



The **WARC**  
**guide**

# Brand activism in the Black Lives Matter era

Guest Edited by Kai D. Wright, Lecturer, Columbia University  
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# In this Guide

## 1. The movement reaches critical mass

Beginning as a hashtag in 2013, #blacklivesmatter has slowly galvanized consumers

## 2. What consumers want brands to do

Consumers want brands to act against racial injustice in ways that go far beyond donations and social media posts

## 3. Inside out – doing work internally first

For too long, brands have failed to focus on essential diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) work; here's what to do now

## 4. Internal work inspires external work

Marketing and communications work that recognizes and exemplifies diversity resonates

## Why it matters

Although three women created the hashtag #blacklivesmatter in 2013, it wasn't until 2020 that a tidal wave of public sentiment, media attention, and brand support evolved the movement into global, mainstream, mass mobilization. From the streets to boardrooms, *Black Lives Matter* has unified consumers and employees in fighting racial inequity, demanding more accountability from CEOs, organizations, and brands themselves.

While the pace of change during 2020 has been dizzying – pandemic-induced e-commerce, work-from-home, and politics – the time

for racial equity is long overdue. This Guide helps underscore that diversity, equity, and inclusion represent business growth opportunities, with 90% of US population growth in the next thirty years coming from current minority audiences, including Black households.

This Guide offers research, inspiration, and advice on how to exercise brand accountability. Ultimately, it is a quick-start foundation for ethically activating Black Lives Matter to be relevant among, and resonate with, diverse communities by creating a new growth imperative based on their empowerment.

**Kai D. Wright, Guest Editor**

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# Takeaways

**1: The US is moving toward a majority-minority culture.** Marketers should no longer default to White culture. Non-US marketers should note the call for better representation is present in many markets, and lessons from the next wave of brand activism will be relevant globally.

**2: Black Lives Matter is bigger than messaging, affecting how brands operate internally and externally.** It's not just about posting a black square in protest on Instagram. And it's not just a multicultural issue; it's a human rights issue.

**3: Addressing racial injustice is a business imperative.** Especially in younger demographics, consumers say they will vote with their wallets and voices in terms of what brands they purchase.

**4: Brands need to accept discomfort and be prepared for polarization in addressing racial inequities.** Consumers firmly want brands to show solidarity but are torn as to what pace or scale.

**5: Ads that reflect diversity work.** They're more likely to get viewers' attention and be remembered. They show sales benefits, too.

**6: A brand purpose, alone, is not enough.** It only works when brands show true commitment and willingness to change. Visa, Levi's and P&G are committing to DEI, Visa is reviewing progress every quarter.

**7: Media budgeting overwhelmingly skews toward the general population.** Brands need to act on bringing more equity to media investment to counter racial inequity in society.

**8: Consumers prefer concrete action,** such as community investments and internal diversity.

# Six steps to move your brand toward inclusiveness



**1: Reframe business growth through a majority-minority lens.** Marketers and agencies need teams that reflect the society they create messaging for, period. If your brand's default position is reaching White people, or the "general" population, it may be time to change.

**2: Identify internal bias and work to erase it.** Bias is often hidden, but frameworks, tools – and honesty – can help root it out.

**3: Build a holistic DEI ecosystem.** Have employees, and business partners, do the same work your brand is doing, and re-evaluate everything, from recruiting to vendor diversity, casting to media investment.

**4: Determine whether you have permission to engage with a culture of diverse audiences.** Brands need to assess whether they can provide empathy, earnestness and empowerment in engaging with minority communities.

**5: Find imaginative ways to help support and nurture Black businesses and communities.** Brands have resources beyond mere money, and innovative brand activism, using all kinds of brand resources, is welcome.

**6: Publicize your progress.** As consumers and employees track your DEI progress, be open and honest about sharing it, warts and all.

# What this means for:

## Advertisers

- **Demand** diverse representation at agencies and internal teams to reflect the majority-minority reality
- **Amplify** diverse voices throughout the creative process from ideation, talent, influencers, and media
- **Plan** for the long-tail of social justice, developing programs to fight racial inequity continually
- **Partner** with minority-owned media outlets that promote socio-economic advancement and positive imagery of the Black community
- **Invest** in Black communities via partnerships, supplier diversity, recruitment, and beyond

## Agencies

- **Develop** creative briefing processes that embrace expressions of diversity
- **Promote, empower, and listen** to minority voices on teams as reflections of society and culture
- **Challenge** client assumptions, status quo, and the comfort zone for campaigns targeted towards the general population
- **Move** brands from a mindset of storytelling to story-doing.
- **Encourage** community-based marketing that activates the unique culture of groups

## Media Owners

- **Encourage** brands to sponsor content verticals that advance diversity, equity, and inclusion
- **Ensure** multicultural budgets are proportional to audience size and category spending power
- **Foster** investment in emerging markets of niche communities
- **Create** tough standards for policing hateful comments and content
- **Encourage** brands to adopt more diverse creative standards throughout the production process

Brand activism in the Black Lives Matter era

# 1. The movement reaches critical mass



## A moment accelerates a movement

The brutal death of George Floyd on May 25, 2020 was a fleeting moment, however tragic, that brought clarity to the Black Lives Matter movement. With Americans, and people throughout the world, in the middle of quarantine, the reality of what happened to Floyd could not be escaped. It rapidly accelerated public sentiment around the need for society – and brands – to address ongoing systemic racism.

Before then, only a handful of brands, such as Nike and Procter & Gamble, had been courageous enough to take a stand. But as consumers, especially young ones, demand change from those in power – including brands – brands will need to find the courage to make change.

**“Black Lives Matter – the hashtag, the phrase, in all possible permutations – is not ‘Black culture’. It is part of the bedrock upon which the American promise is built.”**

