themes in order to render that topic legible

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"Initial Observations, or, examining the structure of a news article."
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The observations of my field data detailed in the previous section were the catalyst for the theoretical framework I developed in Section 2 and informed the methodology here in Section

3. In the next section, Section 4, I will lay out two key approaches to understanding riots and unrest to preface and introduce Section 5, where I detail the construction and stabilization of themes in the three news transcripts as they work to make the events in Minneapolis legible.

Now, I will take the last of this section to detail my observations of the media across all three news services. I am going to analyze the specific practice, the structuring of each article, and the ways in which they construct their themes using several examples as evidence. This will be to demonstrate both my theory from Section 2, as well as to answer the question of 'how a news article makes its subject material legible.'

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"The Anatomy of a News Article."
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"George Floyd protests: Video footage goes viral on social media" by Brian Flood was released the 28th of May, 2020. It details early videos of the riots in Minneapolis, at least in theory. Ironically enough for those expecting an article to start with its subject matter, Fox articles don't actually start with the article, i.e., the main body-text. Instead, the article's header provides its own content: including a link to the Fox mainpage and their "Media"section, followed by a "share" feature to link the article to facebook, twitter, and "flipboard". Even before that, the top of the web page itself a FOX NEWS logo (a hyperlink to the mainpage), lined with a trending tab, login feature, and links to recent articles on the U.S., "Politics", "World", "Opinion", etc. below which are a line of advertisements. The very layout of the webpage the article is situated within is linked in a variety of ways to libraries of FOX content, as well as various social media websites.

More so than anything else, FOX news articles are porously connected to other FOX news articles. The same can be said for CNN, the Washington Post, or any other news service. The "FOX" logo on the web page's header is a link to the website's main page, completing or pausing the video at the top of every article links to 4 or more other videos, and every article ends with a "More from FOX News section". Headlines pasted within the main body of text in the case of FOX, or mid-article links to "more reading on this topic" by CNN all create a contiguous line of article after article for a reader to encounter. It is this medium which constructs a transcript, as themes constructed within one article are compounded on, modified, or removed in later articles.

From here, each is headed by a video segment from Fox Live, Tucker Carlson, or other Fox broadcasts and pundits. In this article by Flood, we are led by a video of Guy Benson being "'Outnumbered' as riots shake Minneapolis following a suspect's death, while a startling poll shows up about the coronavirus and its potential vaccine." Notice the inclusion of "coronavirus", another major news topic: even in an article dedicated to Minneapolis, the wider range of FOX content is fully present, anchoring this article in relation to other themes present across FOX's media. It should come as no surprise that the video segment at the head of every article, once finished, leads to other videos of segments from Fox's televised productions.

Upon reaching the actual body text, it starts by detailing earlier "protests over the death of George Floyd while in police custody" which featured "protesters and rioters calling for justice." The phrase "George Floyd" is an embedded hyperlink to a list of the most recent articles by Fox having to do with the topic "George Floyd." This opening statement is followed first by another advertisement before continuing on to detail a video posted of "the inside of a

Target store in Minneapolis being destroyed." The statement on this video lasts only two sentences before leading into an in-text headline of another news Article: "GEORGE FLOYD CASE: MINNEAPOLIS POLICE CHIEF SAYS CITY'S 'DEFICIT OF HOPE' CANNOT BE COMPOUNDED WITH MORE TRAUMA, VIOLENCE" (Fox in-text headlines are always entirely capitalized). Following that is a twitter link to the aforementioned video. In total, the article includes 6 in-text headlines, 10 embedded twitter posts, 8 in-text advertisements, a link to the Fox News App (found at the end of every Fox article), and 15 written "paragraphs" (most only a sentence long) which feature a total of 2 in-text hyperlinks (one linking to the George Floyd topic page, another to a daily mail article).

But Fox isn't alone in this; one CNN article, for example, includes a similar structure as well as a picture real 231 images long, a "related article" link after every topic change (common to almost every CNN article), and links to every referenced video and even a police report. When I refer to articles as 'porous' or part of a 'discursive ecology', this is what is meant. No article is just its body text and is instead structured around how it is integrated with, and explanatory or contextualizing of, other discourses.

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Articles are written through simple, easily digestible 'what is' statements in order to render their subject matter coherent. This means that an article's practice of legibility is fundamentally structured around making 'what is' claims. Despite this, news networks seem incredibly hesitant to make direct claims. Little space is provided in an article for direct statements about what actually is happening in Minneapolis. Instead, descriptions and ensuing commentary is provided

by people and organizations quoted within the article. For any statement, it is either unaccompanied, attributed to another source, or is a direct quotation.

Here are 4 lines of text from a CNN article by Ray Sancez et. al., released on May 26th:

1 The death of George Floyd, 46, drew hundreds of people to the streets of Minneapolis on Tuesday.

2 Protesters – many wearing face masks – held "I can't breathe" signs and chanted together near the site of Monday's incident. Some motorists honked in support.

3 Later in the evening, police attempted to disperse the crowds outside the Minneapolis Police 3rd Precinct after a front glass window was smashed, John Elder, director of the office of public information for the police department, told CNN.

4 The four officers were "separated from employment," Officer Garrett Parten, a police spokesman, said Tuesday.[27]

In this selection, only 2 lines of text are direct statements made by CNN. The death of Floyd is described as drawing people to the streets, protesters as holding signs, and motorists as honking. These are direct statements of 'what is.' Line 3, however, ends with the statement "John elder…told CNN," while line 4 is a quote said by Garrett Parten. These four lines represent the structure of every news article here analyzed. They are consistently written with basic claims coming either directly from the author or from a platformed source.

The text of news articles themselves are based around the inclusion and exclusion of discursive material, and the ensuing connections formed between them. For example, one of the very first articles released by CNN detailing the killing of George Floyd brings up the killing

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[27] Moshtaghian, Ray Sanchez, Joe Sutton,Artemis. "4 Minneapolis Cops Fired after Video Shows One Kneeling on Neck of Black Man Who Later Died." CNN, May 26, 2020.

of Eric Garner, interviews his mother, and draws a direct connection between that killing and the killing of George Floyd.[28] By contrast, FOX brings up the history of the Rodney King Riots and the "Insurrection Act of 1807" largely to contextualize the "deploying of active-duty forces," as it is thereby "not without precedent inside the United States."[29] Both sources use history to provide context, justification, and coherence to modern events in order to make them understandable (in a certain way). That FOX largely ignores previous riots over police violence leads to them treating Minneapolis as one of many disconnected, intrusive disruptions to daily life (not unlike the some of the approaches to rioting we will be discussing in the following section). Other common instances are references to Martin Luther King, which appear in every transcript I will be analyzing. MLK is, unfortunately, a particularly common cudgel by which violent protests in Minneapolis come to be criticized and delegitimized. The history of Martin Luther King is constructed. It isn't a lie, per se, as in it isn't a complete fabrication. Instead, certain aspects of MLK (his understanding of riots as "the voices of the unheard" or the character of his organized protests as performed by trained activists as opposed to untrained civilians) seem to be regularly omitted while other aspects (his protests as being "successful" namely because they were "peaceful") are highlighted.[30] The CNN opinion piece "As America burns, riots play into Trump's hands"[31] is telling: here, "riots" in Minneapolis are compared to the "nonviolent protests" of MLK. It is argued that the former fail while the latter succeed, even though historically the protests organized by MLK are structurally and ideologically distinct from

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[28] Ibid.
[29] "Minnesota Governor Authorizes 'full Mobilization' of State's National Guard, Says Protests No Longer about Death of George Floyd | Fox News." Accessed April 23, 2023.
[30] "The Other America" Speech byRev. Martin Luther King, Jr. Grosse Pointe High School - March 14, 1968
[31] Avlon, John. "As America Burns, Riots Play into Trump's Hands." CNN, May 31, 2020.

the protests seen in Minneapolis. In fact, CNN goes on to reference criticisms of the weaponization of MLK, as if the practice of nonviolence was "in the blood" of people of color.

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Alternatively, as mentioned in Section 2, the inclusion of statements or attributed material has its own thematic significance, namely in disconnecting the news agency in question from the claim included in their article.

CNN, for example, notably had their Atlanta headquarters vandalized by protesters in late May of 2020. On May 29th, CNN released the article "CNN Center in Atlanta damaged during protests", written by Fernando Alfonso III.[32] The first 7 (of 10) paragraphs detail in plain writing the events of the vandalism before, suddenly, the Mayor of Atlanta (and nobody else) is quoted as saying "directly to the protesters: 'You have defaced the CNN building. Ted Turner started CNN in Atlanta, 40 years ago because he believed in who we are as a city.'" This statement is clearly condemnatory. It separates the actions of the protesters from the 'spirit of the city' defined by Ted Turner, who also happens to link 'Atlanta' with 'CNN,' which began in the city because Turner believed in its character (assumedly damaged by the protesters actions). That it was the mayor of Atlanta, rather than CNN itself, condemning the protesters, disconnects CNN as an organization from the criticism they *technically aren't* making. "CNN", as the source of the article, is an object within the discourse. In a CNN article reporting on the damage to their Atlanta headquarters by protesters, the claim "You have defaced the CNN Building" in a CNN article is a *CNN* claim, but in attributing it to Atlanta Mayor Bottoms, it is now an *Mayoral* claim (with all of the authoritative clout that might accompany it). CNN can effectively chide and scold protesters while distancing themselves from said chiding and scolding.

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[32] III, Fernando Alfonso. "CNN Center in Atlanta Damaged during Protests." CNN, May 30, 2020.

The ability to distance oneself from a statement also can be seen enabling news networks to promote or highlight ideas they might otherwise shy away from, such as by linking to more politically extreme news outlets or including tweets by political figures (Andy Ngô, for example).[33] [34] This disconnecting also can be seen to structure how news sources write their articles. The writing style of a news article, i.e. quick, easily digestible 'what-is' statements, does not lend for either nuance or wordiness. So, most FOX articles don't begin with written text but rather with videos of pundits like Tucker Carlson, known for extravagant and bold political claims. The writing-style used also allows only for basic descriptive and explanatory statements — 'this is bad' is usually not a claim that can fit into this medium outside of an op-ed. If we look again at the CNN article on their headquarters, the Atlanta Mayor is quoted without any other statements that may contradict her statements. CNN claims what happens, and then adds a statement by the Mayor condemning the event at the end. Alternatively, doubt can be cast onto reported subject material, which The Washington Post demonstrates in one of their articles from May 30th:

> Unlike state officials, Barr was unequivocal on who was to blame, claiming that the protests were "planned, organized and driven by anarchic and far-left extremist groups using antifa-like tactics," referring to anti-fascist groups that have used violence.
>
> Barr offered no evidence to support those assertions, and his descriptions ran counter to Walz, who blamed the violence, at least in part, on far-right actors.[35]

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[33] Andy Ngo is a right-wing provocateur known for inciting harassment and violence against those labeled 'antifa' or 'far-left' | Jewish Currents. "The Making of Andy Ngo." Accessed April 23, 2023. | Jacobin. "Portland's Andy Ngo Is the Most Dangerous Grifter in America." Accessed April 23, 2023. | The Independent. "Opinion: The Right Want to Make Antifa Aggression a Reason to Stop Confronting Fascists," July 2, 2019.

[34] Flood, Brian. "George Floyd Protests: Video Footage Goes Viral on Social Media." Text.Article. Fox News. Fox News, May 28, 2020.

[35] Harris, Shane. "Officials Blame Outsiders for Violence in Minnesota but Contradict One Another on Who Is Responsible." *Washington Post*, May 31, 2020.

Here, using only plain statements, doubt is cast onto Barr with the inclusion that he "offered no evidence to support" his assertions, which contrasts his portrayal by The Post as "unequivocal."

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There is one final point which must be mentioned. Platforming and porosity show how news transcripts seek to make other discourses legible.

Take, for example, the figures of choice for FOX News and The Washington Post. Minneapolis City Councilwoman Andrea Jenkins and Mayor Jacob Frey show up regularly in the transcripts developed by FOX and The Post. The same can be said for the likes of Minneapolis Police Chief Medaria Arradondo. The regular appearance of these figures allows their presence to be tracked across each transcript, which largely confirms a certain degree of uniformity between the statements made by certain organizations. Arradondo, for example, shares opinions with other police chiefs, department officials, unions, and other organizations, embodied in articles like "Police chiefs react with disgust to Minneapolis death, try to reassure their own cities," hinting at a kind of "police transcript" that the news is interacting with.[36]

The same can be said for members of local government, with Minnesota Governor Tim Walz and Mayors Jacob Frey and Melvin Carter. All three are often grouped together, and both Frey and Carter, as well as other government figures, construct common themes about the unrest generally.[37] But this might also be an oversimplification and it might be incorrect to label statements by Mayor Frey as being set in relation to some "local government transcript". Other

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[36] Jackman, Tom. "Police Chiefs React with Disgust to Minneapolis Death, Try to Reassure Their Own Cities." Washington Post, May 28, 2020.

[37] Eric Bradner. "Minnesota Gov. Tim Walz Tries to Calm Minneapolis after Days of Chaos Following George Floyd Killing | CNN Politics." CNN, May 30, 2020. | Shaw, Adam. "Dueling Claims: Trump Blames Antifa for Riots, Minnesota Officials Point Fingers at White Supremacists and Cartels." Text.Article. Fox News. Fox News, May 30, 2020.

Minneapolis council members quoted by The Washington Post (such as Jeremiah Ellison[38] for example) are entirely absent from any articles by FOX. This could point to differences between different kinds of transcripts (i.e., practices of legibility) such as those rooted in different *social* practices (a governor practicing legibility as opposed to a news anchor). What is important is that other practices of legibility *are* visible from the news transcripts studied here.

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The above discussion focuses only on the basic observational analysis of how the media analyzed here is structured in practice. What is left to be discussed are the particular ways in which the media makes sense of the events in Minneapolis. What are the specific themes each transcript constructs, reconstructs, and stabilizes around so as to render those events legible?

— 4 —
The Howling, Swarming, Ragged Crowd
"or, various attempts to define riots on any terms except their own."

When analyzing the discourse surrounding riots, most works, articles, theories, and arguments, seem to orbit around two ideas I call the **Hysteric** and **Spasmodic** ideas of rioting. We can think of either of these ideas—Hysteric and Spasmodic—as overarching transcripts, or perhaps broader framework for constructing transcripts. In essence, they are a series of recurring themes which appear over and over across nearly every discourse on rioting and come to structure how those discourses work to make rioting legible.

Neither are meant to be thought of as hard categories or any rigid binary; neither, still, are they limited to *theory* on rioting. Any one discourse — a news article, a theoretical essay, a book — is most likely going to have a variety of features shared between each type, or which don't fit neatly into either. Either is often seen to add to and inform the other. Both approaches

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[38] Bailey, Holly, Brittany Shammas, and Kim Bellware. "Chaotic Scene in Minneapolis after Second Night of Protests over Death of George Floyd." *Washington Post*, May 28, 2020.

focus on a similar underlying assumption of riot: the riot itself is always framed as being underpinned by some mechanism. With those mobilizing the spasmodic approach, that mechanism is purely economic; with those using the hysteric approach, we see the mechanism as purely emotional. In either case, the riotous themselves have no sense of self-awareness.

This analysis will involve a brief historical survey tracking the broad strokes of either approach's development. Using this, I will point out the basic contours of either idea, while also noting certain criticisms of them as attempts to develop theories of rioting. Importantly, this is not a project on "The Theory of Spasmodic Rioting", if such a thing exists. Instead, this is meant to articulate either idea, allowing us to return to these themes as they show up in the FOX, CNN, and Washington Post transcripts.

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"The Spasmodic Idea of Rioting"

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What I'll call the spasmodic idea of riot is a way of thinking about rioting which attributes rioting to some underlying social or economic stimulus. Economic stress, political inequalities, or a myriad of other "symptoms" cause a buildup and then spastic release of social pressures. In short: bread prices go up, riots go up; bread prices go down, riots go down. The rioters themselves, the complexities and nuances of their personal beliefs, their moment-to-moment conversations and cultural norms and practices are largely ignored in favor of attributing their actions to some underlying, diagnosable mechanism.

The spasmodic approach is perhaps the older of the two approaches, originating as early as the late 1700's with the French academic Hippolyte Taine. In response to the 1871 Paris Commune, he produced *The Origins of Contemporary France* in 1876 meant to analyze the

country's history and, using scientific objectivity, articulate the origins of France's political instabilities while outlining proper government. *Origins* portrayed the aristocracy as an evolved elite that achieved social harmony by forcing its hierarchy onto the 'lower orders' of society. Those lower orders, i.e. the masses, could not contain their own barbarity and "popular despotism," and so had to be put down by force.

> Nothing is so healthy for a majority as a ministry composed of its own chiefs…A
> railway conductor is not willing that his locomotive should be deprived of coal,
> nor to have the rails he is about to run on broken up.[39]

The notion of the railroad is not random. *Origins* is particularly important because it marks the first 'scientific' and 'objective' study of the mechanism behind rioting. This 'scientific' outlook is of particular importance because it, for the first time in modern history, sets up a repeating pattern of the sciences: problems were not meant to just be explained, but solved, "If Brunel could use technology to build bridges over vast chasms, railways across continents, and tunnels under great rivers, then the new positivist sciences should also be able to help conquer the central problem of social disorder in industrial society."[40] Society was like a locomotive, it had to be guided *and* maintained, namely by the deployment of state violence. The scientific method was the science of effective societal control. The state, technique, and technology were, in effect, the "armed wing" of science.[41]

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[39] Hippolyte A. Taine. *The Origins of Contemporary France*. P. 153

[40] Clifford Stott, and John Drury. "Contemporary Understanding of Riots: Classical Crowd Psychology, Ideology and the Social Identity Approach." *Public Understanding of Science* 26, no. 1 (January 2017): p.13.

[41] [**Note**] Bonanno goes on to describe how "developments in technology [are] going towards a perfectioning of dominion running parallel to the few minimal improvements conceded in general living conditions." He, 112 years after Taine, is describing the exact technique Taine is: riots will be quelled via a scientific technique of population control paired with a maintenance of general living conditions. | Alfredo M. Bonanno. Translated by Jean Weir. "L'utopia propulsiva." ProvocAzione no. 1 (January 1987): 19

Importantly, disorder began largely among the lower orders, or due to the failure of the

elité. That disorder was caused by a "sovereignty of unrestrained passions,"[42] namely, a passion

> which is neither historic nor local, but natural and universal, the most
> indomitable, most imperious, and most formidable of all…the fear of hunger.

[43]Taine's theory is entirely spasmodic, attribute disorder (which included any illegal activity, not

just rioting) to both poverty and starvation; like a locomotive without coal:

> We have seen how numerous the smugglers, dealers in contraband salt,
> poachers, vagabonds, beggars, and escaped convicts have become, and how a
> year of famine increases the number.[44]

These "poachers, vagabonds, beggars, and escaped convicts", problem elements in society, are

caused and compounded by poor economic maintenance. What's more, it is they who come to

be the Agent Provocateur of the mob, its nefarious and insurrectionary leaders:

> In every important insurrection there are similar evil-does and vagabonds,
> enemies to the law, savage, prowling desperadoes…. It is they who serve as the
> directors and executioners of public or private malice…They are known by their
> acts, by their love of destruction for the sake of destruction, by their foreign
> accent, by their savage faces and their rags.
>
> [For] in every mob it is the boldest and least scrupulous who march ahead and
> set the example in destruction…the beginning was the craving for bread, the
> end is murder and arson; the savagery which is unchained adding its unlimited
> violence to the limited revolt of necessity…

[45]But the key here is that it is poverty which "unchains" savagery, they are:

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[42] Hippolyte A. Taine. *The Origins of Contemporary France*. p.197
[43] Ibid. p.201
[44] Ibid. p.16
[45] Ibid. p.16

the permanent instincts which attack [society]. They are always there even in ordinary times…The moment their repression ceases, their power of mischief becomes evident.[46]

Taine marks not just the arrival of some of the key most themes underpinning spasmodic understandings of riot, but thematic trends in attempts at understanding rioting across numerous counts of literature for the two several centuries. Theories of riot are always accompanied by a particular relationship to the riot, most often antagonism. They usually come to be exemplified by their connection to the technique of policing. With them, the purpose of a theory of riot is to understand how they can be best quelled. These pair with an assumption of riot as inherently an instance of deviation. Riots are the breakdown of an otherwise orderly society, or more aptly, they are the eruption of "permanent instincts which attack" society.[47] It should come as no surprise that the riot—and its chief component, the mob—are virtually synonymous with the activity of an unruly poor; what better population to be said to embody impropriety than those who hold no property.

