

Rodney King and Gen X 20 years later

At an event last month about cross-generational workplaces, I learned that most members of any given generation are between the ages of about 10 and 15 when a national or world event that has a major impact on an entire generation hits. The event facilitators started the panel/audience discussion by listing some of the major national and world events that affected Gen X, The Millennials and the Baby Boomers, each generation represented in the room. My crew, Gen X, should remember the fall of the Berlin Wall, the start of the first Gulf War, Nelson

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Mandela's release from prison, the end of apartheid in South Africa, the O.J. Simpson verdict and Princess Diana's death. The facilitators didn't mention Rodney King. Perhaps putting him, the police acquittal or the resulting L.A. riots on the same list with O.J. Simpson would have been too much for the majority-white, professional and Millennial crowd on a business casual

evening. The symbolic fall of fascism, followed by war, then the end of legal segregation and colorism and the freedom of a great leader and racial unifier, then a "not guilty" (or maybe just "reasonable doubt") judgment on a retired pro athlete that had many African Americans celebrating and white people dumbfounded and angry, and in conclusion, the untimely death of possibly the most adored white woman on Earth. Adding to that list four white police officers found not guilty for beating a black man when the beating was caught on tape probably wouldn't inspire hap-

py feelings.

I didn't miss the Rodney King omission at the discussion — hey, I was surprised the facilitators mentioned O.J. — but in the days approaching and following the 20-year anniversary of the police officers' acquittal one week ago today, I pondered: What does it mean for Generation X to have such racially charged events sealed in our collective memory?

Ironically, I can't begin to imagine answering that question for white Gen Xers (or Korean-American or Chicano

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