Husani Oakley

*Chief Technology Officer, Deutsch*

## Moving to a majority-minority nation

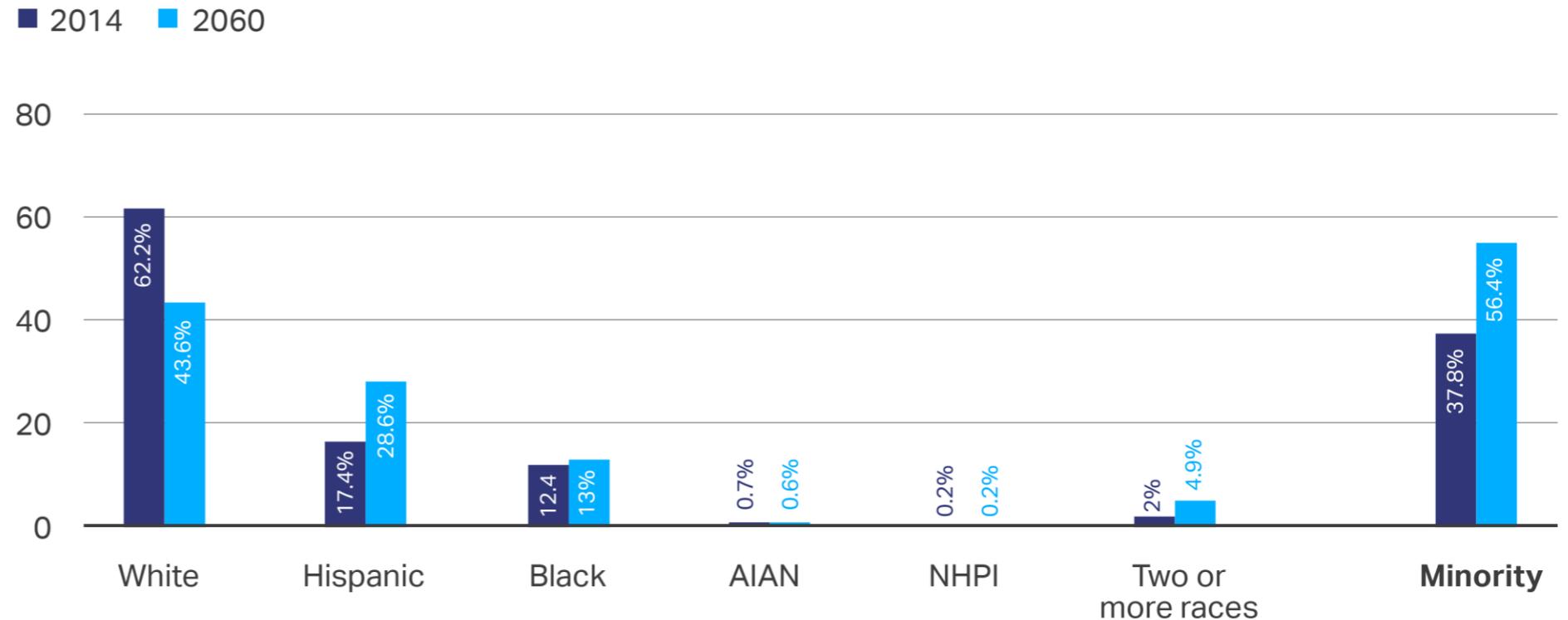
US Census data best states the business imperative case brands have to authentically, equitably and sustainably connect with minority communities.

In 2014, the US was 62% White; by 2060, that group will make up only 44% of the population.

In 2014, minorities made up 38% of the country, but by 2060 they will firmly be in the majority, at 56%.

## Distribution of US Population by Race 2014 vs. 2060

WARC<sup>^</sup>



**Note:** Percentages may not add to 100.0 due to rounding. Unless otherwise specified, race categories represent race alone. NHPI= Native Hawaiian and other Pacific Islander, AIAN= American Indian and Alaska Native. Minority refers to everyone other than the non-Hispanic White alone population.

**SOURCE:** US Census Bureau, 2014 National Projections



## Defining Black Lives Matter

**Black Lives Matter means different things to different people. While that complicates brand responses, it must be noted.**

It began when a Black woman, Alicia Garza, wrote “black people. I love you. I love us. Our lives matter” as reflection and encouragement in a Facebook post, upon the acquittal of George Zimmerman in Trayvon Martin’s death in 2013. Another Black woman, Patrisse Cullors, responded with the hashtag “#blacklivesmatter,” and yet another woman, Opal Tometi, created dedicated social media accounts to spread the word. The three women are the founders of Black Lives Matter.

But while Black Lives Matter has a massive unaided recall, 92% of the general population, according to research from WARC and Wunderman Thompson, it suffers from some blurriness in definition. Respondents called it a movement (66%), a human right (38%), a political statement (35%) and an organization (34%).

What’s a bit clearer is that consumers, especially young consumers, want brands, companies and their employers to change. What started as a hashtag in 2013 is now at a point of mass mobilization that is impossible to ignore.

## Empathy grows for BLM issues

Americans have grown more empathetic to issues facing the Black community between the deaths of Michael Brown (2014) and George Floyd (2020).

Harris Poll data across eight measures, including housing, education and wages shows more Americans feel Black people are discriminated against than six years ago.

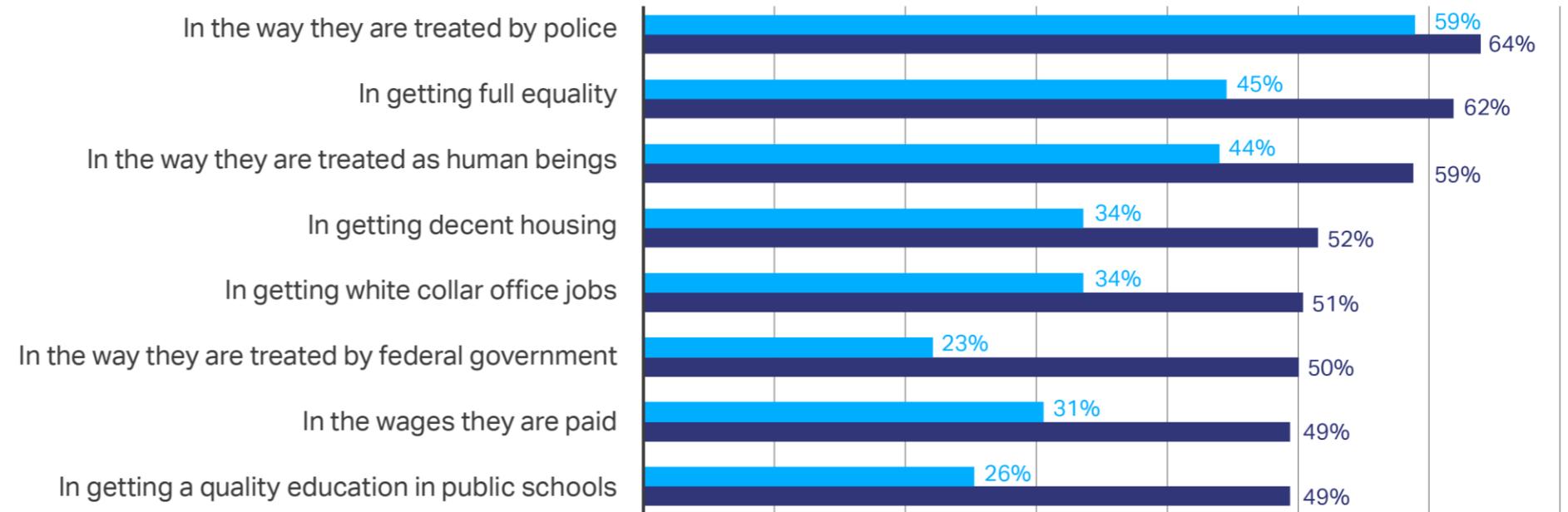
Other data, from Edelman, shows that though interest in BLM can ebb and flow, incidents of violence against Black people cause it to re-ignite.