Riots intrude into history and "the common people can scarcely be taken as historical agents before the French Revolution."[48] At best they are disturbances in the creation of society performed by elites and great men. In fact, the riot is the perfect opposite to great men: a writhing, anonymous mass led by vagabonds and radicals—it is the mirror image of a society of good leadership guiding orderly citizens. Its intrusiveness is "compulsive, rather than self-conscious or self-activating…It is sufficient to mention a bad harvest or a down-turn in trade,

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[46] Ibid. p.197
[47] Ibid. p.197
[48] Thompson, E. P. "THE MORAL ECONOMY OF THE ENGLISH CROWD IN THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY." *Past and Present* 50, no. 1 (1971): p.1

and all requirements of historical explanation are satisfied."[49] In effect, the riot is stripped not only of any sense of self-awareness or agency, it cannot be thought of as structuring society, only as brief and inconsequential deviations from it.

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Most often, the mechanism of rioting is economic: food, prices, wages, etc. Others, though, such as studies of race, focus on group competition for jobs and "turf".[50] But each of these theories employ similar assumptions of some external stimulus which causes or catalyzes riots. On the one hand, a riot can be thought of as a kind of disease. It has particular precipitating causes, proceeding symptoms and, if not an administrable cure, then at least some kind of preventative and treatment (namely humane, i.e. effective, policing). But it's not as if the openly authoritarian or status quo theories of rioting are alone in these kinds of assumptions. These very ideas also come to characterize radical traditions as well.

This approach is often seen in various radical political theories, such as different variations of communist and anti-colonial theory, which sees riots as embryonic, aborted, or "unconscious" revolutions. "Unconscious" here is meant to contrast with the "class consciousness" theorized by the marxist tradition, wherein the material conditions of capitalist or colonial society structure or inevitably catalyze a particular awareness or consciousness among the masses, guiding them toward revolution. Franz Fanon, for example, while describing the evolution of the Algerian revolution, sets it as having been born from a "mutation of the instinct of self-preservation" into "their national consciousness and [deepening] their attribute

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[49] Ibid. p.1

[50] Janowitz, Morris. "Collective Racial Violence: A Contemporary History." Violence in America: Historical and Comparative Perspectives. p.1

as an African people."[51] This "banal instinct of self-preservation" is violence lacking that higher consciousness, i.e., a mere "defense reaction," a "manifestation [of] strictly animal existence" which had otherwise characterized the violence of the colonized.

These theories are just as quick to deny any self-awareness within the crowd as their liberal counterparts, it's just that the thing riot deviates from isn't society but social change. Joshua Clover is apt when he describes this as a product of a "profoundly sedimented" framework defined by Marx's analytical framework and Leninist political strategy, one "centered around proletarian organization toward the revolutionary party and the seizure both of state and production" (Should we be surprised to learn that in the essay quoted above, Fanon notes that it is "the role of the political party that takes the destinies of this people into its hands"?). The riot, by contrast, has no possible place in this approach. Instead, the riot is "understood to have no politics at all," it is merely "a spasmodic irruption to be read symptomatically and perhaps granted a paternalistic dollop of sympathy."[52] Even in supposedly radical traditions of thought, there comes to be the same assumptions as we see with Taine back in the late 1700's: theory comes from the perspective of "the command of state and economy," politics is linked necessarily with "organization" and defined by a "scientific sense of history's progress." Riot is by (their) definition the opposite of such command and progress, it is "a great disorder" (what little surprise that the few political traditions that *have* afforded the riot a political character are those "intellectual and political traditions indifferent or even antithetical to the command of state and economy, most famously…some strands of anarchism).

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[51] Franz Fanon. "Why We Use Violence," in *Alienation and Freedom*. p.655
[52] Joshua Clover. *Riot. Strike Riot.* p.8

Current criticisms of the spasmodic approach, such as by the likes of E.P. Thompson and Joshua Clover have both focused largely on its presence in economic and radical theories. Thompson, for example, takes another author, W. W. Rostow to task for 1950's "Social Tension Chart", which argued that riots could be plotted on a chart mapping out food prices, rent, and wages.[53] The riot, in this instance, is completely acultural just as it is ahistoric. But I also want to extend this view to other approaches in different fields, such as criminology and sociology, particularly the sociology of protests.

The work of sociologist Morris Janowitz, for example, seeks to categorize riots into a binary typology, differentiating between communal riots (characterized by "personal assaults by members of one racial/ethnic group against members of another group") and commodity riots (characterized by "attacks on property".)[54] Either style of riot is rooted in an idea of some form of social or economic conflict. Communal riots, for example, Janowitz describes as occurring when black populations came into contact with immigrant and white populations in the 1960's; there riots triggered as different populations "[contended] for jobs, housing, and turf."[55] The problem is that no further exploration into the cultural landscapes is seemingly possible from here. Whether the root symptom is the collision of populations or rising bread prices, spasmodic theories seem to "conclude investigation at the exact point at which it becomes of serious sociological or cultural interest," in that there is not further examination of cultural relations in which these rioters are situated and by which they understand their own actions.[56]

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[53] Thompson, E. P. "THE MORAL ECONOMY OF THE ENGLISH CROWD IN THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY." *Past and Present* 50, no. 1 (1971): p.2

[54] Janowitz, Morris. "Collective Racial Violence: A Contemporary History." Violence in America: Historical and Comparative Perspectives. 15

[55] Ibid. p.11

[56] Thompson, E. P. "THE MORAL ECONOMY OF THE ENGLISH CROWD IN THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY." *Past and Present* 50, no. 1 (1971): p.1

The hysteric idea is the inverse of the spasmodic. Where the spasmodic idea constructed "riot" as a kind of socioeconomic compulsion, the hysteric approach to riot is a way of thinking which attributes rioting to a surplus of emotion (hysteria) or crowd-induced madness. This approach usually works off of three basic ideas: The first is the idea that within a crowd, we are deindividuated, losing our sense of self in anonymity; from there brought into an extremist delirium — another similar idea is that intense emotions, such as rage at a sense of injustice, travel more rapidly through crowds, leading to a kind of mass hysteria; finally, the "riot" becomes complete when the now hysteric crowd (often driven by Agent Provocateurs) turn to violence. What defines the riot, then, is the emotions claimed to command human action, underscored by a lack of reason, forethought, and critical thinking.

It's with the Hysteric approach that we find ourselves back in France, now in the 1800's with one of Taine's intellectual successors: Gustave Le Bon. Le Bon is one of the first thinkers to articulate a truly *hysteric* theory of riots. In his 1895 work *The Crowd*, Le Bon sought to analyze how crowds "from the mere fact of their being assembled, there result certain new psychological characteristics." His argument is systematized to diagnose and order every aspect of the crowd, from its formation to its consequences. His theory argues that a crowd is an agglomeration that takes on special *psychological* characteristics, characteristics which namely involve

> The turning in a fixed direction of the ideas and sentiments of individuals composing such a crowd, and the disappearance of their personality…[the] crowd is always dominated by considerations of which it is unconscious…The

disappearance of brain activity…[the] lowering of the intelligence and [transformation] of the sentiments.[57]

Riots are portrayed as a kind of collective madness in a direct challenge to the ideas of civic, individual rationalism supposed by the enlightenment. Importantly, what defines these psychological changes are not just the homogenization of individuals; crowd psychology is inherently defined by violence:

> [By] the mere fact that he forms part of an [organized] crowd, a man descends several rungs in the ladder of civilisation. Isolated, he may be a cultivated individual; in a crowd, he is a barbarian…a creature acting by instinct…An individual in a crowd is a grain of sand amid other grains of sand, which the wind stirs up at will.[58]

Le Bon goes on to attribute three specific mechanisms to **crowd psychology**: the loss of self through anonymity in the crowd; a process that allows any idea or sentiment to spread unstoppably through a crowd; and a kind of hypnotic state that enables those ideas to spread. In effect, the crowd first subsumes the individual, makes them suggestable, and then quickly radicalizes them. Importantly, the riot itself is avowedly immoral; so long as we are

> …taking the word "morality" to mean constant respect for certain social conventions, and the permanent repression of selfish impulses, it is quite evident that crowds are too impulsive and too mobile to be moral.[59]

Morality is synonymous, here, with both **legality** and the status quo. That the failing of an almost fanatic "permanent repression of selfish impulses" is seen as synonymous with a crowd defined by barbarism and collective madness also gives us insight into Le Bon's own ideas of what a properly "moral" subject, the "individual" killed by the "crowd," actually looks like.

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[57] Le Bon, Gustave. *The Crowd: A Study of the Popular Mind*. p.1
[58] Ibid. p.8
[59] Ibid. p.28

The Le Bonian argument ends with a reiteration of the **Agent Provocateur**:

> As soon as a certain number of living beings are gathered together…they place themselves instinctively under the authority of a chief.[60]

These leaders, unlike those from Taine's analysis, are driven both by the idea they have become infatuated with as well as the pressure of the crowd itself.

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The themes articulated by Le Bon—Group madness, the rule of emotions or some hypnotic idea, barbarism or degeneration, a moral subject defined by obedience to social codes, etc. —are all hallmarks of ideas not just of rioting, but of western civilization. They work around a common throughline of **subjectification**, the organizing of people into legible categories (essentially, objectification—*the making of discursive-objects*—but as relates to human beings). Namely, an understanding of people and the roles they take on in situations of riot.

Riots are the opposite of the neat hierarchy of the citizen (subject) under government. From the perspective of this hierarchy, then, a riot seems a kind of 'anarchy.' Structurally speaking the perspective of state-having cultures, conceiving of statelessness may be profoundly difficult. Discourses in this custom seek out some 'subject,' a categorical 'rioter' of a 'riot' just as there must be a categorical 'citizen' of a 'state.' This becomes an even more strained assumption when it comes to understanding the riot itself; acephalous and lacking fixed organization, it should come as no surprise that riots are most often described as both heavily organized and following particular leaders.

States are not a fact of life, they are a social practice which must be repeated and enforced. Stateness is a social activity that does not necessarily need to happen. People might

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[60] Ibid. p.72

instead choose to riot, or as James Scott describes, *flee*.[61] Scott details state-culture's relationship to stateless cultures. Namely, his description of peasant flight from state activities (following law, paying taxes, obeying property lines, etc.) via migration into geographic regions more difficult for state administrators to exert their power, resembles the breakdown of these activities that seem to happen during a riot. Scott obviously ties his breakdown to spatial acts of escape, but I argue that we can think of riots as being similar, although occurring through rebellion rather than migration. In both cases, state activities cease. The discourses of a state-having culture might have structural reason to be thought of as interacting with riots similar to how Scott describes they interact with stateless cultures:

> [The French] not only drew boundaries around the tribes they dimly discerned and appointed chiefs through whom they intended to rule but placed the peoples so designated on a scale of social evolution…This technology of rule [not] only proposed new and sharp identities but assumed a kind of universal, hierarchical, chiefly order. Acephalous, egalitarian peoples without chiefs [had] no place…They were hustled willy-nilly into a world of chiefs by fiat whether they liked it or not.

[62]There is a clear connection between how (a French) Le Bon describes people generally as forming "instinctively under the authority of a chief" and the actual practices of colonial French described by Scott. People, in order to be made legible for a state, have to be subjectified into more easily understood (and managed) populations. The same seems to be capable of being said as regards riots, starting with the likes of Taine and Le Bon: if someone is in a crowd and is not rioting, they are labeled and treated as a rioter by the police sent to disperse them. From a

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[61] James C. Scott. *The Art of Not Being Governed: An Anarchist History of Upland Southeast Asia*. p.IX
[62] Ibid. p.258

crowd are created typologies of its members: rioters, protesters, demonstrators, looters, thieves, criminals, etc.; these types are what state activity interacts with. Rioters are *made*.

Scott's reference to state-discourses as placing people on "a scale of social evolution" also echoes Le Bon's own claim that people in a crowd descend "several rungs in the ladder of civilisation" combined with his attempts to typify riots, riot actors and leaders. In this, Le Bon in particular presents an interesting parallel to the ideas of Franz Fanon, in that Le Bon describes his fellow Frenchmen similarly to how Fanon describes French ideas of colonized Africans. Here, we find a strange comparison between how colonizer treats colonized and how a colonizer treats a fellow colonizer failing to maintain themself as a proper colonial subject. A citizen failing to be a citizen, 'falling to barbarism', is treated eerily similar to subjects deemed foreign and denied their citizenry.

> [t]he colonized people are presented ideologically as a people arrested in their evolution, impervious to reason, incapable of directing their own affairs, requiring the permanent presence of an external ruling power. The history of the colonized peoples is transformed into meaningless unrest.[63]

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Ideas of this type also come in various fields of the social sciences, such as the sociology of social movements. Gary Marx, for example, developed a typology not unlike Morris Janowitz described in the previous section: his system is based around two dimensions on which a riot could be scaled: "the presence of a generalized belief" and the perception that rioting would achieve some collective purpose. Through this, the first category of his typology describes "instrumental protests" like 19th century European food riots, in which a generalized belief is

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[63] Franz Fanon. "Why We Use Violence," in *Alienation and Freedom*. p.657

present; the second category holds the presence of a generalized belief or common ideology, but which displays no instrumental purpose other than venting animosity, such as a pogrom or riots meant toward retributive purposes.[64]

Marx also argues for the existence of "issueless riots" which lack any generalized belief or possibility for social change, such as those "that often follow sporting victories." If this sounds like a reincarnation of Le Bonian thinking in 60's sociological language, it is and Marx admits this, arguing modern thinkers "have caused a pendulum to swing too far away from Le Bon."[65] Issueless riots, Marx argues, don't come from group insanity, but do occur where riots lack a generalized belief and an idea that rioting will cause social change. In effect, Marx is working in a strain of thought that has not challenged the underlying assumption of hysteric thinking: riots are *intrusive*. Here, intrusivity kicks in when a riot lacks some ideology geared toward achieving some particular goal, effectively limiting social practices to acultural and oftentimes effectively economic activities.

Properly *hysteric* theories of riot in social psychology were heavily challenged in the 1980's and largely fell to the wayside by the 1990's.[66] They have not entirely ceased, though, as the work of Ralph H. Turner articulated ideas similar to Marx's "issueless" riot, labeling them "primitive rebellion" (and echoing the unconscious revolts described by Fanon).[67] Turner, though, seems to prove the rule: in general, theorists have largely turned away from at least

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[64] Marx, Gary T., "Issueless Riots," *American Academy of Political and Social Science* 391, no.1 (1970). p.21
[65] Ibid. p.23
[66] Friedman, Lauren F. "Rabble with a Cause: Were the London Riots a Spontaneous Mass Reaction or a Rational Response?" Scientific American. Accessed April 22, 2023.
[67] Turner, Ralph H. "Race Riots Past and Present: A Cultural-Collective Behavior Approach." *Symbolic Interaction* 17, No. 3 (1994). 309-324.

direct connections to Le Bon, preferring instead to simply explain what seem to be instances of riot that lack a clearly identifiable (for researchers) ideological motive and practical aim.

The slowdown of hysteric thinking in academia, however, has not prevented their continuation in other discourses, not least statements by public officials. During the London Riots in 2011, the The Daily Mirror referred to events as mindless; then Prime-Minister David Cameron "described them as mindless selfishness and the leader of Liverpool council talked of mindless thugs."[68] For example, in 2017, a video released on Youtube by "Wendover Productions" titled "How to Stop a Riot" argues that in a riot

> There's a sort of wordless peer-pressure, individuals subconsciously escalate their violence to match that of the leaders. People act almost by instinct. [The difference] between crowds and the individual breaks down [and the individual] becomes part of the collective.[69]

An article on howstuffworks.com by Ed Grabianowski makes a similar point, that people in a mob take on a "mob mentality" where

> [T]he people making up the 'mob' do things they normally would not do because the crowd makes them anonymous; this anonymity, combined with the actions of the rest…makes them feel like they can smash, burn or beat whatever and whomever they want.[70]

Finally, a short essay by Yasmine Ghattas was written and published June 3rd, 2020 during the unrest in Minneapolis.[71] It follows, beat for beat, a broadly modernized version of the theories outlined by Le Bon. Ghattas asks how an orderly protest *devolves* into a riot. The first is "group

[68] Reicher, Stephen, and Clifford Stott. "You Won't Prevent Future Riots by Disregarding the Psychology of Crowds." The Guardian, August 19, 2011, sec. Opinion.
[69] Wendover Productions. How to Stop a Riot, 2017.
[70] HowStuffWorks. "How Riot Control Works," November 30, 2004.
[71] Ghattas (@yasmineghattas), Yasmine. "The Psychology Behind Riots." ILLUMINATION (blog), June 3, 2020.

polarization," the tendency of people to make more extreme decisions when in a group setting; a tendency enhanced by the "anonymity factor." One loses a sense of one's individuality or 'self', making "a person more willing to engage in antisocial or violent behavior because they believe they are protected by the group."

This is not meant to be a comprehensive list. Instead, each of the above is meant to point to relatively easily accessible, broadly non-academic sources of information in which hysteric ideas still dominate. And it's not just there that these ideas propagate: Clifford Stott and Stephen Reicher's *Crowd action as intergroup process: introducing the police perspective* hint that even though modern theories of rioting perceive crowds as "heterogenous, [police] officers perceive crowd dynamics as involving an anti-social minority seeking to exploit the mindlessness of ordinary people in the mass."[72] This occurs both due to the practical necessities of policing as a practice as well as the presence of what Stott and Reicher call "ideological" factors which inform police treatment of crowds.

Not every presentation of riots as "mass hysteria" will follow the same arguments as Le Bon. Instead, other interpretations seem to focus on *emotion* whereby the heightened emotional states of individuals in crowds cause a mob mentality to form. But the basic assumption stays the same: rational individuals are made irrational, hysteric, and come to riot.

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One final point before moving onward is a focus on the underlying rationale for Le Bon's research: social science. Like Taine, Le Bon saw his research as underpinning a science of how society functions meant to inform the *governance* of that society. This history is present and

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[72] Stott, Clifford, and Stephen Reicher. "Crowd Action as Intergroup Process: Introducing the Police Perspective." *European Journal of Social Psychology* 28, no. 4 (1998): p. 509

even if the particular theory in play has changed. Le Bon's understanding of social science, if perhaps not as obviously authoritarian and classist, is still alive in modern thinking. Stott and Reicher, referenced above, contextualize their work as informing "methods of police training and police tactics."[73] While they criticize that the practice of policing forces police to view the crowd as a homogenous mass, this is because that form of policing is ineffective at quelling riots and facilitating protesters "in pursuing their legitimate aims so as to limit the escalation of discontent."[74] In order to prevent crackdown, they must be properly integrated into legal (i.e. governmental) activity.

