These Brands Are Speaking Out Against Racism on Social Media

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When the Covid-19 pandemic hit the U.S., brands quickly stepped up to reassure frightened Americans that they were there for them. In countless campaigns, brands let the public know that they were helping by donating money, making masks and giving consumers grace periods on things like utility and mortgage payments.

But when black Americans are being killed—whether by police as is the case of Minnesota's George Floyd, who was suffocated by a white police officer that pinned him down by kneeling on his neck on Monday, or in incidents like the killing of Ahmaud Arbery, who was chased and fatally shot by three white neighbors while out on a run in his Georgia neighborhood on Feb. 23—the silence of the corporate world can be deafening.

On Friday, the American Psychological Association issued a statement calling racism a pandemic.

"We are living in a racism pandemic, which is taking a heavy psychological toll on our African American citizens. The health consequences are dire," said APA president Sandra Shullman. "Racism is associated with a host of psychological consequences, including depression, anxiety and other serious, sometimes debilitating conditions, including post-traumatic stress disorder and substance use disorders. Moreover, the stress caused by racism can contribute to the development of cardiovascular and other physical diseases."

Unlike Covid-19, however, the pandemic of racism isn't new to America. Protests against police killings of black men flood the streets of U.S. cities year after year, yet little changes. And corporations that often preach diversity and inclusion tend to remain oddly silent.

Minneapolis is still reeling today after protestors set fire to, among other buildings, a police precinct and looted a Target and other retailers. Protesters were shot on Thursday in both Louisville, where they gathered to demand justice for Breonna Taylor, a black EMT who was fatally shot in her Louisville apartment when armed white police officers came into her home after midnight looking for narcotics in March (no drugs were ever found in the apartment), and in Denver as protestors gathered demanding justice for George Floyd.

While a majority of brands remain silent, some are coming forward to align with protesters and take a firm stance against racism.

Ice cream brand Ben & Jerry's took a characteristically bold step forward on Thursday, four years after it issued a similar statement in support of Black Lives Matter protests in Ferguson, Miss., and after launching a campaign in 2019 with Lush to bail black mothers out of jail for Mother's Day.

The purpose-driven brand said in a blog post that it "understand[s] that numerous black Americans and white Americans have profoundly different experiences and outcomes with law enforcement and the criminal justice system. That's why it's become clear to us at Ben & Jerry's that we have a moral obligation to take a stand now for justice and for black lives."

While the ice cream brand's statement was less than surprising (after all, racial justice is listed as a core value on its website and Ben & Jerry's partners with Color of Change and the NAACP), it was new to see several fashion and beauty

brands speak up as well.

U.K.-based fashion line Pretty Little Thing, made famous by a partnership with Kourtney Kardashian, tweeted an image of a white hand grasping a black hand, saying in the caption that “we understand we have a duty of care to talk about topics other than just fashion and lifestyle news.” The design was quickly criticized by black Twitter users for the shade of the hand and fingernails, and the tweet was removed a few hours after it went up.

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