## Increase in empathy toward Black Americans between deaths of Michael Brown and George Floyd

WARC<sup>^</sup>

*For each of the following, please indicate if you think Black people are discriminated against in that area or not*

■ 2014 ■ 2020



**Note:** Contrasted with American attitudes immediately following the killing of Michael Brown in Ferguson Mo in 2014 **Base:** Ages 18+

**SOURCE:** Harris Poll COVID-19 Tracker Wave 17, June 18-20, 2020

## Taking a stand is an obligation

How does this affect brands? According to Edelman, half the general population sees it as a moral obligation, and while Black people tend to feel somewhat more strongly than other groups, the need resonates strongly across ethnicities.

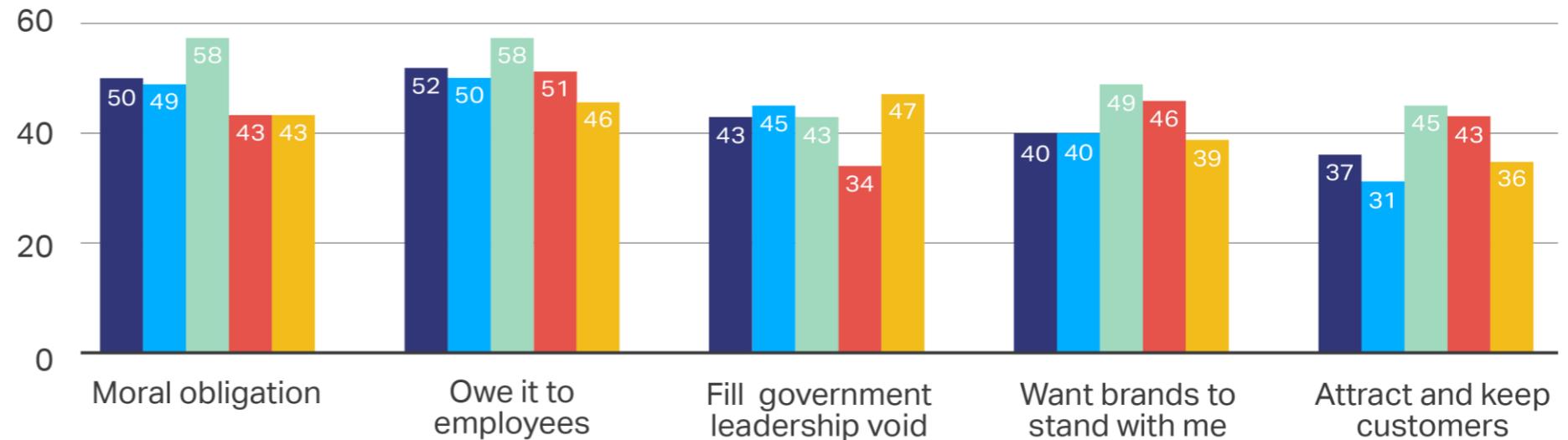
It also resonates across rationales (and countries). That said, attracting and keeping customers is the least important reason for a brand to take a stand, even as other research says consumers will vote with their wallets.

## For many, taking a stand is seen as a moral and societal obligation for brands

*Consumers cite many reasons why brands should speak out when it comes to racial injustice*

WARC<sup>^</sup>

■ General population ■ White ■ Black ■ Latinx ■ Asian American



**Note:** Q3. Why do you believe that brands and companies should publicly speak out against systemic racism and racial injustice following the death of George Floyd and other recent racially motivated attacks on Black people? Pick all that apply. Question asked of those who believe brands should speak out against racism and racial injustice (Q2/1). General population, U.S. and Non-Hispanic White, Black, Latinx and Asian American populations.

**SOURCE:** [2020 Edelman Trust Barometer Special Report: Brands and Racial Justice in America](#)



## Ben & Jerry's: Mixing its platform with partnership

For some firms, confronting racial injustice is new territory. Fortunately, there are a few progressive brands that can provide a roadmap for others to follow. What they share is a strong brand purpose and often a history of addressing social issues.

Ben & Jerry's has three intertwining missions – Economic, Social and Product. Its Social Mission: "To operate the Company in a way that actively recognizes the central role that business plays in society by initiating innovative ways to improve the quality of life locally, nationally and internationally."

That statement, written decades before Black Lives Matter, presages it, and the brand's attention to justice go back through its history.

One example: In 2019, it launched Justice ReMix'd ice cream, with proceeds supporting the Advancement Project National Office, a civil rights group. The brand sees its role as identifying and amplifying causes. "Ben and Jerry's are not the experts in most of the topics that we support," explains CEO Matthew McCarthy. "We partner with the NGOs who really are the experts."

