Big tech companies are responding to George Floyd in a way they never did for Michael Brown

In the days since the death of George Floyd, technology's biggest companies and their leaders have made public statements expressing solidarity with Black communities. The communications — which, really, are press releases — condemn racism and call for unity. Some at least name George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and Ahmaud Arbery. Some have said "Black Lives Matter" outright.

More meaningfully, many companies have committed donations to causes fighting racial injustice in the millions of dollars.

So some of the wealthiest businesses in the world are showing up in a moment when the national attention has turned to racial injustice. But surely, they must have shown up before? It hasn't even been six years since the deaths of Eric Garner and Michael Brown spurred the protests in Ferguson, Missouri. Many of those companies' CEOs found time to publicly participate in the Ice Bucket Challenge to raise money for ALS, so surely they spared a moment to show solidarity with Black Lives Matter in 2014, right?

Let's compare the corporate response today with what was said six years ago. We researched responses to the events of 2014 through online searches, checking company newsrooms, and sweeping social media accounts.

We've updated this story with new commitments from Amazon, Apple, Google, Microsoft, and Twitter.

Amazon

2020

“We believe Black lives matter,” reads a blog post published on June 3rd. Amazon committed to donating “a total of $10 million to organizations that are working to bring about social justice and improve the lives of Black and African Americans.” Amazon’s Black Employee Network will also be given a grant to “fund local organizations that support education and racial equality initiatives in communities across the country where our employees live and work.”

On June 9th, Amazon updated the post to say it would match employee donations of up to $10,000 per employee to the 12 organizations listed in the blog.

Here is Amazon’s tweet committing to solidarity with the Black community.

On Instagram, Amazon CEO Jeff Bezos encouraged his followers to read a Medium essay by Shenequa Golding. Hours this article was first published, Bezos said that Black lives matter in response to an angry customer email he posted on Instagram.

2014

We could not find public responses from Amazon regarding the deaths of Eric Garner and Michael Brown or the Ferguson protests.

Apple

2020

Apple CEO Tim Cook announced the $100 million Apple's Racial Equity and Justice Initiative on June 11th. "The initiative will challenge the systemic barriers to opportunity and dignity that exists for communities of color and particular for the black community," Cook said in a video.

> *The unfinished work of racial justice and equality call us all to account. Things must change, and Apple's committed to being a force for that change. Today, I'm proud to announce Apple's Racial Equity and Justice Initiative, with a $100 million commitment. pic.twitter.com/AoYafq2xlp*
>
> *— Tim Cook (@tim_cook) June 11, 2020*

Cook also published an open letter, "Speaking up on racism," on Apple's website . In the letter, Cook made a number of commitments:

> *We commit to continuing our work to bring critical resources and technology to underserved school systems. We commit to continuing to fight the forces of environmental injustice — like climate change — which disproportionately harm Black communities and other communities of color. We commit to looking inward and pushing progress forward on inclusion and diversity, so that every great idea can be heard. And we're donating to organizations including the Equal Justice Initiative, which challenge racial injustice and mass incarceration.*

Cook shared a similar version of this letter to Apple employees on May 31st, where he committed Apple to matching all employee donations made for the month of June.

Cook has also tweeted twice about Minneapolis:

> *Minneapolis is grieving for a reason. To paraphrase Dr. King, the negative peace which is the absence of tension is no substitute for the positive peace which is the presence of justice. Justice is how we heal.*
>
> *— Tim Cook (@tim_cook) May 29, 2020*

> *Today, as Minneapolis gathers and the nation memorializes George Floyd, we mourn a life ended in its prime and everything it represents. We feel a duty to channel grief into action, and we hold to the hope that a single soul may yet change the world.*
>
> *— Tim Cook (@tim_cook) June 4, 2020*

> *The unfinished work of racial justice and equality call us all to account. Things must change, and Apple's committed to being a force for that change. Today, I'm proud to announce Apple's Racial Equity and Justice Initiative, with a $100 million commitment. pic.twitter.com/AoYafq2xlp*
>
> *— Tim Cook (@tim_cook) June 11, 2020*

2014

CEO Tim Cook shared a tweet from Pope Francis on the day of Michael Brown's death.