— 5 —
Trauma, Injustice, Violence
"or, the common starting points of Major Media covering the unrest in Minneapolis, and how they quickly diverged."

So far I have laid out the theory and methodology by which I analyze the approaches at making the unrest in Minneapolis legible, going on to discuss first my observations of the structure of news media as a discursive practice and then key ideas within discourses of riots. This section will seek to answer the questions "How a 'News Transcript' makes its subject material legible?" Having answered the question of 'what a news transcript *is*', I will now follow the rough evolution of several key themes in order to discuss how the events in Minneapolis are constructed and stabilized. Emphasis here will be largely on the themes present so as to break down in broad-strokes the characteristics of each transcript.

My own selection of articles for this research was not and could not be comprehensive. This means that the following research must be thought of as limited; the conclusions I draw are

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[73] Ibid. p. 527
[74] Ibid. p.527

both the conclusions I am capable of drawing, as well as markers and guideposts for what I feel would be necessary for further research.

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"How the media use trauma and emotional justification to understand events in Minneapolis."

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From the beginning the riot is acknowledged as emotionally understandable through the lens of trauma and pain. The news as a reporting method cannot simply fabricate its own story; the news regularly interacts with other discourses, and so must not only make itself legible, but the many discourses surrounding any topic legible as well. This forces news transcripts to 'work with what they're given.' If a transcript must be constructed, it requires certain material by which this can happen. In this sense, the porosity of an article, its external links, platforming, and ecology which structure it, are a vital necessity of how it operates as a practice of legibility.

George Floyd wasn't just killed, he was killed and the video was shared thousands of times within hours. The first days of news reporting on the topic, lacking a coronary report or even direct statements from the perpetrators, had only the killing and the reactions to it to discuss and build their transcripts with. This was the discursive material that came to structure the transcripts of the news meant to report on them. The killing and its subsequent presence in social media presented the violence in a visceral but agonizingly slow video. This was compounded with a flurry of statements by local government officials, police chief organizations, and protest groups which all maintained a common line of community outrage. These common, salient features of discourse about Minneapolis, a theme of **community trauma**, was how those events were characterized and understood in phase 1 of each transcript. Here, the 'community' of Minneapolis was *unjustly* harmed, and so the unrest by

that community appears as an understandable (or justifiable) reaction. This understanding of the riots is avowedly **hysteric**. In fact, it implicitly appeals to Le Bon's **crowd psychology**, where an idea spreads through and then commands a suggestable crowd.

Take this quote from Minneapolis Councilwoman Andrea Jenkins, saying "You have every absolute right to be angry, to be upset, to be mad, to express your anger…however, you have no right to perpetrate violence and harm on the very communities that you say that you are standing up for."[75] That the protesters have a "right to be angry" or are otherwise defined, driven, or organizing around intense emotions appears in nearly every single article that references the protesters or the unrest in Minneapolis. The protesters are in the streets out of anger, it is through anger that they are understood, and they have reason for that anger (George Floyd).

This presents each news agency both with material by which to develop legibility, as well as a problem to wrestle against. Say, for instance, FOX News wants to criticize the unrest as they shift into the second phase of their transcript. That the protests have an underlying reason they have acknowledged poses a problem for defining that protest in a way perhaps more beneficial for FOX News' political sense. What little surprise that FOX platforms Minneapolis Police Chief Arradondo acknowledging "that there is currently a deficit of hope in this city and I know as I wear this uniform before you, this department has contributed to that deficit of hope, but I will not allow to continue to increase that deficit by re-traumatizing those folks in our community," reworking the theme of anger Floyd's killing by a police officer—acknowledged as

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[75] Sang, Lucia Suarez. "George Floyd Case: Minneapolis Police Chief Says City's 'deficit of Hope' Cannot Be Compounded with More Trauma, Violence." Text.Article. Fox News. Fox News, May 28, 2020. | Holly Bailey, Jared Goyette, Sheila Regan and Tarkor Zehn. "Chaotic Minneapolis Protests Spread amid Emotional Calls for Justice, Peace." *Washington Post*, May 29, 2020.

traumatic—by framing the unrest as equally traumatic, reframing repressive police tactics as

defending the traumatized from further harm.[76] The police, in only a few words, go from

perpetrators of harm to defenders against it. Alternatively, we could take the case of CNN, who

interviews Philonise Floyd (George Floyd's brother), ending that article with him saying "'I want

everybody to be peaceful right now, but people are torn and hurt, because they're tired of

seeing black men die,' George Floyd's brother, Philonise Floyd, said on CNN's 'New Day.'"[77] Here,

Philonise as the bereaved brother, in the context of CNNs further treatment of the Floyd Family

(as well as the family of Eric Garner, another victim of police murder), is positioned as a key

figure of the protests thematically linked to his brothers' death. Here, nonviolence is presented

as a goal, but its absence as an emotionally understandable failure.

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Going into, the next three sections will detail the first, second, and third phases of the

FOX, Washington Post, and CNN transcripts. The first phase will open with how each transcript

first introduces the events; the second, discussing how the transcript develops; and finally the

third, how it comes to stabilize.

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"All-Out Mayhem': Minneapolis according to Fox News."
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FOX's first phase I locate on their May 26th article, "4 Minneapolis officers fired in death of black

man after video shows officer pinning knee against his neck," the first article of theirs dealing

with George Floyd or Minneapolis. [78]

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[76] Sang, Lucia Suarez. "George Floyd Case: Minneapolis Police Chief Says City's 'deficit of Hope' Cannot Be Compounded with More Trauma, Violence." Text.Article. Fox News. Fox News, May 28, 2020.
[77] Almasy, Christina Maxouris, Jason Hanna,Steve. "Prosecutors Do Not Announce Charges in George Floyd's Death but Say 'Justice Will Be Served.'" CNN, May 28, 2020.
[78] Chakraborty, Barnini. "4 Minneapolis Officers Fired in Death of Black Man after Video Shows Officer Pinning Knee against His Neck." Text.Article. Fox News. Fox News, May 26, 2020.

The article frames itself around one major theme: **condemnation**. The firing of Derek Chauvin is underscored by support from mayor Jacob Frey, calling it "the right call," and police chief Medaria Arradondo, who argues "the vast majority of the work we do never require the use of force."[79] The tone shifts as focus turns to a press conference during which Frey "became emotional" and Minneapolis councilwoman Andrea Jenkins states how "our community continues to be traumatized again, and again and again," while vowing alongside the mayor "to be as transparent and forthright with the community."[80] The article then references Darnella Frazier, who recorded Floyd's death, and the comments made during the video before noting "a citywide protest" scheduled for 5pm.[81] The article ends with Arradondo asking the FBI to investigate "whether a possible civil rights violation led to [Floyd's] death."[82]

What's interesting is how the same theme condemning the killing of George Floyd manifests in very different ways within the same article: First, the firing of Chauvin as a "right" or **just** thing to do after he did an unjust act, linked to a theme of investigation or **legal action**; Here: justice is here implicitly defined as a legal conviction of Derek Chauvin, who is **personally responsible** for George Floyd's death (as opposed to a racist police force or even policing as a general concept), and so has personally harmed "the community."[83] Chauvin's actions are themed as either reflecting poorly on the police or as entirely separate from "the vast majority" of police activity. Finally, we see the earlier theme of **community trauma**, rage, or bereavement.[84]

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[79] Ibid.
[80] Ibid.
[81] Ibid.
[82] Ibid.
[83] Ibid.
[84] Ibid.

The themes outlined above are not 'separate' but rather contain common, implicit assumptions; namely, a common construction of **justice**, through which FOX can then define why protesters are protesting set in relation to that construction of 'justice.' This occurs through direct statements that "protesters want charges filed against the officers involved in Floyd's death."[85] As a theme, though, this construction of justice clashes with the general theme of trauma or rage (i.e., hysteric emotion) as the lens by which the unrest is understood. The protests are an outpouring of anger caused by the death of George Floyd and so are understood solely as a community releasing its pent up stress. Emotion is the reason, Floyd's death its justification. This base justification for the protests is something FOX will wrestle with throughout their transcript, and through their definition of justice (and other themes), it is how they will disconnect the protesters from their justification.

One of the key themes at play in this disconnection is the link between protest and violence. What I am calling the theme of **peaceful to violent protest** is the recurring use of that exact or similar phrase to describe where riots come from, namely protesters. Protests *become* violent, they "heat up" or "break out". For example: On May 31st, FOX News released the article "Cities reeling from violent riots tighten restrictions, implement curfews as National Guard deployed," in which they report:

> "Protesters turned violent after a video circulated online showing an NYPD SUV
> ramming into a group of protesters in Brooklyn."[86]

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[85] Michael Ruiz. "Minneapolis Protests Get Heated, Looting Reported as George Floyd Death Sparks New Outcry." Text.Article. Fox News. Fox News, May 27, 2020.

[86] Caitlin McFall, Dom Calicchio. "Cities Reeling from Violent Riots Tighten Restrictions, Implement Curfews as National Guard Deployed." Text.Article. Fox News. Fox News, May 31, 2020.

In this sentence there are several objects: protesters which 'turn violent', 'video circulation,' and an 'NYPD SUV' which 'rammed' another group of protesters. Note how "turning violent" is an attribute associated with the protesters rather than the police. What adds to this is the context in which the sentence can be found:

> Crowds across the nation have seized on the racially charged incident to demand justice, but the protests have turned increasingly violent, culminating in a weekend of carnage.[87]

Crowds are first linked to their underlying justification (demanding justice from a racially charged incident), *but* they proceed to "turn increasingly violent."[88] The protests become "a weekend of carnage."[89] Like the ideas of Le Bon and Tain, protests *degenerate* into riots. Notably, violence is only associated with protesters. Even when police drive a vehicle (which on average weighs around 2 tons) into a crowd of civilians, it is the *civilians* who become violent.

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At the same time as they construct the unrest, FOX engages in various constructions of the police during the events in Minneapolis. While emphasizing the illegality (and so disconnection from justice) of the unrest, FOX at the same time links this with a theme of **police absence**. An absence of police comes to be synonymous with "chaos" and importantly *looting*. Looting features a more prominent role than any other riotous action, even overshadowing the word "riot" (the former shows up four times while the latter appears only once in the entire article). The result is a clear thematic link between the unrest and a **threat to property**. FOX for example, describes "mob of people" making off "with items ranging from TV's to clothing and

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[87] Ibid.
[88] Ibid.
[89] Ibid.

even groceries" with "no police" in sight.[90] This portrayal of the riots remains largely unchanged throughout the course of FOX's transcript, only experiencing one extensive shift regarding 'who' is doing the rioting and 'why.'

Where the police are present, violence, such as the use of anti-riot weaponry, is portrayed almost as a ragged defense against the unruly masses—a theme of **reactivity**. Police violence is portrayed as the obvious reaction to 'chaos' and to the crowd. This is oftentimes literal, as "chaos" breaking out is described as "prompting police to respond with rubber bullets, tear gas and stun grenades."[91] In other scenes we see "police on the ground, carrying their bicycles like shields along with Tasers, pepper spray and tear gas, received cover from a garrison of officers on the nearby rooftop of the department's 3rd Precinct, armed with tear gas launchers."[92] Even the National Guard are deployed "in response to the protests that have turned increasingly violent."[93]

This portrayal of police violence as inherently *reactive* also appears in FOX's approach to the death of Floyd itself. Fox has a hard time admitting that Floyd was killed by the police. That is, both in the sense of responsibility but also *agency*. For example, they claim that "Floyd, 46, was pronounced dead Monday night after he was pinned to the ground…"[94] or refer to George Floyd: "whose death in police custody was recorded on video that went viral."[95] FOX goes on to

[90] IMichael Ruiz. "Minneapolis Protests Get Heated, Looting Reported as George Floyd Death Sparks New Outcry." Text.Article. Fox News. Fox News, May 27, 2020.

[91] Ibid.

[92] Ibid.

[93] Eric Bradner. "Minnesota Gov. Tim Walz Tries to Calm Minneapolis after Days of Chaos Following George Floyd Killing | CNN Politics." CNN, May 30, 2020. | Shaw, Adam. "Dueling Claims: Trump Blames Antifa for Riots, Minnesota Officials Point Fingers at White Supremacists and Cartels." Text.Article. Fox News. Fox News, May 30, 2020.

[94] Flood, Brian. "George Floyd Protests: Video Footage Goes Viral on Social Media." Text.Article. Fox News. Fox News, May 28, 2020.

[95] IMichael Ruiz. "Minneapolis Protests Get Heated, Looting Reported as George Floyd Death Sparks New Outcry." Text.Article. Fox News. Fox News, May 27, 2020.

follow, for example, police reports of a "medical emergency", claiming Floyd "was pronounced dead" after he was pinned to the ground, or saying "Chauvin knelt on his neck until he became unresponsive," etc.[96] Not 'Floyd's killing' but "the circumstances surrounding Floyd's death".[97] Each instance uses the passive voice, or disconnects Chauvin from the theme of 'murder' by using terms such as "became unresponsive."[98] FOX prefers to say Floyd was "killed while in police custody" rather than 'killed by police'. When they do link his death to any notion of systemic racism, this is always attributed to protesters, Floyd's death is "what protesters have called another incidence of police brutality against black men."[99] Given FOX's developing relationship with the protests, this link could be thought of as disparaging.

This doesn't only apply to Floyd: tear gas is referred to as "chemical irritants."[100] FOX is careful to dissociate (or carefully soften the link between) the objects "police" and "violence".

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This thematic development of police comes alongside a new development in characterizing the riots. By May 30th, FOX begins to rely heavily on statements made by Donald Trump.[101] They are not blindly supportive, and do provide counters to some of his claims, but what goes un-countered are his many statements on protesters. FOX describes him condemning "riots that

[96] Sang, Lucia Suarez. "George Floyd Case: Minneapolis Police Chief Says City's 'deficit of Hope' Cannot Be Compounded with More Trauma, Violence." Text.Article. Fox News. Fox News, May 28, 2020.
[97] Ibid.
[98] Ibid.
[99] Shaw, Adam. "Dueling Claims: Trump Blames Antifa for Riots, Minnesota Officials Point Fingers at White Supremacists and Cartels." Text.Article. Fox News. Fox News, May 30, 2020.
[100] Olson, Tyler. "Ilhan Omar Calls for Peace in Minneapolis: 'Show Us How to Organize a Peaceful Protest.'" Text.Article. Fox News. Fox News, May 28, 2020.
[101] Adam Shaw. "Trump Vows to Stop 'mob Violence' amid Riots over George Floyd Death." Text.Article. Fox News. Fox News, May 30, 2020.

have broken out amid what originally were protests," which fit snugly into Trump's coming claim that "what we are seeing on the streets of our cities has nothing to do with justice or peace."[102]

Statements or quotes by FOX distancing rioters from concepts like 'justice' provide the groundwork to introduce another theme: the **Agent Provocateur**. The theme of provocateurship is the culmination of a process by which FOX disconnects the term "rioter" from the term "community". The riot itself, the real people of Minneapolis who are engaged in some form of street practice, are entirely stripped of their agency. Responsibility and agency are thrust solely onto the political opponents of the deeply conservative Trump regime.

Provocateurship comes to be the go-to line for both local and federal government officials, but the results within the FOX transcript are mixed. In one of their most direct articles detailing this theme, Donald Trump and others close to the president are described as blaming ANTIFA,[103] anarchists, and the "radical left."[104] Mayors Jacob Frey and Tim Walz from the Twin Cities, on the other hand, blame virtually every possible group that could be blamed for the violence. Like Trump, the pair blame anarchists, but also white supremacists, "gangs from other states," possible (yet unnamed) "extremist groups," and even drug cartels "trying to take advantage of the chaos."[105] Minnesota Public Safety Commissioner John Harrington is quoted by FOX as asking "is this organized crime, is this an organized cell of terror, where is the linkage?"

FOX goes on to respond to these two lines of thought through direct statements; after referencing local officials, goes on to state that "it is not clear what groups the officials were

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[102] Ibid.

[103] [**Note**] Short for Anti-Fascist, a decentralized anti-fascist and anti-racist political movement

[104] Shaw, Adam. "Dueling Claims: Trump Blames Antifa for Riots, Minnesota Officials Point Fingers at White Supremacists and Cartels." Fox News. Fox News, May 30, 2020.

[105] Ibid.

referring to, or what the evidence is that white supremacists or drug groups are involved."[106]

They report St. Paul Mayor Melvin Carter as being clear that "the people that are doing this are

not Minneapolis residents," but proceed to complete this point by reporting on data by KARE 11

which "showed 'about 86 percent' of the 36 arrests by Minneapolis-based police listed their

address in Minnesota, and that they live in Minneapolis or in the metro area."[107] Carter, FOX

reports, is then said to have "later walked his comments back."[108] In contrast, FOX includes a

"USA today report quot[ing] a security consultant saying intelligence reports indicate many

more of the serious protesters are far-left or anarchists, without significant appearance yet by

far-right groups," seemingly endorsing Trumps prior claims, as well as the claims of other federal

officials.[109] FOX News, however, is not willing to simply agree with everything made by Donald

Trump, as they go on, after quoting the KARE 11 report, to note that "the idea that people were

traveling across state lines to cause trouble and violence was one that appeared to be shared by

the federal government [—] Both Attorney General William Barr and President Trump."[110]

By June 1st, FOX is openly platforming the idea of left-wing Provocateurs "who have

hijacked the otherwise peaceful demonstrations against police brutality."[111] Favoring "U.S.

intelligence sources, law-enforcement officials [and] analysts monitoring the activity," FOX

directly states that "the level of intelligence-sharing and organization involved from what

appears to be the Antifa wing," is "baffling officials," who "had no idea it was this

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[106] Ibid.
[107] Ibid.
[108] Ibid.
[109] Ibid.
[110] Ibid.
[111] McKay, Hollie. "George Floyd Unrest: How Riot Groups Come Together to Loot, Destroy." Text.Article. Fox News. Fox News, June 1, 2020.

sophisticated."[112] When noting "ANTIFA" as an organization does not exist, they quote Tony

Schiena, CEO of security firm MOSAIC, saying "that doesn't mean that there aren't leaders now

emerging."[113] He doesn't "believe it's a coordinated riot," he does "believe that groups are

utilizing it to push their agendas and misguided individuals are buying into it and being

opportunistic and looting."[114]

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All of these ideas come to ahead by the end of May 28th with the development of what I will call

the **Police Defense** theme. Here, legality and protest illegality collide as FOX reports how

"federal and local investigators urged calm in the Twin Cities [as] violent demonstrations raged,"

but "did not announce any charges against the officers involved in the case."[115] Hennepin

County Attorney Mike Freeman, a prosecutor on the Chauvin case, is then quoted saying

> "Sometimes [investigating] takes a little time, and we ask people to be
> patient…We support peaceful demonstrations [but] violence hampers our case,
> it takes valuable police resources away from our investigation, and it also harms
> innocent people." [116]

i.e., not only are rioters separate from protesters, they are active threats against said protesters

and it is *the police who defend them* from rioters. In fact, this exact view is upheld by Chief

Arradondo when he claims that Minneapolis had "experienced a lot of trauma," but that "he

could not allow others to compound that trauma with looting, robbing and torching buildings in

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[112] Ibid.
[113] Ibid.
[114] Ibid.
[115] Ruiz, Michael. "George Floyd Unrest in Minnesota: Feds, Law Enforcement Call for Calm, Time to Investigate amid Riots." Text.Article. Fox News. Fox News, May 28, 2020.
[116] Ibid.

the name of the First Amendment.[117] If violence harms the community, so the logic goes, then clearly the rioters have nothing to do with the riots.