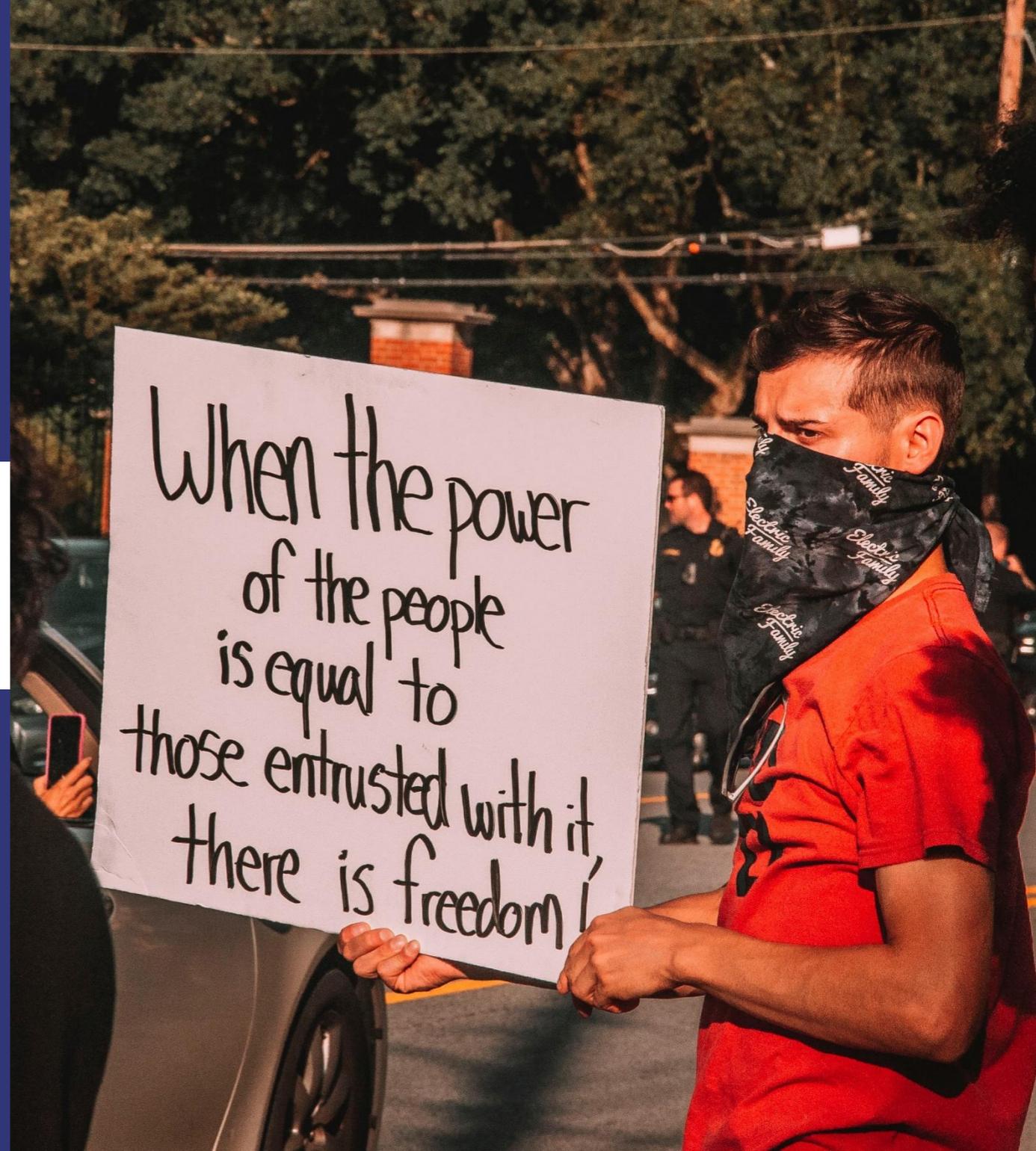
**“You have to demonstrate some level of empathy if you want to get involved. Turning your profile into a black box on Instagram didn’t mean much, but at least it said, ‘I hear you.’ That’s a start, now what?”**

**Keith Cartwright**

*President, Chief Creative Officer, Cartwright*

Brand activism in the Black Lives Matter era

## 2. What consumers want brands to do



# Consumers expect a lot from brands

Addressing racial injustice has facets that touch every aspect of society. Discrimination is everywhere – from “The Look” Black men are often faced with, documented in the Procter & Gamble spot of the same name, to housing and wages.

This chapter is about what consumers expect brands to do in the face of racial injustice. Their demands run the gamut, including investing in Black businesses, standing in solidarity, and using their resources – whether its through content, money or broad reach – to amplify Black voices and messages.

**“Organizations cannot afford to ignore ‘the 2020 effect.’ COVID-19 and the brutal death of George Floyd have created a more conscious and demanding public. It is no longer only employees who are expecting organizations to create inclusive teams that invest in and build Black talent.”**

**Felicia Scott**

*Diversity Coach and Consultant*

## Donations are just one solution

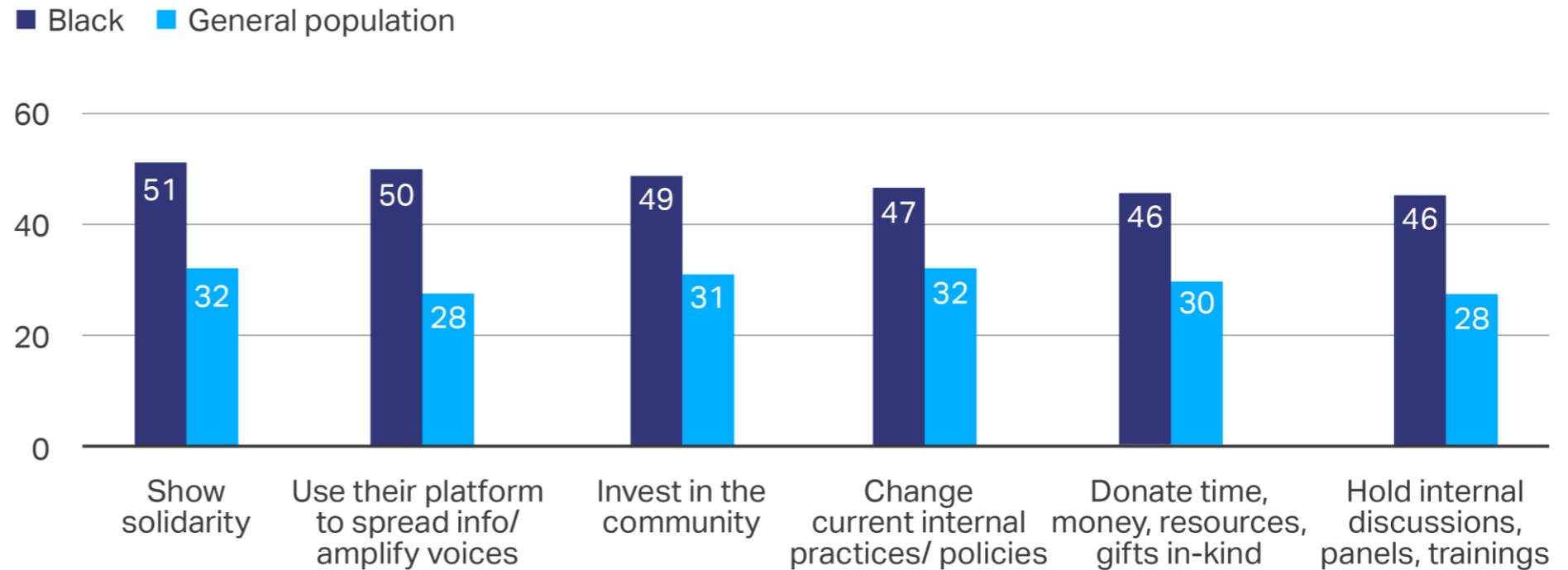
Donations are a mainstay of brands' charitable responses, but this movement is not really about that. It's about combatting racism systematically, and it shows up in what consumers expect from brands.

They want racial issues addressed externally *and* internally. Black people feel these sentiments even more deeply, but for all who see a role for brands, solving this problem requires many solutions.