We could not find other public responses from Apple regarding the deaths of Eric Garner and Michael Brown or the Ferguson protests. In fact, here's what the Apple newsroom looks like during those dates:

Facebook

2020

Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg committed to giving “additional $10 million to groups working on racial justice” in a Facebook post on May 31st. He also noted that his philanthropic arm, the Chan Zuckerberg Initiative, has invested $40 million annually for “several years” to organizations fighting racial injustice.

Hours after this article was first published, Zuckerberg pledged his support to the Black Lives Matter movement as part of a note published to his personal Facebook page. “To members of our Black community: I stand with you. Your lives matter. Black lives matter,” he said.

2014

In a December town hall Q&A, Zuckerberg was asked about social media’s role in helping strengthen communities in the wake of Ferguson and other protests against the use of excessive police force. He shared his response publicly in a video. “I believe we do two things: give everyone a voice and provide greater diversity of perspectives,” Zuckerberg said in his post accompanying the video.

> *As the debate continues about Ferguson and the tragic death of Eric Garner, I’m often asked what role social media plays in strengthening communities. I believe we do two things: give everyone a voice and provide greater diversity of perspectives. This was a top question at our recent Townhall*

> *Q&A, and you can see my answer in the video below. Giving everyone a voice is relatively new in the world. Only in the past 10 years has the internet enabled billions of people to widely share their views and experiences. I believe that giving everyone this power is fundamental to creating more worldwide understanding. A greater diversity of perspectives is also important for creating understanding. Before the internet, we might have only gotten our news from a few TV stations or newspapers. Now we get updates from many more people and sources. If you're interested in understanding how diversity of ideas works in social networks, check out this paper that explains mathematically why you see more diverse information through social media: facebook.com/notes/facebook-data-team/rethinking-information-diversity-in-networks/10150503499618859*
>
> *Posted by Mark Zuckerberg on Wednesday, December 17, 2014*

We could not find other public responses from Facebook regarding the deaths of Eric Garner and Michael Brown or the Ferguson protests.

Google

2020

Google CEO Sundar Pichai published an email sent to Google employees on June 3rd, titled "Standing with the Black community," where he made the following "initial" commitments:

> *We'll be giving $12 million in funding to organizations working to address racial inequities. Our first grants of $1 million each will go to our long-term partners at the Center for Policing Equity and the Equal Justice Initiative. And*

> *we'll be providing technical support through our Google.org Fellows program. This builds on the $32 million we have donated to racial justice over the past five years. We'll also offer $25 million in Ad Grants to help organizations fighting racial injustice provide critical information.*
>
> *As a result of last week's internal giving campaign, I'm pleased to share that you all have contributed an additional $2.5 million in donations that we're matching. This represents the largest Googler giving campaign in our company's history, with both the largest amount raised by employees and the broadest participation.*

"We'll work closely with our Black community to develop initiatives and product ideas that support long-term solutions—and we'll keep you updated," Pichai added. "As part of this effort, we welcome your ideas on how to use our products and technology to improve access and opportunity."

Google-owned YouTube will launch a $100 million fund "dedicated to amplifying and developing the voices of Black creators and artists and their stories," the video service announced on June 11th.

Pichai also tweeted Google's solidarity with the Black community.

> *Today on US Google & YouTube homepages we share our support for racial equality in solidarity with the Black community and in memory of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Arbery & others who don't have a voice. For those feeling grief, anger, sadness & fear, you are not alone. pic.twitter.com/JbPCG3wfQW*
>
> *— Sundar Pichai (@sundarpichai) May 31, 2020*

2014

We could not find public responses from Google regarding the deaths of Eric Garner and Michael Brown or the Ferguson protests.

Microsoft

2020

Shortly after we published this story on June 5th, Microsoft pledged to donate $250,000 each to the Black Lives Matter Foundation, Equal Justice Initiative, Innocence Project, The Leadership Conference, Minnesota Freedom Fund, and NAACP Legal Defense & Education Fund.

Microsoft CEO Satya Nadella's May 28th remarks to employees about the protests in Minneapolis were . As part of those remarks, Nadella discussed Microsoft's Criminal Justice Reform Initiative, which was formally launched in 2019.