Combined with the theme of the provocateur (one of the most prolific themes in the FOX transcript) this sets up one final thematic addition: the **Nothing to Do With** theme. The line of thinking is self-descriptive: the protests/riots/events in Minneapolis "have nothing to do with" the idea of George Floyd/the needs of the black community/ the memory of Martin Luther King, and etc. The disconnection between "rioter" and "protest" that Provocateurship accomplishes comes to ahead in this theme, by which the protests as a whole are stripped of their underlying justification. The "Nothing to Do With" theme is the definitive description used in the FOX transcript by June 9th, with figures from Governor Tim Walz, to Mayors from Minneapolis, St. Paul, Louisville, and Atlanta all being quoted as condemning violence and destruction of property. "This is not protest; it is violence" becomes the watch-word of local government.[118]

The transformation that has occurred here is a disconnection of protesters from their own actions defined on their terms, as well as the complex of ideas and justifications behind those actions. Protesters are not even enraged at an unjust system anymore: they are anarchists, left-wing agitators, and threats to the community that only the police—the very instigators of the ritos—are in a position to stop.

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"FOX News Phase 3 — A stable transcript of an unstable Minneapolis."
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[117] Ibid.
[118] Barnini Chakraborty and Dom Calicchio. "Minnesota Governor Authorizes 'full Mobilization' of State's National Guard, Says Protests No Longer about Death of George Floyd." Fox News. Fox News, May 30, 2020.

I mark the 30th as the point when the transcript largely stabilizes, orbiting around a core of themes which don't see much further reconstruction. These core ideas are embodied by a series of direct statements by FOX in their article "As fear settles over Minneapolis, protests and violent clashes spread across the U.S." regarding what actually has been happening in Minneapolis and why:

> The protests started peacefully Tuesday night, as hundreds marched to the 3rd Precinct police headquarters **to demand accountability** for the officer who jammed his knee into George Floyd's neck for more than eight minutes as he gasped for breath.
>
> **Tensions quickly escalated.** By the second night, **people had looted** nearby businesses and set them on fire.
>
> By the third night of protests, the police precinct was also on fire. By the fourth, dozens of buildings were set ablaze, and **anger once directed just at the police exploded into all-out mayhem**.
>
> This Midwestern city is now consumed by fear and unease triggered by the anarchy playing out after dark in certain neighborhoods — and worries that the violence could quickly spread throughout the city. **Some residents now stand guard outside their homes with clubs** and guns to fend off **opportunists or possible arsonists**; others have contemplated fleeing the city for the weekend.[119]

I have bolded portions of the above text to highlight the appearance of certain themes: a protest based around convicting Derek Chauvin leads escalates into looting and arson, as anger takes over erupts into chaos and anarchy. Minneapolis is now gripped by fear and lawlessness, an absence of police forcing residents to defend their homes from opportunists and arsonists divorced from the original protest for accountability. This is exactly the thematic construction

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[119] Klemko, Robert, and Jenna Johnson. "As Fear Settles over Minneapolis, Protests and Violent Clashes Spread across the U.S." *Washington Post*, May 31, 2020.

happening in FOX's second phase; notable here is how direct FOX is in articulating it. After this point the FOX transcript stabilizes around this understanding of the events in Minneapolis as they occurred over time. There are, however, a few more thematic reconstructions that only stabilize by the 31st, namely the thematization of the police.

By May 31st FOX is noting the sheer scale of the protests as unrest erupts across the United States and begins to spread into other countries.[120] They also begin emphasizing the police defense theme through the deployment of the National Guard, focusing on their role in defending private property and business owners. Importantly, the mobilization is claimed as coming in response to "a sweeping number of riots and looting … across the U.S." while the National Guard are described as aiding "crowd movement."[121] The theme of police defense and reactivity is also supported by a few other objects and themes: a series of advisories by local governments recommending people not to go into particular areas or to go out at particular hours as well as repeated references to damage toward businesses.[122] These come with the provocateurship theme as FOX platforms the ideas of William Barr, that violent protest

> "[Undercuts] the urgent work that needs to be done – through constructive engagement between affected communities and law enforcement leaders – to address legitimate grievances … preventing reconciliation and driving us apart is the goal of these radical groups, and we cannot let them succeed."[123]

I reference Barr because FOX simply quotes him, providing no commentary or any other competing sources, but also because it goes to show how seemingly abstract themes of police

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[120] Fedschun, Travis. "Indianapolis Riots Leave 2 Dead after 'multiple Shootings' Reported Downtown, Buildings Damaged." Fox News. Fox News, May 31, 2020.
[121] Ibid.
[122] Ibid.
[123] Ibid.

defense and the disconnecting of protesters from their initial justification actually appear in context. Barr's quote embodies the changes in FOX's transcript that I have detailed thus far, positioning the *protesters* as being led by politically radical opportunists bent on harming communities, and it is the *police* who defend those communities *and* facilitate their ability to "address legitimate grievances."[124]

This is compounded by a much more overt "Nothing to Do With" theme from multiple sources, such as Indianapolis Mayor Joe Hogsett who claims that rioters "diminish that activism through inexcusable violence," and again William Barr saying that "voices of peaceful and legitimate protests have been hijacked by violent radical elements" working to "pursue their own separate, violent, and extremist agenda."[125] FOX likewise includes a statement by Los Angeles Business Owner Alan Kokozian calling events in L.A., "not a political protest. This was basically a bunch of thieves getting together taking advantage of a situation."[126]

While present earlier, the final disconnect between the protesters and the emotional justification I discussed in Phase 1 of FOX's transcript is best embodied by direct claims by FOX made June 9th in the article "Minnesota governor authorizes 'full mobilization' of state's National Guard, says protests no longer about death of George Floyd:"

> Although fired Minneapolis Chauvin has been arrested and charged with third-degree murder and manslaughter in connection with Floyd's death, the three other officers who were fired in connection with the case have not been

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[124] Ibid.
[125] Fedschun, Travis. "Indianapolis Riots Leave 2 Dead after 'multiple Shootings' Reported Downtown, Buildings Damaged." Fox News. Fox News, May 31, 2020. | Caitlin McFall, Dom Calicchio. "Cities Reeling from Violent Riots Tighten Restrictions, Implement Curfews as National Guard Deployed." Text.Article. Fox News. Fox News, May 31, 2020.
[126] Ibid.

charged with any crimes – and it remained unclear when the protests and

rioting would end.[127]

Here, FOX directly states that it is "unclear" when the unrest would end now that

Chauvin has been charged, that 'justice has been achieved.' It is a theme that reaches all the

way back to the initial explanation by FOX on what the protests 'are about,' (a conviction). Once

this conviction is reached and the protests continue, the thematic disconnect of the protests

from their ideological legitimation (justice for George Floyd) is stabilized. This disconnect is then

compounded with a disconnecting of the police from responsibility for George Floyd's death and

their new connection to a defense of civil order and peaceful protest.

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The "end" of FOX's transcript is actually rather fuzzy, which connects to how FOX handles the

"end" of the unrest in Minneapolis: it doesn't. Unlike CNN and The Washington Post, FOX News

does not seem to emphasize a clear die down of violent unrest in Minneapolis.

Let's take for example the June 9th article "Minnesota governor authorizes 'full

mobilization' of state's National Guard, says protests no longer about death of George Floyd".[128]

The video at the top of the article claims "buildings burn in Minneapolis as rioters ignore curfew

order" and the news anchor themself is said to be "live on scene." This video was released May

30th. The video is *titled* "live" even though the article it is posted in is released 10 days later.

This, technically, is not a lie as the video description (only accessible by clicking on the video

title, which is a hyperlink to another webpage) marks the video as released live on May 30th. But

this is not easily accessed information from the article in which the video is found. Other

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[127] "Minnesota Governor Authorizes 'full Mobilization' of State's National Guard, Says Protests No Longer about Death of George Floyd | Fox News." Accessed April 23, 2023.
[128] Ibid.

material reported on include linked twitter posts from May 30th through 27th. Images present in the article are all from May 30th through 29th. That is, there is little evidence within the article that its subject matter is *not* happening June 9th. When reading FOX's account of events, the actual *end* of the unrest in Minneapolis is left unclear. According to MPR News, most acts of mass violence ceased after the 30th.[129] If one is only reading articles by FOX on June 9th, they can easily believe that the rioting simply does not end. Either one could be mistaken for believing that violence could be ongoing a week or more after it seems to have actually stopped.

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"Where are the Healers?': Minneapolis according to The Washington Post."
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The Post's opening phase on the 26th of May features two articles. The first is a short breakdown of a "private security video" provided by the "owner of a nearby restaurant," describing beat by beat the killing of Floyd and announcing the firing of the officers.[130] 15 minutes later, the Post releases their first real analysis of George Floyd's death entitled "Four Minneapolis officers are fired after video shows one kneeling on neck of black man who later died."[131] The article is quick to lay out the theme of trauma, opening with a direct statement that "four Minneapolis police officers were fired Tuesday, authorities said, amid protests and outrage."[132] From there, it platforms "Mayor Jacob Frey (D)" as saying the firing of the officers was "the right decision for our city, the right decision for our community."[133]

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[129] MPR News. "What Happened at Minneapolis' 3rd Precinct," June 30, 2020.
[130] Bennett, Dalton. "Video Captures Events before the Handcuffing of a Black Man in Minneapolis Who Died after Being Pinned to the Ground by Police." *Washington Post*, May 27, 2020.
[131] Shammas, Brittany, Timothy Bella, Katie Mettler, and Dalton Bennett. "Four Minneapolis Officers Are Fired after Video Shows One Kneeling on Neck of Black Man Who Later Died." *Washington Post*, May 27, 2020.
[132]Ibid.
[133]Ibid.

The article as a whole is a strong mixture of direct and attributed statements. The Post (unlike FOX and CNN) provides a lot of direct commentary on the subject, referencing the killings of Eric Garner, Philando Castile, and Ahmaud Arbery.[134] They bring in the Facebook video of Floyd's death, while also referencing an incident of "a white woman, Amy Cooper, who called 911 on a black birdwatcher who told her to leash her dog in New York's Central Park, telling a dispatcher that he had threatened her life."[135] This then transitions into quotes by Minnesota Senator Amy Klobuchar and Mayor Melvin Carter, the latter calling the video "one of the most vile and heartbreaking images I've ever seen."[136] The article ends by reporting on "a large crowd" of protesters, quoting a civilian, Antia Murray "who visited the scene with her 6-year-old daughter," as saying that "it's scary to come down here in the middle of the pandemic, but how could I stay away? How could any of us stay away?"[137]

The Post is heavy handed in directly presenting the sense of tragedy and **trauma** surrounding the killing, and it's around this point that their themes seem to orbit. The second article outlines this emotional base, emphasizing Floyd's **innocence** by using quotes by Frey to contradict Minneapolis PD claims that Floyd "physically resisted officers," which is found to be untrue.[138] They directly state that Floyd "was a father and a security guard," while quoting Jovanni Thunstrom who claims Floyd was "a 'brother' and a friend." This explains the presence of protests around the 3rd Precinct headquarters, where "some protesters clashed with police clad in riot gear."[139] While statements about these protests are small, only reporting on their

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[134]Ibid.
[135]Ibid.
[136]Ibid.
[137]Ibid.
[138]Ibid.
[139]Ibid.

presence and ensuing light violence, already we see ideas of a protest triggered by the death of Floyd as well as those protests featuring heightened aggression ("some protesters clashed with police").[140]

The innocence of Floyd mirrors the guilt of both Chauvin and the police, with The Post directly pointing out that Minneapolis law enforcement had "faced criticism in recent years over its use of force," while quoting Frey saying "this was not a matter of a split-second poor decision." In comparison to FOX, it is interesting how The Post maintains the presence of an explicit theme of **racism** which goes to inform a theme of **responsibility** for Floyd's death. They start, for example, by directly saying how "Floyd's death came amid a national conversation about the rush to judgment of unarmed black me, both by police and civilians."[141] The Post is then quick to compare Floyd's death to "the 2014 death of Eric Garner in New York," before directly stating that the "Minneapolis-area law enforcement has faced criticism in recent years of its use of force," and referencing the St. Anthony P.D. killing of Philando Castile. The Post goes on to reference the death of Justine Damond by a Minneapolis officer, as well as the death of Ahmaud Arbery.[142] These cases are contrasted with the speed at which Derek Chauvin and his accomplices are fired and come under investigation, a speed claimed to be a good choice.

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"Washington Post Phase 2 — Unstable Legibility"
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I find it necessary to preface this section by saying that, in comparison to both FOX and CNN, the Post's transcript of events seems remarkably more hectic. Themes will see inversions, or two contradictory themes will come to explain the same event or thing.

[140]Ibid.
[141]Ibid.
[142]Ibid.

With May 27th, focus on the transcript centers around understanding the police and, especially, Derek Chauvin. The theme of **responsibility**, either personal or systemic, is one that The Post constructs the 26th but inverts here on the 27th, completely shifting from a broadly systemic understanding of responsibility to one focused primarily on Floyd. This could be interpreted as The Post mobilizing contradictory ideas even within its own transcript as it attempts to work around shifting events in Minneapolis. Alternatively, it could mean that this research missed something. Nevertheless, from what is observed here, the theme of responsibility is destabilized on the 27th and will stay destabilized for the duration of the transcript, especially as The Post begins platforming both protesters as well as local government officials, who usually carry opposing views on the events in Minneapolis as they unfold.

The Post released two articles on the 27th, one discussing "police chiefs react[ing] with disgust" toward Floyd's death, the other, a piece on Derek Chauvin claiming he had "used fatal force before and had [a] history of complaints."[143] The first is, self-descriptively, a condemnation by various police chiefs of Chauvin's actions; the effect is distancing the police more broadly from Chauvin. The various statements by quoted police chiefs from Huston, Los Angeles, and Buffalo Grove in Illinois, are simply stated without any form of accompanying commentary (which is common in other articles by the Post but is a noticeable departure in writing style from their articles on the 26th).[144] Apart from the seemingly random selection of police chiefs quoted (some from major cities, some from more obscure areas), the narratives presented are very much in favor of the personal responsibility theme. "The officers' actions are inconsistent

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[143] Jackman, Tom. "Police Chiefs React with Disgust to Minneapolis Death, Try to Reassure Their Own Cities." Washington Post, May 28, 2020. | Hawkins, Derek. "Officer Charged in George Floyd's Death Used Fatal Force before and Had History of Complaints." Washington Post, May 30, 2020.
[144] Jackman, Tom. "Police Chiefs React with Disgust to Minneapolis Death, Try to Reassure Their Own Cities." Washington Post, May 28, 2020.

with the training and protocols of our profession," Houston Chief Acevedo is quoted as saying, while Buffalo Grove Chief Casstevens is given space to remind us that "no single incident should define an agency or the profession."[145]

The second article is a detailed investigation into Chauvin's person, focusing on his use-of-force history. It is a tense piece, in that it sets up a criticism of the police department that he was never removed for this history. Instead, the piece is a dive into Chauvin's person and only that, ending on a quote by "Serpas, the former police chief," who "noted that the vast majority of police go their entire careers without firing their service weapons, but he said Chauvin may have faced a different set of circumstances as a longtime patrol officer that required him to use his gun."[146]

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The Post's handling of the protests is equally unstable, but here, it seems to shift between two opposite extremes.

On the one hand their reporting on the unrest seems downright vitriolic. Protests are repeatedly described as "descend[ing] into disarray and looting," with "chaos [following] demonstrations."[147] Demonstrators are described as "swarming" the third precinct police station, "pour[ing] into the streets of downtown Minneapolis," while "packs of looters" break windows at stores and restaurants.[148] Focus on acts of arson and imagery like "smoky skies" are

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[145] Ibid.

[146] Hawkins, Derek. "Officer Charged in George Floyd's Death Used Fatal Force before and Had History of Complaints." Washington Post, May 30, 2020.

[147] Bailey, Holly, Brittany Shammas, and Kim Bellware. "Chaotic Scene in Minneapolis after Second Night of Protests over Death of George Floyd." *Washington Post*, May 28, 2020.

[148] Bellware, Kim, Hannah Knowles, Tom Jackman, and Annie Gowen. "'Nothing Short of Murder': After Officers Allegedly Suffocate a Suspect, Condemnation Grows." *Washington Post*, May 29, 2020. | Bailey, Holly, Brittany Shammas, and Kim Bellware. "Chaotic Scene in Minneapolis after Second Night of Protests over Death of George Floyd." *Washington Post*, May 28, 2020.

found in nearly every article dealing with the protests.[149] Minneapolis is depicted almost like a warzone. Most reports follow a general line where "peaceful protests [descended] into disarray and looting as the night wore on."[150] During the 28th, for example, focus is set on fires set across the city, a person shot and killed by a pawn shop owner, and "looters" who "ransacked a Target, Foot Locker, and nearby small businesses.[151]

When it comes to analyzing those responsible for the rioting, The Post usually relies on terminology such as "looter," "rioter," and "protester." Each of these constitute distinct categories of person. Rioters, for example, are described as burning down the Third Precinct building, making the way for looters to sift through the wreckage. Briefly, though, Police Chief Arradondo is given space to employ the **Agent Provocateur** theme, whereby peaceful protests are said to have been "'hijacked' by some protesters and those looting and vandalizing businesses."[152] But this theme is contradicted two days later on the 30th with an in-depth article which casts doubt on provocateurship claims made by different officials, concluding that "ultimately, the confusion of rioting and looting that [had] outstripped the capabilities of local law enforcement…offered little clarity and ample opportunity for opposing political parties to advance their own theories."[153] The theme seems to appear and then quickly disappear from The Post's transcript of events.

The approach to the rioting detailed so far, though, is hardly the only one. The Washington Post also features interviews and quotations from protesters, including ones that

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[149] Ibid.
[150] Ibid.
[151] Ibid.
[152] Ibid.
[153] Harris, Shane. "Officials Blame Outsiders for Violence in Minnesota but Contradict One Another on Who Is Responsible." *Washington Post*, May 31, 2020.

are in-favor of, or are at least sympathetic toward, violent unrest. This is surprising given how strongly The Post seems to feature aggressively *anti*-unrest rhetoric as described above.

For example, Published the 28th, an article on Michael McDowell, founder of Black Lives Matter Minneapolis, is quoted as openly justifying actions by protesters previously condemned by Mayor Frey. The article, "'These are folks reacting to a violent system': Minneapolis activist says the riots feel like an 'uprising'" focuses on a brief interview with McDowell, who "emphasized that he supports the violence that's unfolded at local business."[154] The Post goes on to quote McDowell as saying that "I don't think that folks are being anywhere as violent as the system has been toward them…at the end of the day, people still have their life. They can rebuild all that s---."[155] As a matter of fact, McDowell comes to be referenced multiple times in the Post's transcript, such as in the article "Protests, fires rage through the night in Minneapolis" and "Chaotic Minneapolis protests spread amid emotional calls for justice, peace." What's more, he almost always appears with the same quote: "There are folks reacting to a violent system…You can replace property, you can replace businesses, you can replace material things, but you can't replace a life."[156]

The Post, interestingly, follows up on McDowell's perspective, going on to quote C'Monie Scott, a protester, calling for prosecution of Derek Chauvin. Scott emphasizes the role the violence plays in forcing the government to follow protester demands, stating the slogan: "Cause Mayhem, Be Heard."[157] Protest leaders such as McDowell and Michelle Gross come to

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[154] Timothy Bella and Jared Goyette. "'These are folks reacting to a violent system': Minneapolis activist says the riots feel like an 'uprising.'" Washington Post, May 28, 2020
[155] Ibid.
[156] Tim Elfrink, Timothy Bella, Holly Bailey, Kim Bellware, Hannah Knowles and Jared Goyette. "Protests, fires rage through the night in Minneapolis." *Washington Post*, May 29, 2020
[157] Robert Klemko. "'A once-in-a-lifetime opportunity': Young protesters seize the chance to be heard in Minneapolis." Washington Post, May 29, 2020

blame the burnings and vandalism on social injustice and the actions of the government in enabling that injustice. A similar line is brought out by Forest McClarron, an individual present at the burning of the Third Precinct building, who strongly differentiates between protests always having "been peaceful before" as opposed to now, when it for "the first time [feels] like we're actually taking action, showing our anger."[158] McClarron argues the riots are meant to send a message that the police weren't welcome in their neighborhoods, while arguing that property destruction is unifying, rather than dividing.