## Consumers are less supportive of brands making donations to solve racial inequity

*Would prefer to see brands show solidarity, amplify, invest (%)*

WARC<sup>^</sup>



**Note:** B= N= 500 Black/ African American US adults, age 18+, nationally representative. GP= N= 1,006 Gen Pop (including Black) sample US adults, age 18+, nationally representative

**SOURCE:** WARC, Wunderman Thompson of 1006 U.S. adults 18+, from Sept 3 – 9. Sample generously provided by Prodege.

## Consumers will act & influence

In a society riddled with boycotts and cancel culture, many consumers say they have started or stopped using a brand because of its response to racial injustice. While this is most true of black people, at least a third of those in other groups say they have done so. (The data doesn't cover whether consumers approved or disapproved of the brand's stance.)

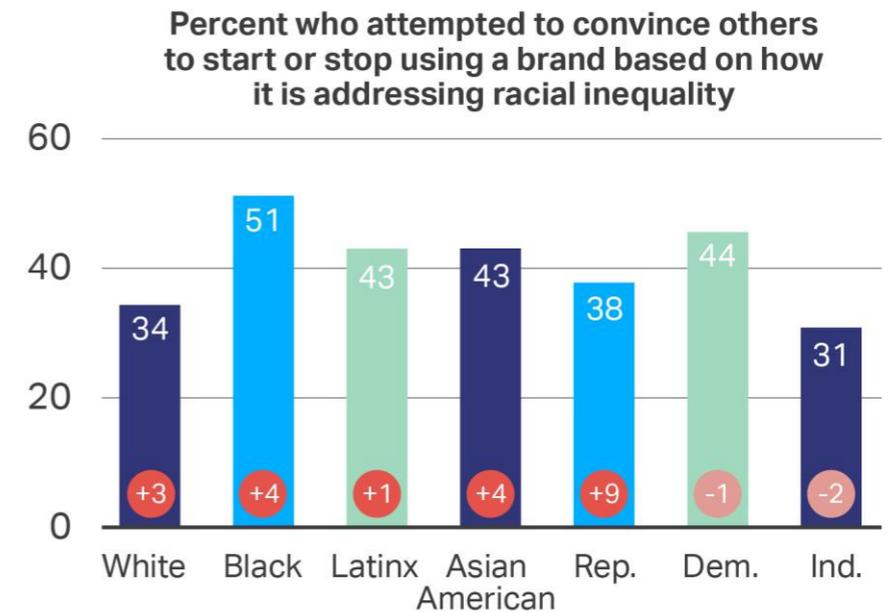
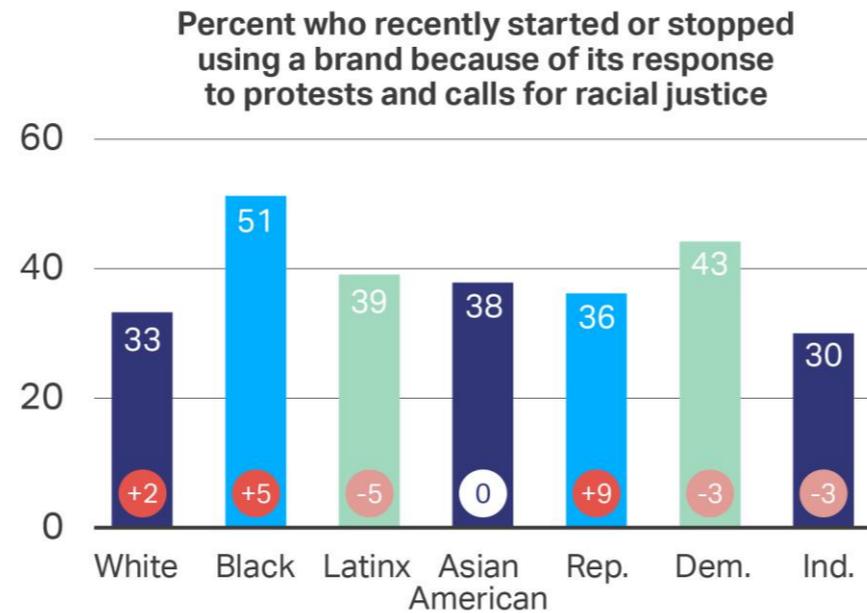
Consumers are also using their influence to convince others to either stop or start using a brand based on how a brand is reacting.

## Consumers engage with brands – or not, based on how they address racial injustice

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*More than a third of consumers have taken action based on a brand's approach to combatting racial injustice – and they influence others to act in the same way*

● Change, Aug 21 to Aug 31



**SOURCE:** 2020 Edelman Trust Barometer Special Report: The Fight for Racial Justice in America

## P&G: A 360° approach

Procter & Gamble has garnered accolades for advertising including “The Talk,” “The Look” and “The Choice” that view the world through a Black person’s eyes. But its work is comprehensive, and has ratcheted up following the killing of George Floyd.

The company has developed a roadmap for racial equality focusing on creative, media and education.

## A look at P&G’s racial-equality roadmap

WARC<sup>^</sup>

### Creative

- Ensure the creative supply chain fully represents people of color.
- Review advertising to ensure it accurately and respectfully portrays Black people – and all people.

### Media

- Commit to investing in Black-owned businesses in the media and marketing supply chain.
- Review content in which advertising appears to ensure it accurately and respectfully portrays Black people – and all people.

### Education

- Study race and racism and how it has shaped and impacted people – especially Black Americans.
- Reflect on your own experiences with race and equality.
- Talk through complex problems around race.

**SOURCE:** [Procter & Gamble steps up to tackle systemic racism with marketing action](#), WARC Events Report, Lions Live, June 2020

**“It is now inescapably clear that we have a responsibility to reinvent ourselves ... from brands and companies that are all about themselves to brands and companies that step up as both a force for growth and a force for good.”**

**Marc Pritchard**

*Chief Marketing Officer, Procter & Gamble*

## How to use your brand's resources to address racial injustice

*Recruiting, amplifying, training and investing – all are ways for brands to ally with Black people*

**WARC**<sup>^</sup>

### Recruit

Focus on recruiting efforts that will result in diverse teams.

### Review

Review media choices and advertising for their accuracy and respect in portraying Black people.

### Donate

Donate to racial justice groups – or look for organizations that are closely tied to your brand.

### Train

Train employees, particularly leaders, on anti-racism and racial equity.

### Amplify

Amplify Black voices using your platforms, as some brands and social media influencers have been doing.

### Stock

The 15 Percent Pledge asks retailers to allocate 15% of shelf space to Black-owned businesses.

### Assess

Look for signs of bias not only internally, but also in how you cast and create.