"This initiative invests in partnerships and programs working to drive reforms, focusing on policing," Merisa Heu-Weller, director of the initiative, said in a March 3rd blog post. "While we recognize that disparities exist throughout the system, we believe that by focusing on policing, and building positive relationships between police and communities, we can help keep people out of the system and reduce the disparities within it."

Heu-Weller also said that "teams across Microsoft have partnered with organizations across the United States working on criminal justice improvements" since 2014.

Nadella tweeted his support for the Black and African American community on June 1st. He has also retweeted many statements

from Black Microsoft employees shared on Microsoft's official Twitter account.

> *There is no place for hate and racism in our society. Empathy and shared understanding are a start, but we must do more. I stand with the Black and African American community and we are committed to building on this work in our company and in our communities.* ***https://t.co/WaEuhRqBho***
>
> *— Satya Nadella (@satyanadella)* ***June 1, 2020***

2014

We could not find public responses from Microsoft regarding the deaths of Eric Garner and Michael Brown or the Ferguson protests.

Twitter

2020

Twitter CEO Jack Dorsey called for "police policy reform now" in a June 1st tweet.

Dorsey also tweeted #startsmall grants to benefit Black and Brown communities, support ex-offenders, and more. Dorsey first began making #startsmall grants in April after moving $1 billion of his Square equity to an LLC to be used to fund COVID-19 relief. All of the grants made so far are tracked here.

Dorsey's Twitter thread with his most recent grants begins here:

> *More* ***#startsmall*** *grants. $134m total granted.*

> *Working on getting help to be more proactive and have a general intake form that doesn't lean on my network or established orgs that have already done the work.*
>
> *The tracking sheet, and recent orgs: https://t.co/NEvCyaBuMh*
>
> *— jack (@jack) June 11, 2020*

Twitter's @TwitterTogether account posted a Twitter thread about how people can practice allyship.

> *Racism does not adhere to social distancing.*
>
> *Amid the already growing fear and uncertainty around the pandemic, this week has again brought attention to something perhaps more pervasive: the long-standing racism and injustices faced by Black and Brown people on a daily basis.*
> *pic.twitter.com/8zKPlDnacY*
>
> *— Twitter Together (@TwitterTogether) May 29, 2020*

On June 12th, Twitter shared more information about donations and contributions it would be making toward fighting racial injustice, including a $250,000 grant split between the Equal Justice Initiative and National Association of Black Journalists and a $1 million fund to match employee donations. The tweet thread spelling out Twitter's actions starts here.

> *We've also set up a $1 million fund to match Twitter employee donations through our Allyship Right Now work and have lifted our donation cap for this campaign.*
>
> *We've already matched nearly $300,000 in employee contributions.*
> *https://t.co/w6YuJN65rO*
>
> *— Twitter for Good (@TwitterForGood) June 12, 2020*

2014

Dorsey went to Ferguson, Missouri shortly after Michael Brown's death to participate in protests, and tweeted extensively while there. At the time, he was Twitter's executive chairman, not its CEO.

We could not find other public responses from Twitter regarding the deaths of Eric Garner and Michael Brown or the Ferguson protests.

These companies may not have shown up in 2014, but given the very low bar, the fact that they have in 2020 is an encouraging sign of progress. Still, a statement of solidarity and a few donations should be just the beginning. There is the acknowledgment of racism, and then there is the ongoing work of being anti-racist.

Amazon, Apple, Facebook, Google, Microsoft, and Twitter—these companies are proud of being some of the most powerful institutions in the world, and often tout that they are making the world a better place. If they commit to their pledges of "pushing progress forward" and taking on "the fight against systemic racism and injustice," that effort could really help the Black community – or at the very least, amount to more than just promises and platitudes in a press release.

***Update June 12th, 8:24PM ET**: Added new contributions from Amazon, Apple, Google, Microsoft, and Twitter announced since the original publication of this post.*

https://www.theverge.com/2020/6/5/21281017/amazon-apple-facebook-response-george-floyd-michael-brown-tech-companies-google