With the arrival of BLM Minneapolis we are also met with a completely new theme, what I will call the **Cycle** theme. The Post includes the voice of other activists, such as Michelle Gross, "an activist affiliated with the local group Citizens United Against Police Brutality," who is quoted as blaming the local government for the unrest "by failing to address concerns of racism and misconduct by the police department."[159] Here, a cycle of violence is articulated by community members and activists in which someone is killed by police, sometimes protests or outrage start, local politicians either feign impotence or promise splendid reforms up and never beyond focus on the killing, before no promises every come through and someone is inevitably again killed by police. What's interesting about this theme specifically is that it is almost always articulated by community members and activists, going against the perspectives brought by The Post's platforming of business owners, government officials, and political figures. Neither of the two, however, are favored over the other and oftentimes appear in separate articles, meaning the relationship between either group is difficult to analyze.

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[158] Tim Elfrink and Jared Goyette. "'We're actually taking action, showing our anger': Protester justifies setting fire to police station." Washington Post, May 29, 2020

[159] Holly Bailey, Jared Goyette, Sheila Regan and Tarkor Zehn. "Chaotic Minneapolis Protests Spread amid Emotional Calls for Justice, Peace." *Washington Post*, May 29, 2020.

Continuing on during the articles from the 28th and 29th, while the Post seems ready to give voice to persons such as Jacob Frey or Police Chief Arradondo, who consistently justify police repression while bemoaning their understanding of the protests, it also gives voice to staunch criticisms of the police, usually for their actions against the protests, such as those by Ilhan Omar quoted saying that "shooting rubber bullets and tear gas at unarmed protesters when there are children present should never be tolerated."[160] But there are also more systemic critiques. In yet another inversion of their theme of responsibility, Minneapolis City Council Member Jeremiah Ellison (a voice wholly absent from the FOX transcript), gives a strong criticism of police practices on May 28th, saying that

> [we] always do this — we create a barrier, put the police out there, put them in
> a line, put face masks, depersonalize them, make them look as scary as possible
> and we always get this result, and then we want to point the finger at
> community members."[161]

This seemingly two-sided line of thinking, wherein both the police and the protesters are challenged, begins to make more sense when we contextualize what exactly is being threatened in either instance of police and civilian violence: a concept of **Community**. Both rioting and (select instances of) policing are being framed as violence against "members of our community", keyword "our".[162] A polity is being created, a sense of Minneapolis as one cohesive group toward which (excessive) police violence and violent unrest are damaging. It also comes with several underlying assumptions, namely, the existence of an overlying, pan-minneapolitan "community" that rioters are both a part of and thus, in harming, are harming themselves. This

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160 Ibid.
161 Ibid.
162 Ibid.

approach is embodied clearly in the article, "Like Trump, JFK faced riots. Here's what he did to

stop the violence in Birmingham in 1963," The Post directly states that,

> The rioters weren't Martin Luther King Jr.'s soldiers well-schooled in nonviolence,
> but rather long-suffering African Americans, scarred by the brutality regularly
> inflicted on them by police and white society, and invisible until they expressed
> their rage by torching their own community.[163]

That phrase, "torching their own community," represents a very particular conception of what

exactly a riot is. It assumes that the houses disenfranchised people of color live in and a nearby

Target occupy the same meaninged "space", i.e. are embedded in and maintain the same or

similar meanings. They are both "minneapolitan." That is, it assumes that there is one

Minneapolis with an overarching Minneapolitan identity and space that all Minneapolitans

inhabit, and that a threat to this common Minneapolis is a threat to all its inhabitants. So, when

people of color in Minneapolis burn a target, this is identical to burning their own home down.

It is from this perspective that claims such as by Police Chief Arradondo, quoted as

acknowledging "the 'trauma' and 'pain' in the community," but stating that the "department

would not tolerate unsafe behavior," come to make more sense.[164] Arradondo is backed up by

Mayor Frey, who, supporting the police, "could not run the risk of one tragedy leading to

another." In both cases, local government officials seem to be operating under a notion of a

common community—using a similar police defense theme as FOX—which is thematized within

The Post's transcript, coming to inform how the unrest is characterized and understood.

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[163] Levingston, Steven. "Like Trump, JFK Faced Riots. Here's What He Did to Stop the Violence in Birmingham in 1963." Washington Post, May 30, 2020.
[164] Ibid.

It's from this thematic "community" that a clear statement of the **Right Way**, by which police and especially protesters are held up to a particular standard of behavior, is constructed. The police are set up into the role of 'serving and protecting' and are criticized harshly not for suppressing violent unrest, but for perhaps 'going too far.' For example, The Post portrays the deployment of the national guard as next to a military takeover, describing "Thousands of National Guard troops and state and city police officers moving to aggressively — and sometimes violently — regain control of the streets, and a lockdown that has residents under curfew and has closed the major highways at night."[165]

Protesters, by contrast, are set next to a selected history of non-violence, i.e., the constructed afterimage of Martin Luther King. As mentioned, MLK is particularly prized as a historical figure, but only particular aspects of his history and person are ever evoked. Atlanta Mayor Keisha Bottoms, for instance, "This is not in the spirit of Martin Luther King Jr. This is chaos. A protest has purpose…You're not protesting anything running out with brown liquor in your hands and breaking windows in this city…Go home!"[166] I bring back here the quote from Andrea Jenkins from May 29th, that "you have every absolute right to be angry [however] you have no right to however, you have no right to perpetrate violence and harm on the very communities that you say that you are standing up for."[167] Mayor Frey, is quoted as saying that "we cannot let tragedy beget more tragedy", and Representative Ilhan Omar, claiming "violence

[165] Bailey, Holly, and Robert Klemko. "Minneapolis Has Become a War Zone." *Washington Post*, June 1, 2020.
[166] Levingston, Steven. "Like Trump, JFK Faced Riots. Here's What He Did to Stop the Violence in Birmingham in 1963." Washington Post, May 30, 2020.
[167] Holly Bailey, Jared Goyette, Sheila Regan and Tarkor Zehn. "Chaotic Minneapolis Protests Spread amid Emotional Calls for Justice, Peace." *Washington Post*, May 29, 2020.

only begets violence…more force is only going to lead to more lives lost and more devastation."[168]

While this community theme seems to provide some clarity into how The Post's transcript is structured, it still exacerbates logical tensions. What we are seeing is two lines of thinking: first, a 'community' centered *criticism* of police violence against Floyd and then police absence during the riots, existing parallel to an equally 'community' centered *endorsement* of police response toward riots which are now a threat to the community.

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This characterization of the unrest as threatening to the 'community' comes alongside a general trend in Washington Post articles favorable toward police activity, this time contextualized by the reappearance of a theme of **leadership**.

This theme first arrived on the 29th in a piece contrasting Governor Frey and President Trump. In short, Trump is quoted as referring to all protesters as thugs before threatening increased violence and military intervention, while Frey criticizes him back, justifying his order to abandon the Third Precinct before it burned by saying that "the symbolism of a building" is not worth police lives. But by the next day (and hereafter), huge sections of articles by the Post come to be dominated by coverage of Donald Trump and what the Post label as his inattentiveness.[169] Space is given to figures and events as diverse as D.C. Mayor Muriel Bowser and Turkish dictator Tayyip Erdogan, an Iranian candlelight vigil and Chinese state television

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[168] Ibid.
[169] Tim Elfrink, Timothy Bella, Holly Bailey, Kim Bellware, Hannah Knowles and Jared Goyette. "Protests, fires rage through the night in Minneapolis." *Washington Post*, May 29, 2020

broadcasts criticizing "deep social contradictions" in the United States; all of which are then contrasted to Trump, who "continued to talk tough."[170]

This theme of leadership is structured around the idea that protests and unrest occur in the absence and emotional distance of leadership. Simply put, in a direct statement and appearance of the **Police Absence** theme like that seen with FOX, the Post argues that "the people Americans have chosen to take charge in times of crisis have more often left a leadership vacuum — such as the remarkable absence of police and public officials on the streets of minneapolis in recent days."[171] This line of thinking has clear logical roots in the Posts' prior usages of the "community trauma" theme. Popular rage and grief, combined with an absence of **hope** brought about by aforementioned leadership problems, cause the "long, ugly history of American political street violence."[172] In fact, rage and hopelessness are treated as almost synonymous, and it is the job of an emotionally attentive leader to bring hope back to the population. The solution the Post represents as leaders walking among protests, "wading in tough, painful confrontations that pointed a path toward reforms."[173]

This comes to ahead with another presidential comparison, this time between Trump and Kennedy, lauded for following the compassionate, moral narrative recommended and articulated by MLK. The Post goes on to reference Atlanta Police Chief Erika Shields, who "waded into a clot of protesters and listened to their grievances."[174] Note the repeated "wading" imagery. She is described as saying "again and again, 'I'm with you.'" and "gently touch[ing] their arms." However, in such a leader's absence, there comes "the sense that no one

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170 Fisher, Marc. "Buildings Burn, and Trump Talks Tough. Where Are the Healers?" *Washington Post*, May 31, 2020.
171 Ibid.
172 Ibid.
173 Ibid.
174 Ibid.

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[is] in charge. Businesses burned to the ground. The nation watched on live TV as crowds looted liquor stores and other shops, with no pushback from the authorities." The logic is contradictory, on the one hand emotionally distant repression is needed to ensure enough "pushback" in order to prevent looting; on the other, rioting and looting happen because of emotionally distant leadership.

The result is a new characterization of the unrest to be added with the others, namely, the idea that a riot occurs in the absence of attentive leadership. That attentiveness is responsible for maintaining hope within the community and a sense of integration with the government. In the absence of this leadership, hopelessness leads to a riot defined by hopelessness and unrestrained aggression.

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"Washington Post — Phase 3?"
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I started Section 5.1 by classifying each transcript into three periods. The introduction of events, the continuous construction and reconstruction of themes, and the stabilization of the transcript around a set of apparently non-discrepant themes making the events in Minneapolis legible. The Post does not, at least within the time frame studied here, ever seem to reach this third phase. Instead, it seems to maintain a series of recurring themes but does not address discrepancies between them.

Let's look, for example, at their handling of the riots. The early morning June 1st, the post released an article titled "Mass protests and mayhem continue into a sixth night; thousands nationwide are arrested during weekend."[175] That evening, a second article describes how "FBI

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[175] Meagan Flynn, Katie Shepherd, Teo Armus, Hannah Knowles, Alex Horton and Isaac Stanley-Becker. "Mass protests and mayhem continue into a sixth night; thousands nationwide are arrested during weekend." Washington Post, June 1, 2020

charges Illinois man with rioting, handing out 'bombs' in Minneapolis."[176] The depiction of the situation is one of consistent mass violence. After a "sixth night of mass demonstrations has put government officials, law enforcement officers and protesters at odds in cities across the United States."[177] Peaceful protests are described as having "exploded into unrest and outrage in Washington" with "some demonstrators setting and feeding fires." A man is reported being shot and killed by Police during "a violent confrontation." Finally, police are reporting having "arrested about 4,100 people in U.S. cities over the weekend, according to the Associated Press, and several people have died nationwide in the protests." At this time "nearly a week after Floyd's death, it remains unclear whether tensions across the country are calming or escalating."

The morning of the next day comes an article titled "As protests nationwide continue past curfew, tension eases in some cities" and that evening, another titled "After days of unrest, Minneapolis begins to rebuild."[178] That is, unlike FOX, The Washington Post seems to follow the unfolding of events very closely, and is quick to highlight any die down in a wave of protests they have come to describe as explosive, outraged, and violent. This is underscored by another article released June 2nd—"A Minneapolis school asked people to donate food for students after looting closed stores. 'Miles of cars' lined up."—which emphasizes a sense of community and solidarity that is otherwise absent from any description of Minneapolis up until this point.[179]

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[176] Barrett, Devlin. "FBI Charges Illinois Man with Rioting, Handing out 'Bombs' in Minneapolis." Washington Post, June 2, 2020.

[177] Meagan Flynn, Katie Shepherd, Teo Armus, Hannah Knowles, Alex Horton and Isaac Stanley-Becker. "Mass protests and mayhem continue into a sixth night; thousands nationwide are arrested during weekend." Washington Post, June 1, 2020

[178] Lateshia Beachum, John Wagner, Brittany Shammas, Ben Guarino, Meryl Kornfield, Allyson Chiu and Katie Shepherd. "As protests nationwide continue past curfew, tension eases in some cities." *Washington Post*, (June 3, 2020 | Bailey, Holly. "After Days of Unrest, Minneapolis Begins to Rebuild." Washington Post, June 3, 2020.

[179]Washington Post. "A Minneapolis School Asked People to Donate Food for Students after Looting Closed Stores. 'Miles of Cars' Lined Up." June 8, 2020.

June 4ᵗʰ brings complete reversal in the portrayal of protesters for the past three days with the article "'Begging' to be heard: Young protesters implore police to acknowledge them and their cause." Here, focus is placed on Donald Trump walking indifferently past a teenager standing "in sight of the White House."

> "Where are you going?" Adam Lenssa shouted…"We're not violent. We just want to talk rational reform. Is that too much to ask for?"
> Lenssa turned his attention to the officers, who had stopped their advance…"One fist," the African American [shouted] at a black Secret Service member, raising his hand and asking the officer to do the same. "Is that too much to ask for? Do you have no heart? One fist! Please, one fist!"
> The teen sank to the ground, tears streaming down his face.
> "Please, I'm on my knees," he begged. "Please, one fist, bro. Just one."
> But the officer didn't move.[180]

"'Begging' to be heard" is a return of the **leadership** theme present in The Post's, here highlighting the emotional indifference both of Trump and his security to the plight of the protesters. It contrasts examples of violent and indifferent officers with emotionally available counterparts, which give rise to "remarkable moments of reconciliation."[181] For example, in Atlanta, "where six officers were charged for using excessive force on protesters over the weekend, a white officer in a gas mask and helmet hugged a black protester on Monday."[182] These moments are contrasted with an especially harsh tone against the police by The Post, which describes a conversation between a protester and an officer, with the latter saying that

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[180] Miller, Michael E. "'Begging' to Be Heard: Young Protesters Implore Police to Acknowledge Them and Their Cause." Washington Post, June 5, 2020.
[181] Ibid.
[182] Ibid.

they're "'people, too…this uniform doesn't turn you into a different person.[183] It's just hot and uncomfortable.'" The Post immediately then describes how "as he spoke, a woman screamed as officers tackled a black protester in the street behind Tubbs."[184]

This theme is compounded on June 8th with the article "The nexus between coronavirus and protests: 'The virus was the kindling. Police brutality lit the fire.'" which describes a population "pent up" after the coronavirus lockdown, driven to explosive fury by police brutality.[185] On the one hand, The Post remains critical of the police here, but they quickly revert back to a theme of riots as fundamentally defined by emotional outburst, dropping the emphasis on protests as rational searches for reform in the article from the 4th.

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I will end my analysis of The Washington Post here, with their definition of protest never having quite stabilized, and discrepancies still bounding between different themes of leadership, violence, and their relationship to the unrest. The Post has seemed to shift between focuses and perspectives, such as a more police or more protest oriented interpretation of the unrest, but it does not address these discrepancies. It might come to light that, upon further investigation, The Post might stabilize their transcript later — alternatively, they might be engaging in a different practice of legibility that my methodology has not taken into account. This, though, is all speculation.

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"Heated Protests over George Floyd's Death': Minneapolis according to CNN."
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[183] Ibid.
[184] Ibid.
[185] Marc Fisher, Peter Jamison and Ava Wallace. "The nexus between coronavirus and protests: 'The virus was the kindling. Police brutality lit the fire.'" *Washington Post*, June 8, 2020

The first "phase" of the CNN account of Minneapolis occurs within their opening article, "4 Minneapolis cops fired after video shows one kneeling on neck of black man who later died" released late on the 26th.[186] This phase, though, where CNN introduces its audience to George Floyd and Minneapolis more broadly, carries with it its own discrepancies which deserve focus.

The article focuses, like with FOX and the Post, on the firings of the four police officers involved in George Floyd's death, centering on the condemnations and explanatory statements presented by various figures of local government and the Minneapolis police. However, it opens with a series of four direct statements before attributions and quotations begin:

> Four Minneapolis police officers have been fired for their involvement in the death of a black man who was held down with a knee as he protested that he couldn't breathe, officials said Tuesday.
>
> The FBI is investigating the incident, which drew widespread condemnation of the officers after a video showing part of the encounter circulated on social media.
>
> The death of George Floyd, 46, drew hundreds of people to the streets of Minneapolis on Tuesday.
>
> Protesters – many wearing face masks – held "I can't breathe" signs and chanted together near the site of Monday's incident. Some motorists honked in support.[187]

These lines serve to introduce the audience to the events occurring in Minneapolis and already we see themes common to the other transcripts: the firing of officers after the killing "of a black man," a federal investigation, the death "drawing hundreds," and thus ensuing civil

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[186] Moshtaghian, Ray Sanchez, Joe Sutton,Artemis. "4 Minneapolis Cops Fired after Video Shows One Kneeling on Neck of Black Man Who Later Died." CNN, May 26, 2020.
[187] Ibid.

protests which appear to be popularly supported.[188] That is, it introduces the audience to Minneapolis through a police killing of specifically a black man as well as protests, all themes reminiscent of other police killings, such as in New York City and Ferguson. This familiarity or (grim) normalcy is not lost on CNN, though, and in another sharp turn from FOX and the Post, they openly acknowledge this connection to other killings by including the death of Eric Garner at the end of the article.

That CNN begins with direct statements before switching to platforming is a notable departure from the practices of the two other outlets. FOX's first article opens with attributed statements, while the Washington Post only made two statements before deferring to claims by Mayor Jacob Frey. Here, CNN lays out most of the background of events in Minneapolis, before quoting, John Elder (director of the office of public information for the Minneapolis PD) to explain why:

> Later in the evening, police attempted to disperse the crowds outside the Minneapolis Police 3rd Precinct after a front glass window was smashed, John Elder, director of the office of public information for the police department, told CNN.[189]

This quote by Elder lends more credence to the notion that it isn't FOX, for example, that is creating a theme of 'passive police reacting to active protesters,' but that this is rather originates with police organizations (perhaps constituting a kind of police transcript), that is structuring within the FOX transcript.