### Invest

Provide mentorship, training and capital to Black people and Black-owned businesses.

**SOURCE:** WARC





## Nike: The backlash is the point

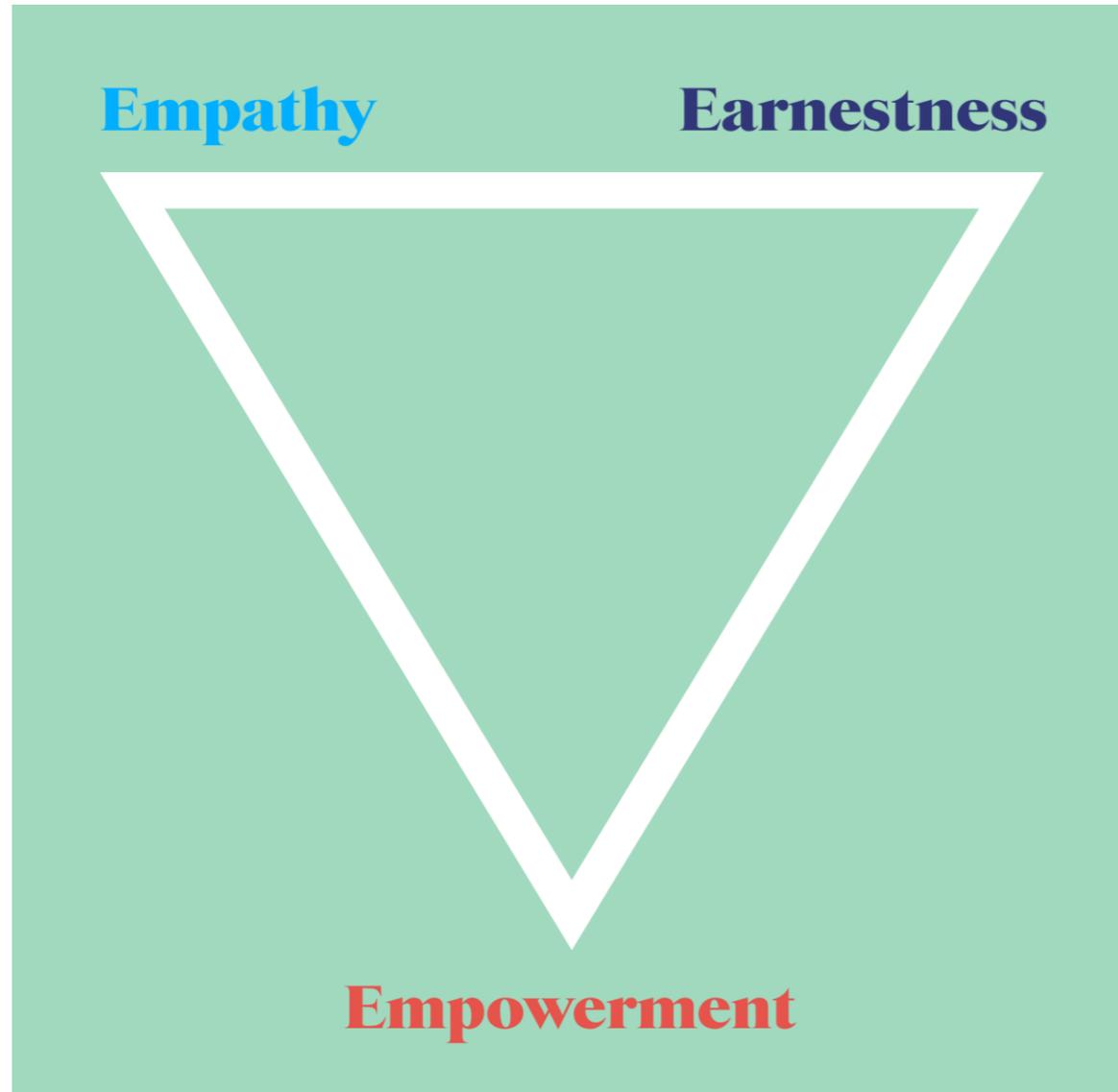
**Probably more than any other American brand, Nike exemplifies the fact that taking a stand isn't easy. But in Nike's case, the backlash is the point.**

Colin Kaepernick, a long-time Nike endorser, was the first NFL player to take a knee during the national anthem in protest of police brutality against Black people. In standing by him, Nike wasn't only antagonizing some consumers, it was also going up against the NFL, which Nike also works with. Nike re-upped its contract with Kaepernick in 2018 and has not backed down from its support.

Gino Fisanotte, Nike vp/brand, told *The New York Times*, "We believe Colin is one of the most inspirational athletes of this generation, who has leveraged the power of sport to help move the world forward."

Moving the world forward isn't usually a brand KPI, but Nike's steadfastness has changed minds. As more NFL players have become activists, the NFL now fully backs its players.

And, though Nike suffered a short-lived retrenchment in its stock after the campaign ran, it has climbed more than 50% since then.



## Is your brand prepared to engage?

**Polarizing issues are difficult for most brands, and when it comes to a movement like Black Lives Matter, brands may wonder whether they even have permission to engage.**

WARC Guide Guest Editor Kai D. Wright suggests brands can take a “Culture-Ethics Test,” focusing on empathy, earnestness and empowerment, to ensure they can equitably engage with the community they are trying to reach. Ideally, a team would answer all of the following questions during the creative briefing or strategy stage:

**Be earnest:** How do you demonstrate you’re committed to the community you want to engage with? Can you make the appropriate time commitment to this community?

**Deliver empowerment:** What are the everyday barriers and struggles for this community? What would this community consider the “good life?”

**Show empathy:** How does this community see the world? Who are the voices that the community trusts?

Brand activism in the Black Lives Matter era

### **3. Inside out – doing work internally first**



# Looking inward is essential for brands

Now for the hard part: for brands, the most crucial aspect of fighting racial injustice is taking an uncomfortable look at how and whether their organizations truly represent a diverse world.

Most will fall short, because most brands are late to support #blacklivesmatter and affirm solidarity. And, part of the complexity of the issue is that consumers have high expectations for brand accountability.

Some companies have a diverse workforce, but may find that most minority groups are low-level employees. Others may have a workplace rife with unseen and unaddressed bias. Whatever the internal issues, the work still needs to be done, with the ultimate goal for brands being creating marketing and messaging that reflects the world as it actually is.

**“Combating racial injustice doesn’t start with marketing efforts, but with building brands and organizations that first recognize that it can only be resolved by looking deep internally.”**

Monique Nelson

*Chairman/CEO, UWG*

## Much work to be done

September 2020 data from the 4As underscores that an enormous amount of work needs to be done for marketing to become a diverse industry.

Less than 6% of the industry identifies as Black or African-American, and only 4% are vice president or higher, excluding C-suite roles.

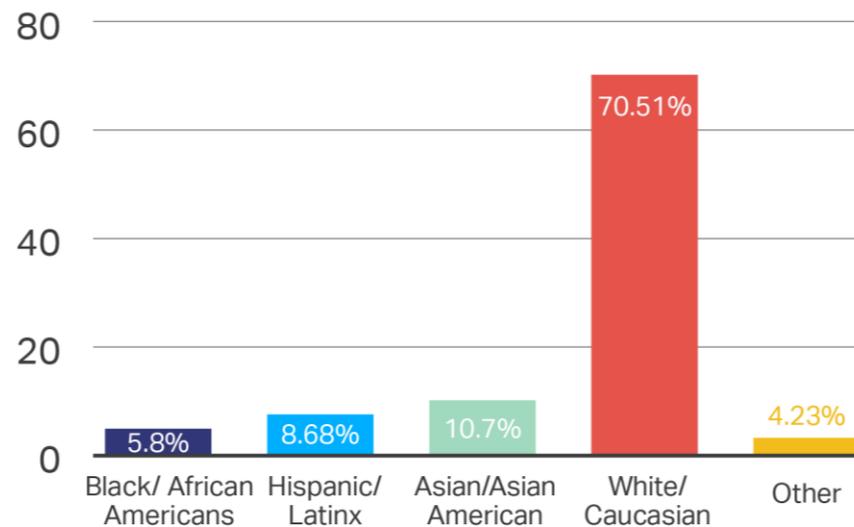
CEO Marla Kaplowitz told *Forbes*: "I'm just going to go out and say it: the data sucks. ... let's just all recognize that until we acknowledge the problem, we can't move forward and drive solutions."

## Diversity among US advertising agencies lags

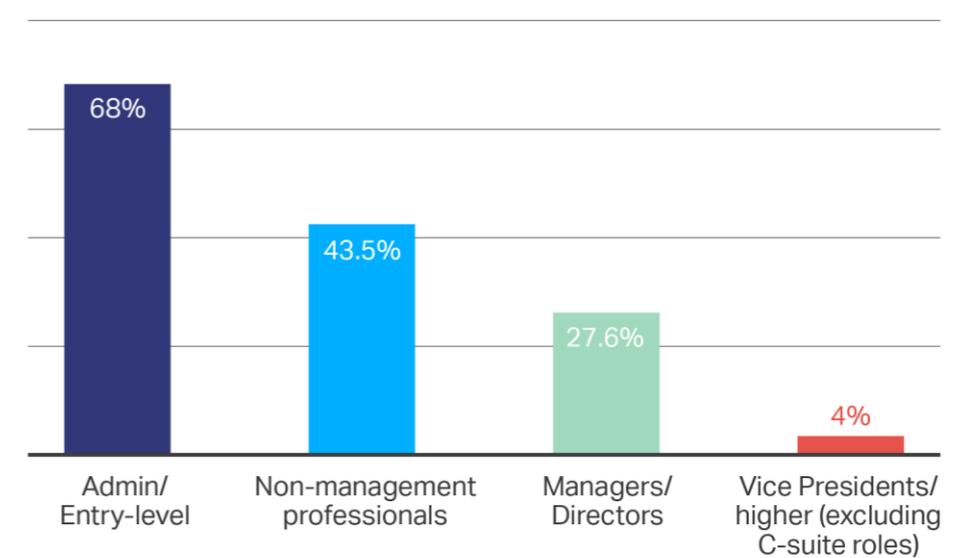
*Black and African-American people make up less than 6% of total, two-thirds are in junior positions*

**WARC**<sup>^</sup>

Percentage of employees from different ethnic groups



Percentage of Blacks or African-Americans at each job level



**SOURCE:** 4As, September 2020

## Inequality is vast

As is the case among ad agencies, Black and Hispanic populations are vastly under-represented among marketers.

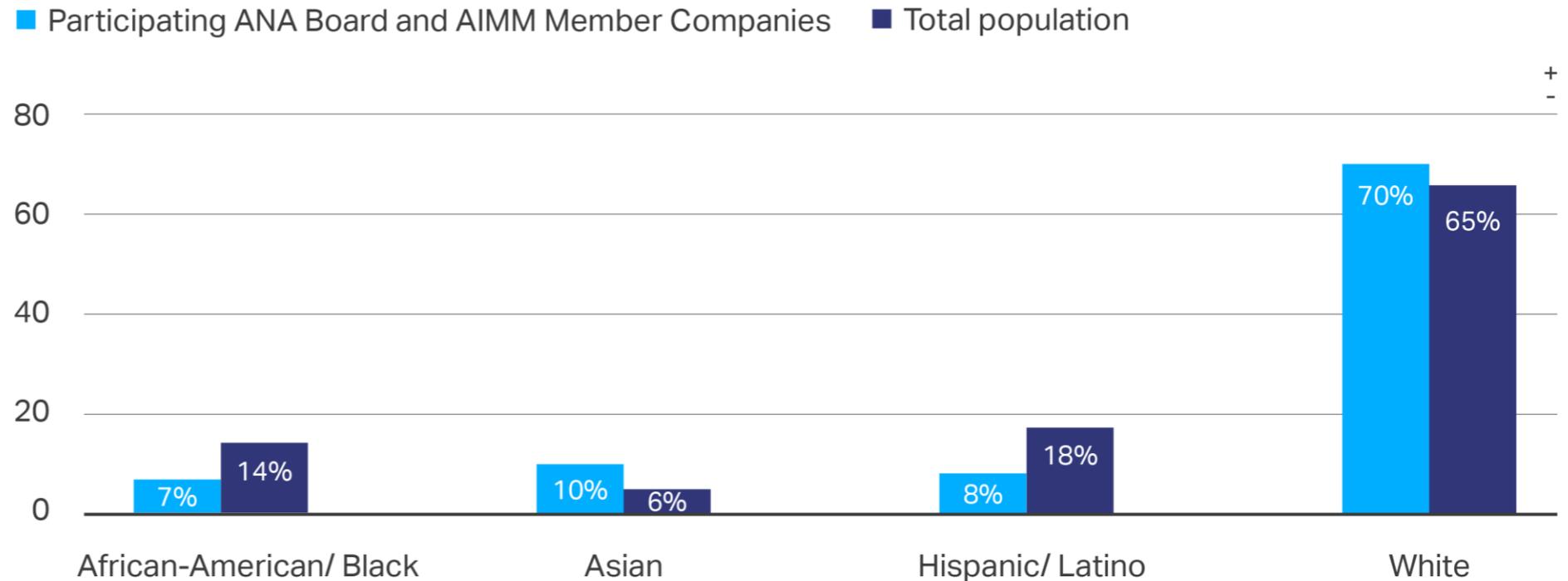
People who identify as African-Americans or Black make up 7% of the employees at ANA/AIMM member companies, but are 14% of the total population.