The body text proceeds from here like a running commentary. CNN is anchoring statements by the police—the four officers were "separated from employment," were

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responding to an "alleged forgery," Floyd had "physically resisted,"—around various statements

of condemnation by Mayor Frey, quoted as saying that the technique Chauvin used was "not a

technique that our officers get trained in on [sic]," that he supports the firings by Police Chief

Medaria Arradondo (who is completely absent apart from this one mention), and that the death

of Floyd "was horrible."[190] The back-and-forth includes a statement by the Police Officers

Federation of Minneapolis reminding the audience that "now is not the time rush [sic] to

(judgment) and immediately condemn our officers."[191]

CNN very heavily emphasizes characterization of Floyd's death as a tragedy, featuring

figures we've seen favored by the media before, such as Mayor Jacob Frey, but also Civil Rights

Attorney Benjamin Crump who referred to the event as an "abusive, excessive and inhumane

use of force."[192] Similarly sympathetic statements follow with St. Paul Mayor Melvin Carter and

Minnesota Senator Amy Klobuchar. None of these names appear with FOX or the Post, at least

not this early, but where CNN really differs from the other transcripts is that it underpins these

statements by ACLU Policing Policy Advisor Paige Fernandez who likens Chauvin's actions to the

"death of Eric Garner, who repeated 'I can't breathe' several times after a police officer held him

in a chokehold."[193] With the Washington Post and FOX News both giving plenty of room to police

voices calling for investigations and patience, CNN does not structure its articles around the

claims made by Police, instead regularly providing counter-commentary. What's more, they are

the *only* media source to link Floyd's death to other police killings so early in their coverage of

Minneapolis.

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[190] Ibid.
[191] Ibid.
[192] Ibid.
[193] Ibid.

Drawing together the various points detailed in their first article around the tragic death of Floyd is an implicit notion of **justice**. Floyd's death is a tragedy because he was innocent—or at least, not so guilty as to deserve death—and his death represents an unjust transgression against people of color comparable to other police killings such as the death of Eric Garner. In short, the killing is being established almost from the onset as both a transgressive and unjust action, and the result as a condemnatory tragedy. As the first focus by CNN on the coming unrest in Minneapolis the protests themselves are very simply understood and little focus is given to them. They are described as occurring due to outrage at Floyds unjust death and as being shut down by police after a window was broken. First, what this means for our purposes is that CNN will not be treating the unrest as their own unique topic, but rather one aspect of many coming out of Minneapolis; Second, the specific relation here between the protests and other themes is causal, meaning CNN is from the outside constructing the justification of the protests: emotional outrage at unjust tragedy.

— **5.141** —
*"CNN Phase 2 — the evolution of the transcript as it seeks to cover
events as they unfold."*
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This transcript is set around the unfolding of an idea of **justice** around which CNN both grapples with and explains the unrest. On the one hand, CNN defines the unrest as stemming from anger at **traumatic injustice**, on the other hand, they favor a definition of protest informed by their definition of justice (the **right way** to protest).

The 27th features two new articles from CNN: one, an analysis piece titled "There's one epidemic we may never find a vaccine for: fear of black men in public spaces," the other, an

interview with Eric Garner's Mother, Gwen Carr.[194] Both introduce a theme of **racism** later iterated in the CNN transcript, constructing an idea of justice which will characterize the unrest.[195]

In the first article, CNN connects Floyd's killing to other instances of racism, such as a Black man in Manhattan who had the police called on him by a white woman in Central Park. In the second piece, they expand on their fist article by reiterating a connection between the killing of George Floyd and that of Eric Garner, going so far as to bring up both victim's use of the phrase "I can't breathe."[196] CNN provides space for Garner's Mother to demand criminal charges for Derek Chauvin, while she pledges to "fight for accountability and justice" with the Floyd Family.[197] This, as will be evident by coming focus on the Floyd and Taylor families, comes to position the family's of the victims of police violence as active representatives of the protests. More, it brings in a theme of **injustice** and **community trauma** that police violence causes.

The theme of racism and heightened emotions bleeds into CNN defenses of Floyd's person. The network is very careful to (either directly or via platforming) distance George Floyd from any accusations of wrongdoing (such as resisting police), while emphasizing his **innocence**. This theme of victimhood continues as late as the 30th, where CNN directly pushes back against claims that Floyd wasn't killed by Derek Chauvin, quoting CNN Chief Medical Correspondent Dr. Sanjay Gupta as claiming "that the absence of physical evidence doesn't necessarily mean Floyd

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[194] John Blake. "There's One Epidemic We May Never Find a Vaccine for: Fear of Black Men in Public Spaces." CNN, May 27, 2020. | Alsharif, Mirna. "Eric Garner's Mother Says George Floyd's Death Feels like Déjà Vu." CNN, May 27, 2020.

[195] Sanchez, Ray. "George Floyd Killing Latest in String of Police Actions to Stoke Public Anger in Minnesota." CNN, May 30, 2020.

[196] John Blake. "There's One Epidemic We May Never Find a Vaccine for: Fear of Black Men in Public Spaces." CNN, May 27, 2020.

[197] Alsharif, Mirna. "Eric Garner's Mother Says George Floyd's Death Feels like Déjà Vu." CNN, May 27, 2020.

didn't die from asphyxiation."[198] At the same time, **guilt** is thrust directly onto Derek Chauvin as well as the other police officers. Floyd's death comes, through this, to embody both the unjust killing by a cop outside his assigned role—as with Mayor Frey's emphasis that Chauvin's was "not a technique that our officers get trained in on [sic]"—as well as the more systemically racist violence of police against the black community.[199]

In either instance, justice is purely *legal* justice. If Chauvin's actions were individually illegitimate, then he broke the law; if they were part of a systemic problem, the solution is through purely legal methods of reform. We see this theme of justice in two other interview-based pieces released by CNN on the 28th. The first interviews Philonise Floyd (George Floyd's Brother) while the second highlights the wider family as well as Benjamin Crump, the family's attorney who will become a recurring figure as the transcript continues. In these initial articles, CNN prioritizes definitions of justice which align with legal proceedings. This is the case for FOX and the Post, but a key difference with CNN is that these priorities they are avowedly harsher, providing space for the Floyd Family to demand Chauvin be "given the death penalty," something nearly unheard of in the other two transcripts (not showing up in the FOX transcript at all, and showing up only once with the Post, and later on in the 30th).[200] Nonetheless, CNN is clear in its construction of a definitively legal understanding of what justice is and how it might be achieved. Philonise Floyd for example (employing a clear theme of **Community Trauma**)

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[198] Sidner, Steve Almasy, Dakin Andone,Faith Karimi,Sara. "Unrest Mounts across Multiple US Cities over the Death of George Floyd." CNN, May 29, 2020.

[199] Moshtaghian, Ray Sanchez, Joe Sutton,Artemis. "4 Minneapolis Cops Fired after Video Shows One Kneeling on Neck of Black Man Who Later Died." CNN, May 26, 2020.

[200] Vogt, Adrienne. "George Floyd's Brother on Protesters: 'They Have Pain. They Have the Same Pain That I Feel.'" CNN, May 28, 2020. | Maxouris, Christina. "George Floyd's Family Says Four Officers Involved in His Death Should Be Charged with Murder." CNN, May 27, 2020. | Bellware, Kim, Hannah Knowles, Tom Jackman, and Annie Gowen. "'Nothing Short of Murder': After Officers Allegedly Suffocate a Suspect, Condemnation Grows." *Washington Post*, May 29, 2020.

states that he "doesn't want [the protesters] to lash out like that, but [can't] stop them," when questioned regarding the unrest.[201] Philonise is later quoted as "crying" for peaceful protests.[202]

The presence of calls for peace and calm, peaceful protest, mourning, legal proceedings, prosecution, and investigation from both local and federal sources all inform or are informed by CNN's concept of justice. Take for example the community trauma theme. Like defining justice as legal, defining Chauvin's actions as a trauma to 'the community' allows the definition of rioting as similarly traumatic. In fact, this happens in the third article released on the 28th, who calls the riots "the level of our oppressors," employing a theme I call the **Right Way**.[203] The "Right Way", like the "Nothing to Do With" theme prevalent in the FOX transcript, argues that rioting is not "the right way" to achieve justice and is common throughout the CNN transcript. It is, in short, defining the ability to achieve "justice" around a (non-specific) practice of peaceful protest. But it also strips the riot of any self-definition. Their cause has already been defined in relation to "justice" and so clearly, by rioting, they have come to *deviate* from justice.

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The 29th begins with a criticism of Donal Trump, directly arguing that the protests are "another test of leadership" for Trump who had spent the night before tweeting with "racist overtones."[204] This marks the start of CNN's own **Leadership** theme that they will continue to develop well into the first few days of June. Just as the riots themselves have seemed to have

[201] Vogt, Adrienne. "George Floyd's Brother on Protesters: 'They Have Pain. They Have the Same Pain That I Feel.'" CNN, May 28, 2020.
[202] Ibid.
[203] Hanna, Omar Jimenez, Nicole Chavez,Jason. "As Heated Protests over George Floyd's Death Continue, Minnesota Governor Warns of 'Extremely Dangerous Situation.'" CNN, May 27, 2020.
[204] Liptak, Kevin. "Trump Stokes Tensions over George Floyd Protests before Calling for Calm | CNN Politics." CNN, May 29, 2020.

become a backdrop for a media narrative focusing on Floyd and Chauvin, the notion of leadership will come to fill a similar foreground role going into the final days of May.

Tied to this theme of leadership is a new relationship to the police. CNN goes on to report "18 previous complaints against" Chauvin for various counts of misconduct. That article points out that the other officers, too, had a range of issues; for example, one was subject to a lawsuit for the use of "unreasonable force."[205] In all, though, the exact message is unclear. More research may be required as this could either be interpreted as focusing on Chauvin's failings as an individual police officer (i.e. a theme of **personal responsibility**), or on the police department for not firing "bad cops" (i.e. a theme of **systemic responsibility**). CNN is not directly explicit, and it is only by looking at the proximity of these articles to other recurring references to systemic problems within the CNN Transcript that I am leaning toward the latter. For example, a notion of systemic responsibility is reinforced later on once Chauvin is convicted, with CNN being quick to quote Floyd's family stating they are "angry about the charges".[206] The family's attorney points out that he and the family "are upset that Chauvin wasn't charged with a more serious offense," giving rise to a question of why such a harsher charge was reached (if not a systemic refusal to charge police for misconduct)?

This seemingly confused theme of responsibility occurs at the same time when CNN's focus moves to Kentucky. During protests for Louisville Breonna Taylor where seven were shot by an unknown assailant, Mayor Greg Fischer is given the platform to lay out a **Police Defense** theme, similar to those favored by FOX. What's interesting here is that CNN applies no

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[205] Alonso, Dakin Andone, Hollie Silverman,Melissa. "The Minneapolis Police Officer Who Knelt on George Floyd's Neck Had 18 Previous Complaints against Him, Police Department Says." CNN, May 28, 2020.

[206] Sidner, Steve Almasy, Dakin Andone,Faith Karimi,Sara. "Unrest Mounts across Multiple US Cities over the Death of George Floyd." CNN, May 29, 2020.

counter-commentary, unlike their previous treatment of police-related themes. They allow the

claim that Police went to help the victims (ironically using "tear gas to reach victims and offer

medical aid"), while further highlighting the particular relationship police have to violence by

highlighting that two police officers were hospitalized by "chest pain spurred by the events."[207]

The protest here is clearly defined by property damage and the "'fury of the protests."[208]

One potential reason for this new relationship to the police is its relationship with CNN's

developing theme of leadership. In their article "Minnesota Gov. Tim Walz tries to calm

Minneapolis after days of chaos following George Floyd killing," the news network directly

states that "Walz has faced criticism for failing to deploy the state's National Guard and use

emergency powers sooner," while quoting Paul Gazelka, the Republican Senate Majority Leader

as well as Tim Walz himself as support.[209] CNN goes on to state that Walz claims to be "taking

control away from local officials, and asked for black residents' help restoring order after rioters

set Minneapolis' third precinct police headquarters ablaze Thursday night."[210] This is followed

up by CNN claiming that "hours later, in the first full night after Walz had deployed the National

Guard, it was unclear whether any control had actually been imposed in the tense Twin Cities."

In effect, CNN itself criticizes Walz for not intervening in the riots sooner, and allows him

to effectively claim that police action against protesters is them being "there to serve."[211] This is

reflected in CNN's coverage of Walz' re-defining of the protests which goes entirely without

direct or platformed commentary. Walz, for example, says that he understands that "there is no

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[207] Riess, Madeline Holcombe, Rebekah. "7 People Shot in Protests over the Fatal Police Shooting of Breonna Taylor, Police Say." CNN, May 29, 2020.
[208] Ibid.
[209] Eric Bradner. "Minnesota Gov. Tim Walz Tries to Calm Minneapolis after Days of Chaos Following George Floyd Killing
[210] Ibid.
[211] Ibid.

trust [in the police] in many of our communities," and that "the differentiation between the Minneapolis Police department that we witnessed losing trust of [and] those [that] are there to serve is very difficult for people to make." Echoing the ideas of Le Bon, he continues saying "the situation in Minneapolis is no longer in any way about the murder of George Floyd. It is about attacking civil society, instilling fear and disrupting our great cities."

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CNN's coverage of the riots themselves, though, actually remains rather complex. On the one hand, from the start of the protests through the 30th of May, CNN has led an idea of **Emotional Protest**. Here, protests are defined by "pain and anger" which often spills over into violence.[212] Demonstrators "[funnel] their anguish in cities like Atlanta, New York and Washington into chants, signs and outbreaks of violence, smashing windows and setting vehicles ablaze."[213] This hysteric approach to the unrest follows a general trend of being steadily more unjustified, by which the trauma which defined and justified the unrest at the beginning is steadily distanced before ending with the ideas of Walz, that the unrest is "about attacking civil society, instilling fear and disrupting our great cities."[214]

Continuing into May 30th, this transition seems to be solidified by clearly demarcating the "protest" and the "unrest" or "rioting". This change is marked by articles such as "What protesters say is fueling their anger," where CNN quotes claimed "community organizers" such as Shanene Herbert, who argue that young people had "every right to be angry," that they had "experienced trauma … seeing your friends, your families and even yourself harassed by the

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[212] Sidner, Steve Almasy, Dakin Andone,Faith Karimi,Sara. "Unrest Mounts across Multiple US Cities over the Death of George Floyd." CNN, May 29, 2020.
[213] Ibid.
[214] Eric Bradner. "Minnesota Gov. Tim Walz Tries to Calm Minneapolis after Days of Chaos Following George Floyd Killing.

police and killed by the police [is] traumatic."[215] Like with business owners quoted by the Post, though, Herbert closes their statement by saying that protesters "don't know what to do with that" trauma. Payton Bowdry is also included, arguing that "riots were not part of the protests," and that "the looting and rioting wasn't in George Floyd's name."

Other quoted individuals focus on "systematic change" that needs to happen, others still focus on instances of racism and the importance of protest as a means of combating that racism, for example Leslie Redmond, president of the Minneapolis NAACP, who laid out a theme of **systemic responsibility**, claiming to have sat down with many different governors and mayors, warning that "if you keep murdering black people, the city will burn. We have stopped the city from burning numerous times, and we are not responsible for it burning now." It should come as no surprise that "systematic problems" referenced by CNN overlap with their growing criticism of poor leadership.

CNN also quotes the Rapper Killer Mike as saying that he "woke up wanting to see the world burn down yesterday because [he was] tired of seeing black men die."[216] His caveat? "We don't want to see Targets burning. We want to see the system that sets up for systemic racism burned to the ground."[217] Killer Mike is a seemingly random choice until we contextualize his statements alongside other quoted individuals such as those above as well as Atlanta Mayor Keisha Lance Bottoms, who (mimicking the Le Bonian statements of Mayor Walz) says that "this is not a protest, this is not in the spirit of Martin Luther King, Jr. … this is chaos."[218] In her opinion, "If you want change in Amerca [sic], go and register to vote ... that is the change we

[215] Murphy, Amir Vera, Paul P. "What Protesters Say Is Fueling Their Anger." CNN, May 30, 2020.
[216] Thompson, Melissa Macaya, Mike Hayes,Fernando Alfonso III,Daniella Diaz,Jessie Yeung,Steve George,Ivana Kottasová,Nick. "George Floyd Protests Spread Nationwide." CNN, May 28, 2020.
[217] Ibid.
[218] Ibid.

need in this country."[219] I bring in the seemingly disconnected quoting of "Killer Mike" because, narratively speaking, his quotation *is* seemingly disconnected. Nestled into a "Live Coverage" feed of multiple bit-sized statements and articles, his voice is treated as equal to statements by police and local government.[220] In fact, his statement is larger than some spaces afforded to official police statements. They are picking 'big names' with potentially high social value based on how well their public statements fit into the existing transcript.

What defines the coverage at this time is the sense of tragedy, of trauma informing justice, and actions from that trauma being 'unjust' by CNN's definition. Whenever the violence in Minneapolis is brought up, at least one mention is made that the speaker does not "agree with breaking into all of the businesses," yet nevertheless, they "can understand the outrage after repeated incidents [of police brutality]."[221] Each instance mentioning the riots, or any form of violence or illegality, are accompanied by some form of condemnation or disagreement. But CNN never truly condemns the unrest as a whole, as they cannot shake the general notion that the emotions underpinning and causing those riots are in all unjustified. It is for this reason that I mention figures like Atlanta Mayor Bottoms, as their quotations explicitly seek to distance the protests from their emotional justification (Bottoms also has a very unique role in the CNN transcript, specifically because she is about to become the go-to poster child for CNN's Good Leadership theme—in fact, they practically endorse her for the vice presidency).

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This trend shifts by the arrival of June, where CNN actually expands the underlying reasoning behind the protests beyond just emotional outrage, something completely without precedent

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[219] Ibid.
[220] Ibid.
[221] Holcombe, Nicole Chavez, Jason Hanna,Dakin Andone,Madeline. "Protesters Break Curfew on Another Night of Fury and Frustrations over George Floyd's Killing." CNN, May 30, 2020.

given how FOX and the Washington Post came to feature the notion of an Agent Provocateur reminiscent of Le Bon, i.e., hellbent on *violence pour violence*.

Instead, CNN seems to adopt a more **spasmodic** approach to the riot in articles such as "Pandemic, meet Protest," which develop the idea that protesters and rioters engage in riotous activities not just due to rage at injustice, but also the coronavirus and the resulting economic hardships.[222] "Throngs of people" are said to be demonstrating from a "nation cooped up for weeks over coronavirus restrictions and suffering from resulting job losses."[223] In "Pandemic, meet protest," CNN continues this line of thinking, analyzing how the "pandemic and protests collide."[224] They directly state that there "is more context to the fury" than just Floyd's death and "racism and inequality" that death "seems to prove."[225] These claims have two aspects: First, the riots are tied to economic hardship which is itself intersecting with racism; But second, if not more importantly, this racism is compounded and embodied by Donald Trump — in effect, an employment of the leadership theme found in articles released back on May 31st, one detailing the chaotic speech and violent crowd dispersal by Trump in Lafayette Square and St. John's church, the other an Opinion piece criticizing Trump's wider administration.[226]

Similar criticisms fell on Tim Walz and William Barr, both of whom argued for provocateurship as an explanation for the riots, and each claim brought forward by either figure CNN quite viciously criticizes. Walz claims that "only 20% of protesters [are] Minnesotans," so

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[222] Collinson, Stephen. "Pandemic, Meet Protest." CNN, June 1, 2020.
[223] Ibid.
[224] Ibid.
[225] Ibid.
[226] Diamond, Kevin Liptak, Alex Marquardt,Evan Perez,David Shortell,Jeremy. "60 Minutes of Mayhem: How Aggressive Politics and Policing Turned a Peaceful Protest into a Violent Confrontation | CNN Politics." CNN, June 3, 2020. | Liptak, Kaitlan Collins, Kevin. "A Serious Divide Exists among Trump Advisers over How to Address Nights of Protests and Riots in US after Floyd's Death | CNN Politics." CNN, May 31, 2020.

CNN responds that "data from the Hennepin County Sheriff's office showed that more than 80% of those booked into jail on riot and other potentially riot-related charges over the last two days were from Minnesota."[227] When Barr claims that "'voices of peaceful protest are being hijacked by violent radical elements' pursuing 'their own separate and violent agenda,'" it is CNN that directly states that these claims are made "without citing evidence."[228] This is notable as, until now, only FOX has pushed back so strongly against Provocateurship and that has largely been against figures like Tim Walz and Jacob Frey (while the claims made by figures like Trump and Barr, they usually platformed without commentary).[229]

After establishing and examining *poor* leadership, it may not be surprising that, from the 31st up to June 3rd CNN hosts a slate of articles articulating *good* leadership, focusing on the actions both by local and federal government officials as well as members of the police. The CNN article "A sheriff put down his baton to listen to protesters.[230] They chanted 'walk with us,' so he did," follows almost identical thematic beats of 'good leadership' to those found in the Washington Post, both even highlight some member of the police (their, Atlanta Chief Erika Shields, here, Michigan Sheriff Chris Swanson) joining and listening to the crowd.

CNN's article is even more blatant, though, providing space for Swanson to say that "the only reason we're here is to make sure that you got a voice – that's it," that, "these cops love you – that cop over there hugs people."[231] Swanson embodies the leader that CNN has demanded: emotionally present, engaged, non-combative, and their coverage of him matches

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[227] Holcombe, Nicole Chavez, Jason Hanna,Dakin Andone,Madeline. "Protesters Break Curfew on Another Night of Fury and Frustrations over George Floyd's Killing." CNN, May 30, 2020.
[228] Ibid.
[229] Ibid.
[230] Croft, Jay. "A Sheriff Put down His Baton to Listen to Protesters. They Chanted 'walk with Us,' so He Did." CNN, May 31, 2020.
[231] Ibid.

this tone: "'Let's go, let's go,' Swanson said as he and the cheering crowd proceeded. 'Where do you want to walk? We'll walk all night.'"[232] CNN, more so than the Post, is very direct, ending the piece by directly saying that "Saturday's event offered a welcome contrast to violent confrontations in cities across the country."[233] Another article, "Police officers are joining protesters for prayers and hugs in several US cities" released June 2nd, follows with the theme of Sheriff Swanson, this time following "in many place, [how] some officers have shown solidarity with the movement by hugging protesters, praying with them, mourning with them, and taking a knee to honor Floyd."[234] The article maintains very little commentary either in Direct Statements by CNN, or by the myriad of individuals referenced there. Instead, it simply lists 9 examples in single sentences interspersed with images, and then ends.

With a new, more spasmodic definition of riot implicated with a notion of failing leadership, it should come as no surprise that this ensuing thematic approach features not only instances of "good" leadership, but also "appropriate" forms of protest. Another opinion piece released on the 31st, "As America burns, riots play into Trump's hands," has a simple premise, "but We The People need to be bigger than the President and hold ourselves to a higher standard in pursuit of justice and peace. Because when righteous protests turn violent it is deeply self-defeating."[235] The article proceeds to reference another news network, the Intelligencer, who reported on a Princeton paper arguing that, statistically, riots push white voters away from the democratic party out of fear, whereas organized peaceful protests statistically do the opposite. Given CNN's endorsement on the Democratic party, it is

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[232] Ibid.
[233] Ibid.
[234] Silverman, Hollie. "Police Officers Are Joining Protesters for Prayers and Hugs in Several US Cities." CNN, June 2, 2020.
[235] Avlon, John. "As America Burns, Riots Play into Trump's Hands." CNN, May 31, 2020.

unsurprising that they do not include that the inciting incident for the most widespread social unrest in recent U.S. history happened due to police violence in a democratic city, under a democrat mayor, in a democratic state, with a democrat governor and a police chief who is a person of color. By all accounts, Minneapolis should have done everything right; George Floyd is still dead.

The same view is repeated as we enter into June, where CNN releases several interesting pieces. The first compares and contrasts two separate protests in Orange County, California. One along Huntington Beach protesting alongside Black Lives Matter was dispersed and declared unlawful, the other, a largely Republican protest against the beaches being closed from COVID restrictions, was mostly left alone.[236] The reason? The Huntington Beach protest "became violent with numerous assaults," police officials said. Another piece, "As America sees another night of protests and curfews, families of those killed plea for no more violence," has the families of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor calling "for protesters to abstain from violence."[237]

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From here, June 1st, the leadership theme moves its focus to national figures, or at least figures CNN seems to hope will move to the national stage. We return, for example, to the developing platform of Atlanta Mayor Bottoms with an article, "Atlanta Mayor Keisha Lance Bottoms steps into national spotlight with passionate plea to protesters", calling her a "rising star in the

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[236] Meeks, Saba Hamedy, Alexandra. "In Huntington Beach, a George Floyd Protest Was Deemed an Unlawful Assembly. A Stay-at-Home Protest One Month Ago Was Not." CNN, June 1, 2020.
[237] Maxouris, Holly Yan, Steve Almasy,Christina. "As America Sees Another Night of Protests and Curfews, Families of Those Killed Plea for No More Violence." CNN, June 1, 2020.

democratic party."[238] Bottoms "whose name has been floated as a possible vice presidential pick for presumptive Democratic nominee Joe Biden," is described as "facing a high stakes test of her leadership at home," and being joined by local figures such as "local hip hop artists, civil rights leaders, including the Rev. Bernice King, and law enforcement officials, as she mixed empathy with anger and pleaded with protesters to 'go home.'" That is, the leadership theme is fundamentally implicated in the steadily unfolding legibility of the riots, CNN for example quoting Bottoms as calling the protests as "not in the spirit of Martin Luther King, Jr."

It is a view parroted by the article "Obama condemns violence and calls for change in wake of George Floyd protests," where former-President Barack Obama says:

> Let's not excuse violence, or rationalize it, or participate in it. If we want our criminal justice system, and American society at large, to operate on a higher ethical code, then we have to model that code ourselves.[239]

Unsurprisingly, CNN ends the piece by briefly mentioning that Obama "didn't mention his successor, President Donald Trump, who has largely stoked tensions by calling protesters "thugs" and threatening violence against looters," before releasing another article, "While Trump shelters in the White House, America cries out for leadership," an hour and a half later.[240]

The 2nd of June brings Atlanta Mayor Bottoms back into CNN's spotlight as she is "trying to strike 'tough balance' between criticizing police and supporting well-intentioned ones amid protests." As Bottoms comes to argue,

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[238] LeBlanc, Gregory Krieg, Paul. "Atlanta Mayor Keisha Lance Bottoms Steps into National Spotlight with Passionate Plea to Protesters | CNN Politics." CNN, May 30, 2020.

[239] Gordon, Chandelis Duster, Allison. "Obama Condemns Violence and Calls for Change in Wake of George Floyd Protests | CNN Politics." CNN, June 1, 2020.

[240] Ibid.

I know that there are men and women who put on a uniform every day who love and care about our community. And they do it for all the right reasons…and that's the vast majority of our police officers in our city.[241]

This is a nearly identical line of thinking to a speech by Joe Biden released in an article by CNN that afternoon, where he argues that there is "no place for violence. No place for looting or destroying property or burning churches, or destroying businesses … Nor is it acceptable for our police — sworn to protect and serve all people — to escalate tensions or resort to excessive violence."[242] In Biden's view, "we need to distinguish between legitimate peaceful protest — and opportunistic violent destruction."[243]

This theme ends on June 3rd with the release of two articles. The first, "If you're planning to take part in protests, know your rights. Read this," is a Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) style article breaking down the rights and responsibilities of peaceful protesters.[244] The second, an article titled "Protesters feel joy after four former officers hit with new charges in Floyd's death." Here, three themes—leadership, justice, and the right way—collide, with CNN reporting that "protesters cheered Wednesday by news that four Minneapolis officers are now charged in George Floyd's death," while those same protesters, "also heard uplifting words from former President Barack Obama, who said their demands for justice and persistence mark a new era in America."[245] It is a simple claim: protesting 'the right way' brings 'the right results'. What is important is the way in which the article creates a link between the legal victory of charges

[241] Cole, Devan. "Atlanta Mayor Trying to Strike 'tough Balance' between Criticizing Police and Supporting Well-Intentioned Ones amid Protests | CNN Politics." CNN, June 1, 2020.

[242] CNN. "READ: Joe Biden's Remarks on Civil Unrest and Nationwide Protests | CNN Politics." CNN, June 2, 2020.

[243] Ibid.

[244] Mullery, Scottie Andrew, CNN Illustrations by Will. "If You're Planning to Take Part in Protests, Know Your Rights. Read This." CNN, June 2, 2020.

[245] Holcombe, Steve Almasy, Holly Yan,Madeline. "Protesters Feel Joy after Four Former Officers Hit with New Charges in George Floyd's Death." CNN, June 3, 2020.

against the four police officers and "uplifting words from former President Barack Obama." The article goes on to report on statements made by Tim Walz, that "America must change now," before returning to Obama urging "young African Americans to 'feel hopeful even as you may feel angry,' because he sees epic changes."

It is in this statement that we observe the culmination of the various statements of leadership presented by CNN. If, until this point, violent protest or riot was caused by rage and excess emotion and by poor leadership, strong leadership which provides a different emotional outlook, one rooted in presence and attentiveness, is presented as a proper solution.

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"CNN Phase 3 — the stabilizing of the transcript as events in
Minneapolis begin to slow down."
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I will set the rough end of the transcript on the 4th of June with the release of the article "The George Floyd protests are sparking a surprising debate in black America."[246] This is not the final article released covering the protests or even the Derek Chauvin case. Instead, it marks the point when the transcript explaining the unrest in Minneapolis largely stabilizes, namely because said unrest in Minneapolis at this point begins to come to a close.

"A surprising debate in black America," lays out several points surrounding the topic of peaceful as opposed to violent protest. First, Omar Wasow, an assistant professor of politics at Princeton and author of the study referenced in the article "As America burns, riots play into Trump's hands," returns to argue that violence "might be moral. It might be just … but it's not strategic."[247] From there, the article sets up 5 points of what "some [Black Americans] are arguing." Two of these points are merely statements by voices in support of those ideas, they

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[246] Blake, John. "The George Floyd Protests Are Sparking a Surprising Debate in Black America." CNN, June 4, 2020.
[247] Ibid.

lack any accompanying commentary by CNN or any counterarguments by other sources: "Some wonder whether white allies are hurting the cause" releases statements by Stacey Patton, a black commentator critical of insincere and damaging white performativity; the section "Some argue we shouldn't apply MLK's teach to today's black youth" references Melanye Price and Kareem Abdul-Jabbar's criticism of "using Martin Luther King as a weapon against [today's protesters]", as if "nonviolence was genetically implanted in us."[248] The irony that this is exactly what Atlanta Mayor Keisha Bottoms, a CNN favorite, is doing is not addressed.

This leaves us with three final sections: "Some are arguing nonviolent protest has not worked for black people," "Some argue violent protests will help Trump get re-elected," and "Some wonder if protests will ever change anything."[249] Each of these sections are the ones CNN has a clear mindset toward, evident from the appearance of voices which challenge the idea constructed in the sections' title, or direct commentary by CNN. The first, "nonviolent protest has not worked" uses statements by Wasow asking if "Selma, the March on Washington, the lunch counter sit-ins – that didn't work?"[250] CNN goes on to directly cite a more recent example. Former NFL quarterback Colin Kaepernick's kneeling protest against police brutality spread throughout sports and beyond and helped transform the debate about racism in law enforcement."[251] Wasow as well as his paper's lead researcher Kevin Drakulich also appears in the section "violent protests will help Trump," this time in support of the idea based on their prior research on the subject. Finally, the section "if protests will ever change anything" ends with direct commentary by CNN. Their answer? Yes.[252]

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[248] Ibid.
[249] Ibid.
[250] Ibid.
[251] Ibid.
[252] Ibid.

But as people in the black community debate how to navigate the aftermath of George Floyd's death, they received one hopeful sign this week. — Ferguson, Missouri, where Brown's death set off weeks of protests, just elected its first black mayor. — Her name is Ella Jones, and she got her start by running for city council during the 2014 unrest. — The Ferguson protests got attention. But they did more than that. —Jones is what true change looks like.[253]

CNN's stance is clear. Justice is legal action and change through local and federal government. Even when major unrest does break out, at most the result is attention, while perhaps inspiring "true change" though elected officials (provided they actually get elected).

This final article is a stable summation of the themes developed over the course of CNN's transcript of events in Minneapolis. It occurs through a commentary with themes counter to the definition of justice and acceptable protest (peaceful protest, in the style of MLK) that CNN has come to favor. The riot itself is anchored always in relation to the leadership which is responsible for quelling it. It is a link which itself is connected to CNN's conception of justice, of legality and the liberal democratic status quo. Only within this framework of legality and leadership, i.e. figures like Ella Jones, Keisha Bottoms, and Chris Swanson, is "hope" re-acquired and riots avoided (or, an effective enough leader is there to deploy an appropriate police response to quell it). It is through being implicated with the themes of justice and leadership that riot gains any sense of legibility within the CNN transcript. A riot is the failure of leadership as well as its responsibility and testing; as such, the riot, while maintaining its own hysteric and spasmodic dimensions, is understood via its relationship to the society it rebels against.

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[253] Ibid.

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"Protesters and Demonstrators; Rioters and Looters: Categorizing the Minneapolitan Crowd."

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As discussed in Section 4.2, legibility involves subjectification (the organizing of people into legible categories). Each of the examples outlined in Section 4.1 shows up here in Section 5. A focus on "murder and arson," the presence of agent provocateur "known by their acts, by their love of destruction for the sake of destruction," (Tim Walz's claims that "this is about violence"), "by their foreign accent," (local government accusations of "drug cartels" and "foreign agents" being behind the riots), "by their savage faces and their rags," (I point here to Ami Horowitz' notion of the "orgy of violence"), and the synonymy of protesters and "smugglers, dealers in [contraband], poachers, vagabonds, beggars, and escaped convicts." That these ideas continue to show up even today shows either their staying power or their repeated evolution within a state-culture such as ours. It also goes to show how understanding how the media makes rioting legible, then, entails asking how they make *rioters* legible.

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I will point out, though, that this was not a quantitative study and so I will simply be noting a few trends within my observations. FOX News by far has featured the most uses of the terms "looter" and "rioter". Of the rough 22 usages of the term "looter" within the month of May, 9 of them were featured in direct statements by FOX, whereas 4 were in quoted statements (most often by Trump) platformed by FOX. The term "riot" features most heavily in FOX headlines rather than in the body text itself. By contrast, the Washington Post directly states the term 5 times, while CNN only directly states it once, while featuring the term in quoted statements 3 times (most often, again, by Trump). The term rioter appears in 7 direct statements by FOX, and

4 quoted statements; it is used roughly three times by the Post, and is never used by CNN outside of a few quoted statements from Donald Trump.

I also observed the term "Mob" used by the Post and FOX twice directly, with FOX featuring the term another 5 times in quotations. The Post also includes the only use of the term "horde", and the term "Swarm" (including its derivations "swarmed" and "swarming") is used twice by the Post in direct statements, once by FOX, and once by CNN to describe police and national guards clearing Lafayette Square of demonstrators. In all, every news source favored the usage of the term "protester" over alternatives except for CNN, which saw prevalent use of the term "demonstrator". "Demonstrator" is also used by FOX and the Washington Post but to a lesser degree.

FOX presents distinct groups of people in Minneapolis: protesters and looters. This distinction is important, because while the term "rioter" has its own relationship with "protester", looters are always treated as a group of people whose sole purpose is taking part in mass theft. They are a "mob of people" making off "with items ranging from Tvs to clothing and even groceries."[254] Looters are described as "running rampant, smashing windows, and stealing items from popular stores," or "a bunch of thieves getting together taking advantage of a situation," and business owners are described as "plead[ing] with looters to spare [their] establishment[s]."[255] This distinction is shared by the Washington Post, who also created a definite distinction between "protesters" and "looters." While the term "looter" shows up

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[254] Michael Ruiz. "Minneapolis Protests Get Heated, Looting Reported as George Floyd Death Sparks New Outcry." Fox News. Fox News, May 27, 2020.
[255] Calicchio, Dom. "More Riots, Looting Prompt Curfews, Calls for National Guard in Cities, States across US." Text.Article. Fox News. Fox News, May 30, 2020. | Caitlin McFall, Dom Calicchio. "Cities Reeling from Violent Riots Tighten Restrictions, Implement Curfews as National Guard Deployed." Text.Article. Fox News. Fox News, May 31, 2020.

numerically fewer times in the Post's transcript, when it does show up, it is almost always within

the context of terms like "packs", "ransacking", and "hord". In fact, the Post's approach is

seemingly more vitriolic against both looters and protesters, the latter being described as

"[descending] on the City's Third precinct" and "setting fire to the structure as looters searched

smoke-filled hallways for souvenirs."[256] This connection between looting and collecting

souvenirs effectively compares looters to opportunistic tourists, disconnecting them from any

political connotations as well as the wider protests, which they are now portrayed as

parasitizing. This vitriol extends into any instance of deviation from a rigidly constructed idea of

"peaceful protest." The Post is quick to emphasize the "chaotic" nature of the unrest in

Minneapolis, with protests being described as "descending into disarray and looting," protesters

being labeled as "horde" or "swarms", while a variety of reports on arson and shooting incidents

paint a picture of incredible violence. [257]

FOX, in comparison, also favors terms such as "chaos" as well as signs of destruction and

arson. Unlike the Post, however, FOX News' approach to those responsible for this chaos is less

black and white. "Rioter" is a go-to term to describe those being violent during a protest, and

"rioters" are presented as a separate group or kind of person from "protesters," evident in

phrases such as "protesters and rioters calling for justice."[258] However, FOX also describes

protesters as engaging in violent acts, such as when saying that "Chicago police officers" were

[256] Robert Klemko. "'A once-in-a-lifetime opportunity': Young protesters seize the chance to be heard in Minneapolis." Washington Post, May 29, 2020

[257] Bailey, Holly, Brittany Shammas, and Kim Bellware. "Chaotic Scene in Minneapolis after Second Night of Protests over Death of George Floyd." *Washington Post*, May 28, 2020.

[258] Flood, Brian. "George Floyd Protests: Video Footage Goes Viral on Social Media." Text.Article. Fox News. Fox News, May 28, 2020.

"swarmed, hit and dragged by protesters."[259] In either instance, the effect is that, rather than

constructing a term such as "rioter" to attribute violence toward in the way "looter" is

constructed to attribute acts of theft and illegality relating to property, "protesters" are also

linked to violence and take on responsibility for that violence. For all intents and purposes,

rioters riot, but protesters riot, too.

This is exactly how protesters come to be described within the FOX transcript. On June

5th, FOX released an article covering documentary filmmaker Ami Horowitz entitled "'Orgy of

violence': Ami Horowitz talks to Minneapolis protesters who support looting, killing cops."[260]

The article itself is simple, only providing space to allow Horowitz to construct his argument.

Apart from the obvious factors, such as an extremely inflammatory title like "Orgy of Violence",

the Horowitz's conclusion is that, contrary to "a media narrative that tries to divorce the

violence and the protestors…they're two sides of the same coin — protesters agreed that

violence was [necessary]."[261] Even if protesters themselves are not engaging in the rioting,

Horowitz argues, they give "the anarchist rioters the air to breate [sic] -- to keep that fire

burning."[262] It should be unsurprising that Horowitz's closing statement is that:

> [The] thesis of the protests is that our country is fundamentally racist and that
> our police departments are fundamentally racist but the data doesn't support
> that thesis…These crowds and protests are trying to make out that our country
> is fundamentally racist. I find that so offensive that they would have that

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[259] Calicchio, Dom. "More Riots, Looting Prompt Curfews, Calls for National Guard in Cities, States across US." Text.Article. Fox News. Fox News, May 30, 2020.
[260] Parke, Caleb. "'Orgy of Violence': Ami Horowitz Talks to Minneapolis Protesters Who Support Looting, Killing Cops." Text.Article. Fox News. Fox News, June 4, 2020.
[261] Ibid.
[262] Ibid.

viewpoint…The truth is that they are just wrong and the data does not support

their argument.[263]

The conclusion is clear: the protests and violence are "their perverted version of Justice."

The piece features quotes from the filmmaker's research, it just so happens that every single

quote included that doesn't make some extraordinary claim in favor of the violence ("I think we

should kill them [the Police] b--tches.")[264] instead has some negative statement toward America

("If anybody's a thief, it's America").[265] Echoing Le Bon, protesters are described as "roving

bandits" and Minneapolis and other American cities are likened to "Venezuela or Africa."[266]

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Here I will contrast the above with CNN's transcript. CNN is astoundingly conservative when it

comes to the use of terms like "looter" and "rioter". Regardless of the situation, CNN will go out

of their way to use terms such as "demonstrator" and even "marcher," rather than "rioter". The

protests themselves come to be marked by "looting and arson," but the term "riot" or the

labeling of protesters themselves as "looters" or "rioters" does not often occur. Instead, CNN

will use terms such as "heated protest" or describe protests as "getting violent" or "tense". They

will accept the term "unruly" as a description but, apart from select usages, hesitate on the use

of the term "violent" or "violence", even when they report shopping carts of rocks being

brought to be thrown — keep in mind, those bringing said carts are called "demonstrators".

CNN is incredibly hesitant to use the term looter at all, only having one direct statement

using the term—when CNN described how "looters ransacked stores on the famous Melrose

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[263] Ibid. | [**Note**] It is unclear what "data" Horowitz is referring to, or how such data could conclusively rubber-stamp America as "not racist." Would we measure it in "slurs per hour"?
[264] Ibid.
[265] Ibid.
[266] Ibid.

Avenue in Los Angeles, leaving shelves bare and setting some buildings ablaze."[267] This hesitation means that, at least consequentially, while looting and theft are reported, CNN does not make the same group distinctions between someone who is protesting and is thus a protester, and someone who is looting and is thus a looter. Looting is rather kept as a part of the entire event of violent protest in a way starkly different to the word's use by The Washington Post.

"Looting" is more common than derivations on the word "riot" in direct statements by CNN, I would argue because there are fewer alternative ways of describing the kind of mass theft "looting" describes. In contrast, "riot" is often replaced with "heated protest", or protests themselves are described as "getting violent".[268] The lengths CNN will go to avoid labeling protesters as rioters are also quite far, even when their own news anchors and headquarters are harassed and damaged. The unrest during May and June of 2020 actually held two incidents of damage against CNN, one by Protesters in Atlanta, and another, by Police in Minneapolis. The contrast between how CNN articles covered these two events are telling.

The article "Arresting reporters at a protest is an affront to the First Amendment," outlines the arrest of CNN journalists on live television on May 29th, 2020.[269] In short, it is very and directly critical of the police than similar articles against protesters. The officers themselves are described as a "phalanx" and the arrest is described as "egregious" and sources such as The Committee to Protect Journalists are quoted as calling the event "simply outrageous". Other

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[267] Holcombe, Nicole Chavez, Jason Hanna,Dakin Andone,Madeline. "Protesters Break Curfew on Another Night of Fury and Frustrations over George Floyd's Killing." CNN, May 30, 2020.
[268] Hanna, Omar Jimenez, Nicole Chavez,Jason. "As Heated Protests over George Floyd's Death Continue, Minnesota Governor Warns of 'Extremely Dangerous Situation.'" CNN, May 27, 2020. | Murphy, Amir Vera, Paul P. "What Protesters Say Is Fueling Their Anger." CNN, May 30, 2020.
[269] Stelter, Brian. "Arresting Reporters at a Protest Is an Affront to the First Amendment | CNN Business." CNN, May 29, 2020.

news agencies such as MSNBC and FOX are both quoted as denouncing the arrests. In contrast, Fernando Alfonso III's article—"CNN Center in Atlanta damaged during protests"—outlines extensive actions of destruction of property committed by "protesters."[270] Every direct statement exclusively uses this term and are direct in stating what was "damaged" (also a specific term usage). The only quoted voice is that of Atlanta Mayor Keisha Bottoms who, speaking "directly to the protesters," claimed that they had "defaced the CNN Building," that "Ted Turner started CNN in Atlanta, 40 years ago because he believed in who we are as a city." In an article clearly criticizing the protesters, CNN never changes the language they use to describe protesters.

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The analysis in this section is not comprehensive. I have no doubt that more articles to study could expand the picture discussed here, or that more attention could be given to specific quotes and ideas within the articles I have studied. What this section does is both construct an approach for further research, while also exploring some of the keymost themes around which each transcript is stabilized. However, even though each has their differences, these three transcripts do have one similarity: they do not understand the riot in its terms.

— 6 —
The Practice of Making Legible
"or, the uses and consequences of projects such as this."

This project, as a practice of legibility, makes us as researchers acknowledge our own positionality. A study of riots is an inherently *political* study. Previous sociologies of rioting have already been shown to be implicated in practices of statecraft and techniques of policing. Being

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[270] Ibid.

theorists, we *have* to grapple with the fact that engaging with riots in research implicates us in what we study. We are participants in the riot, but what *kind* of participant is up to us.

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"The Hidden Transcript, or, what rioters say when we let them speak for themselves"

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It should be notable that one particular transcript is seemingly absent from the media: the rioters themselves. This absence, though, is imperfect. The Washington Post, for example, is so hectic specifically because it regularly brings in the voices of protesters who, when asked about their opinions on the violence have shown clear understanding of the meaning and ramifications of their actions. Alternatively, we can look at Ami Horowitz, however much they attack the protests. By focusing on only the most extreme quotes in order to paint a picture of a rebellious, dangerous protest, it acknowledges the existence of a violent protester who understands their actions. Horowitz quotes one as saying that "we're attacking big, known businesses like Apple, Boost ... Target, Walmart, Best Buy, all that s--t, Gucci ... Whatever the f--k you all like, you better lock your doors!" Another one refers to the looting as "slavery money ... So when we take it back or we burn it down, yeah. We're getting back what's ours. You won't give it up? Okay, you ain't having it no more."[271] As Scott notes in his own analyses, "what is particularly striking is that this is anything but an inchoate scream of rage;" it is an image of the rioting linked to a well-understood cultural history and articulate perception of right and wrong.[272] Yet, however well articulated those interviewed by Horowitz are, the normative break they represent from usually acceptable discourses means that they are still construed as an

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[271] Parke, Caleb. "'Orgy of Violence': Ami Horowitz Talks to Minneapolis Protesters Who Support Looting, Killing Cops." Text.Article. Fox News. Fox News, June 4, 2020.
[272] James C. Scott. *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts.* p.6

"inchoate scream of rage." See for example, how each of the three media outlets describes a riot as "peaceful protests that descended into disarray and looting"[273] or which "quickly escalated to outright violence and looting,"[274] or "that turned violent."[275] Even CNN, which usually avoids this approach describes how "peaceful demonstrations took a turn" or "turned to violence."[276] This, is almost word-for-word a repeat of the thinking of Hyppolit Tain, who describes riots as starting where "the beginning was the craving for bread, the end is murder and arson."[277] Scott's argument that "the political struggle to impose a definition on an action and to make it stick is frequently at least as important as the action per se," is entirely correct.[278] The media shows how, "by denying rebels the status in public discourse they seek," it enables "the authorities [to] assimilate their acts to a category that minimizes its political challenge to the state."

It also allows us to interrogate the narrative that rioters were harming their own community as we have a community member saying that "if they didn't kill a black man, their stores wouldn't get burned down" to describe the burning of Target.[279] It is *their* stores being burnt down, the stores of someone *else*. As far as this person in question is concerned, the targets of violence aren't their own. This view is hardly comprehensive, but that is the point.

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[273] Bailey, Holly, Brittany Shammas, and Kim Bellware. "Chaotic Scene in Minneapolis after Second Night of Protests over Death of George Floyd." *Washington Post*, May 28, 2020.

[274] Talia Kaplan. "Minnesota Charity Founder Speaks out on Destruction from George Floyd Riots: 'We Need Peace.'" Text.Article. Fox News. Fox News, May 31, 2020.

[275] Kaplan, Talia. "Loeffler: Georgia Riots over George Floyd's Death Have 'Got to Stop.'" Text.Article. Fox News. Fox News, May 31, 2020.

[276] Riess, Madeline Holcombe, Rebekah. "7 People Shot in Protests over the Fatal Police Shooting of Breonna Taylor, Police Say." CNN, May 29, 2020.

[277] Hippolyte A. Taine. *The Origins of Contemporary France*. P. 16

[278] James C. Scott. *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts.* p.206

[279] Parke, Caleb. "'Orgy of Violence': Ami Horowitz Talks to Minneapolis Protesters Who Support Looting, Killing Cops." Text.Article. Fox News. Fox News, June 4, 2020.

Evidence of a kind of hidden transcript is scattered throughout the media. It is included in the public transcript only in particular ways—namely, to be made legible on the public transcripts terms. What little of the hidden transcript we are able to see, though, paints a very different picture of discourse than the one we have worked with so far.

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"Constructing a Definition of Riot, or, approaching rioters as purposeful and even aware."

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This brief glimpse into the perspective of the rioters forces us to shift our view of them into self-aware, purposive actors. We cannot rely on assumptions of rioting as socially deviative (which assumes a normative society to deviate *from*) and spastic or hysteric (which deny that self-awareness). But this leaves us with a problem of how to define them.

An excellent example of this problem comes with Clark McPhail, in "The Dark Side of Purpose," where he acknowledges rioting as purposive and defines them as "the judgment that one or more persons, part of a larger gathering, are engaged in violence against person or property or threaten to so engage and are judged capable of enacting that threat."[280] McPhail lumps different kinds of people engaged in qualitatively different social relations under a common label. Under McPhail's definition, nearly all police activity must be judged as a riot. After all, most police activity involves one or more persons, part of a larger gathering, threatening to engage in violence against person or property and being capable of enacting that threat. Why then, outside of a specific instance of police officers breaking ranks, are police generally not categorized as rioters by McPhail?[281] Because police activity is socially legitimate:

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[280] McPhail, Clark. "Presidential Address: The Dark Side of Purpose: Individual and Collective Violence in Riots." The Sociological Quarterly 35, no. 1 (February 1994): p.2
[281] Ibid. p.2

only when individual officers abandon their commanders, their *orders*, do they become riotous. Only when they can thrust responsibility for their actions elsewhere, to claim that they are not *purposive* but *commanded*, are they absolved of the title "rioter" and instead called "officer."

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"Are riots actually violent?"
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McPhail is, like all social scientists, involved in a project beyond simply *la science pour la science.* Like Le Bon and Hyppolit Tain, he takes a political stance toward rioting. Defining riot as an essentially violent "disorder" is not a self-evident definition of riot. Can we really say that a race riot is equivalent to a strike? That is, after all, what such an implicit definition of riot entails. When defined by violence it seems that most often strikes are simply riots set not in urban streets but by factories.[282] Broadening the definition of riot to include hundreds of diverse social practices, while also implicating themself with perspectives antagonistic toward rioting, doesn't get us any closer to analyzing what a riot is (least of all on its own terms). Most riots involve violence, but does a gathering of many people where the primary result was not personal injury or death but damage to property a riot? McPhail and other sociologists seem to think so, labeling them "property" or "commodity riots."[283] This sentiment also seems to be shared by all of the news agencies studied in Section 5. The assumption is that "violence" is damage to *both* person *and* property; it's only through this that "commodity riots" could be labeled a "riot" in a violence-based paradigm. This is hardly self-evident. That "property damage equals violence is not a truth but the adoption of a particular set of ideas about property…involving specific

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[282] Joshua Clover. *Riot. Strike Riot.* p.10
[283] McPhail, Clark. "Presidential Address: The Dark Side of Purpose: Individual and Collective Violence in Riots." The Sociological Quarterly 35, no. 1 (February 1994): p.2

identifications of humans with abstract wealth of the sort that culminate in, for example, the legal holdings that corporations are people."[284] An overemphasis on violence also "effectively obscures the daily, systematic, and ambient violence that stalks daily life for much of the world." It assumes that society is essentially pacifistic, and violence (like a riot) is essentially intrusive.

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"The Role of Police, or, riots as practices implicated in class-struggle."

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Even if in a roundabout way, McPhail's inclusion of the police in a study of riots, even if problematic, is in some way important: why *aren't* police considered rioters? Most public definitions of riot—Oxford Languages, Merriam-Webster, Wikipedia, etc.—usually operate around the idea of a group-based violent disturbance and unless focus is placed on defining riots as explicitly anti-state or status-quo—Encyclopedia.com—or disorderly/disorganized, many police actions in any group capacity, especially protest dispersal, should be considered a riot.[285] We have already focused on how McPhail's definition doesn't exclude police, so that leaves us asking: why exactly are police so easily absolved of responsibility in escalating a nonviolent situation into a violent one?

In *Section 5*, I detailed the emergence of a theme of police reactivity, where all police action is seen solely in reaction to violence for which protesters are responsible. Violence itself is a quality assigned to protesters, even though it might be the police who are employing much better funded and supplied violence, such as using tear gas. The reason, as was so obvious with McPhail, is that police violence is not violence. Violence seems most often to have the implicit

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[284]   Joshua Clover. *Riot. Strike Riot.* p.10

[285] "Riot_1 Noun - Definition, Pictures, Pronunciation and Usage Notes | Oxford Advanced American Dictionary at OxfordLearnersDictionaries.Com." | "Definition of RIOT," April 12, 2023 | "Riot." In Wikipedia, January 11, 2023. | "Riots: Behavioral Aspects | Encyclopedia.Com." Accessed April 24, 2023.

definition of only *actually* applying to violence considered culturally illicit (which is how police actions in *Section 5* only seem to be criticized when they become in some way "illicit", such as by being overly zealous or aggressive). But what makes this so difficult is not just that the term riot comes to be a loaded term; it also allows the word to mask the role police play in a riot.

By refocusing on the police, we are forced us to reexamine rioting from the perspective of an escalating or deescalating clash between multiple sides in conflict.[286] If police can provoke and instigate riot, then rioting itself must be understood not as the actions of civilian rioters, but as something which emerges between their clash with the police. A theory of riot must also be a theory of the police. This enables us to understand riots as socially and historically situated; they cannot be viewed as socially or historically 'intrusive' *or* as just an asocial, ahistorical combination of crowds, spontaneity, and illegality. Finally, defining riots dialectically allows us to highlight *differences* between phenomena, such as working class, police, and race 'riots.' Police riots, for example, are McPhail described as effectively the breakdown of the internal structure of a police organization and the unleashing of their violence sporadically and energetically.[287] Police "riots," because the relationship of the "rioting" police to the state and legality, structures of power within police institutions, police unions, and their access to funding and equipment, cannot be understood as engaging in the same kind of riotous practice as riots performed by civilians against police. Race riots, too, must be understood as fundamentally different from other kinds or riots, not least because their relationship to a racist society at large is fundamentally different to, for example, working-class riots or riots centered around racial

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[286] Stott, Clifford, and John Drury. "Contemporary Understanding of Riots: Classical Crowd Psychology, Ideology and the Social Identity Approach." *Public Understanding of Science* 26, no. 1 (January 2017): 2–14.
[287] McPhail, Clark. "Presidential Address: The Dark Side of Purpose: Individual and Collective Violence in Riots." The Sociological Quarterly 35, no. 1 (February 1994): p.2

minorities; more concretely to the topic being discussed, so too are white race riots' relationship to the *police* different. More often than not, police seem to join in and enable race riots, rather than doing anything to stop them.[288]

We see this in our own observations. The Washington Post notes that the firing of Derek Chauvin amidst protests was a notably "quick dismissals of the officers [in] contrast with several previous high-profile incidents, including the 2014 death of Eric Garner in New York." Noting the speed at which Chauvin's actions were condemned is also seen in several other CNN and Washington Post articles. Few articles, however, seem to state the seemingly obvious point that the difference with Floyd was the sudden and powerful public outburst. However true this hypothesis is, what's important here is that this fact is not lost on the *protesters*. Violent protest is seen by its practitioners as a *practice* of retribution; importantly, one that *works*.

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"What is a Riot?"
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The definition of discourse here is meant to be broad, and as consequences leaves the borders between the "linguistic" and "material" fuzzy. For riots in particular, this is specifically important as it enables us to identify a plethora of discourses: slogans and speeches made by protesters, yes, but also the actions of the protesters themselves. Hurling a brick is discursive; we might think of it as not *essentially* different from a word. It, too, creates meaning. In a protester referring to Target as "their store" while it burns, can we really differentiate between the phrase 'that is their store' and the actual attack against that store? Can we not say that the burning itself is a discursive challenge? This is the importance I find in the brick.

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[288] Kristian Williams. *Our Enemies in Blue: Police and Power in America*. p.126

The brick is a phrase, part of a language, a *material* critique — it is the language of riot.

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James Scott, in the final chapter of his *Domination and the Arts of Resistance*, gives a small portion of his study to those rare moments when the 'hidden' transcript bursts into 'public' discourse, when the publics excluded from the hidden transcript are suddenly included. The idea of a transcript as a set of practices in relation to discrepancy falls right in line with E.P. Thompson's **Moral Economy**, a specific set of social norms and practices of class struggle. It is through the Moral Economy that Thompson describes the riot: one *practice* rooted in a set of *practices*, from beliefs about the proper order of society, to expected price of bread, to acceptable degrees and targets of violence. Discrepancy is implicit, as the moral economy is a moral economy *of the poor*, which emerges in contradiction with other moral economies. This, a focus on dialectical practices and meaning, should be the bare minimum of any theory of rioting. Current anthropologies and theories of discourse do not allow us to assume the lack of self-agency and understanding that hysteric and spasmodic ideas of rioting tacitly work under. They do not allow us to observe societies and social practices through assumed normative standards set by those societies.

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A language is a dialect with an army and a navy. The dialects of riot discussed here – from social theories and new reports – have nearly all been implicated in practices of statecraft meant to quell the riot—the armed wing of science. These dialects literally have an army and navy. In the instances that they do not, they still apply themselves exogenously *onto* the riot rather than emerging from it. Their practice is speaking over the riot rather than letting it speak for itself. This is the way that most people came to understand the events of Minneapolis.

I detailed in Section 2.2 that discourse *creates* its objects, "systematically forms the objects of which they speak."[289] This means that as researchers we are active in producing 'riot' within discourse, rather than acting as passive observers. To make a claim of what a riot is means to take a political stance. Not only that, it entails constructing a particular relationship between the researcher and the riot. The precedent is that this is relationship is one of antagonism; the riot is pathologized, categorized, and flattened, i.e., made legible, governable, available for suppression. In no way, then, is the riot understood outside its deviation from the normative expectations of the society against which it rebels. Neither is it understood as it understands itself. Studying the legibility of riots shows that the current practices working toward a 'theory of riot' are incapable of ever grasping what a riot is. They also avoid the consequences of their own research as implicated within the very practices which disparage and suppress rioting. If riot is to be understood, then, it must be understood on its own terms.

If riot is to be understood, the riot must be enabled to speak for itself.

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[289] Michel Foucault. *The Archaeology of Knowledge & The Discourse on Language*. p.49

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