Hispanics/Latinos make up 8% of the staff at member companies, but are 18% of the total population.

## Among marketers, Whites overwhelmingly dominate

*Based on share of total population, the industry should employ at least twice as many African-Americans/Blacks and Hispanics/Latinos*

WARC<sup>^</sup>



**SOURCE:** Association of National Advertisers/Alliance for Inclusive and Multicultural Marketing Diversity Report, November 2019; U.S. Census

## Getting your house in order

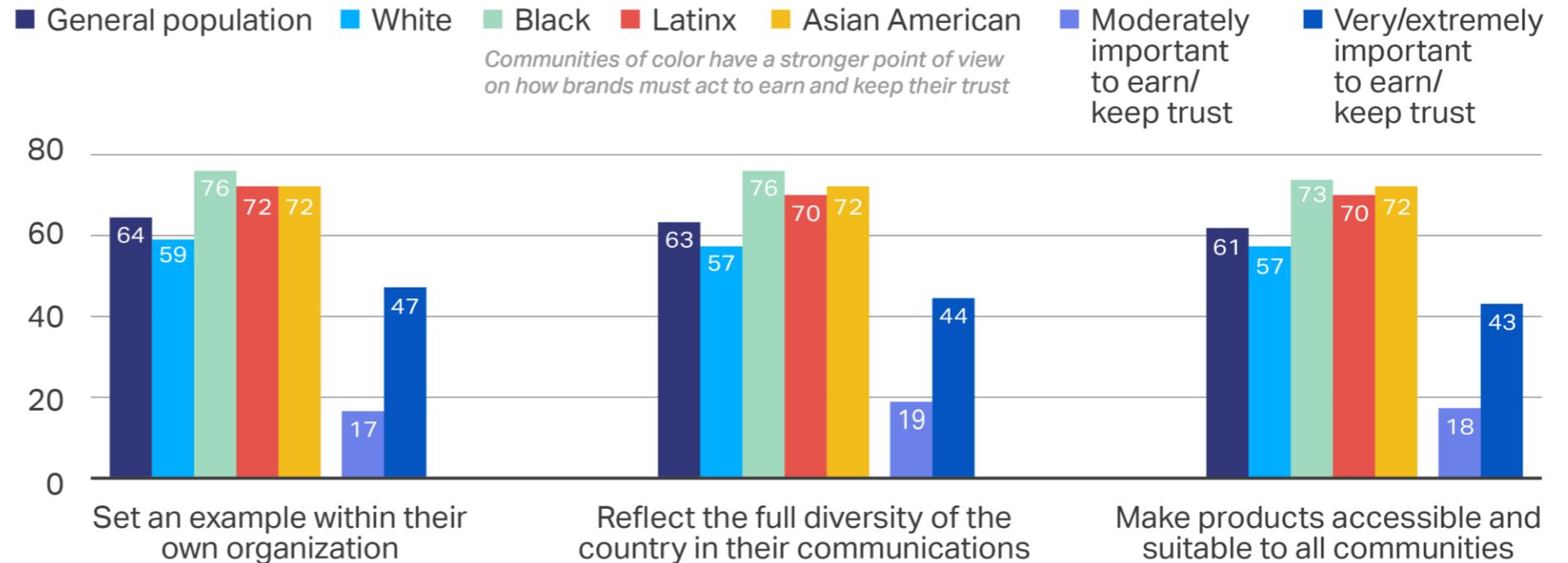
Consumers view trust as multi-faceted when it comes to combatting racial injustice.

The majority of consumers see this as moving from inward-looking concerns to outward-looking ones, with strong majorities – regardless of ethnicity – saying brands need to set an example within their own organization, reflect the diversity of the country in their communications, and make products accessible and suitable for all.

## Brands must get their own house in order

*Elements brands need to address touch on every part of their organizations*

**WARC**<sup>^</sup>



**Note:** Q4. In general, how important is it to earning or keeping your trust that brands or companies do each of the following in response to systemic racism and racial injustice following the death of George Floyd and other recent racially motivated attacks on Black people? 6-point scale; code 4, moderately important; codes 5 and 6, very/extremely important. General population, U.S. and Non-Hispanic White, Black, Latinx and Asian American populations.

**SOURCE:** 2020 Edelman Trust Barometer Special Report: Brands and Racial Justice in America

## Methods for rooting out internal bias

Here are ways to examine microaggressions, coded language, and prejudice in AI bias, according to Diversity Coach and Consultant Felicia Scott.

**Microaggressions:** Everyday slights, indignities, put-downs and insults often experienced by marginalized groups.

**How to address:** As offenders often beg ignorance, educate and establish policy, putting the onus on the offender instead of the victim. Provide employees with accountability frameworks and pathways for addressing microaggressions to foster individual confidence and build trust in the organization and HR.

**Coded Language:** Closely related to microaggressions, this is the use of double meanings and phrases, such as when a leader says someone is “too urban” or “lacks polish” for a more senior role.

**How to address:** Identify and call out terms and phrases used in your organization. Require users explain their perceptions in a more measurable way and require feedback employees can use to address the perceived development gap.

**AI bias:** This happens when an algorithm is developed on bias data input, [due to errors in the machine learning process](#). In the context of hiring, this can give a false sense of security that hiring is free from bias.

**How to address:** AI is only as good as its data, so vet and explore it for unconscious bias. There is no substitute for hearing the voices and opinions of diverse people in the room when hiring decisions are being made.

## Watch out for White blindness

One of the first things White executives need to realize is that they may not be seeing what's going on within their own organizations.

According to The Center for Talent Innovation study "Being Black in Corporate America," two-thirds of Black people say they need to work harder in their jobs than White people if they want to advance.

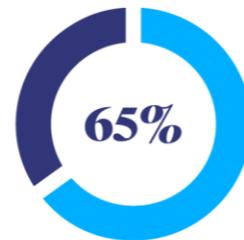
That's a huge issue, but it's even more problematic – and a red flag in terms of internal bias – that White people just don't see it.

## Black people see problems with their advancement, but White people don't notice it

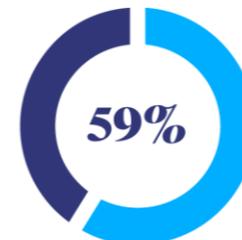
*Approximately 85% of White executives do not perceive that Black colleagues need to work much harder to get ahead*

WARC<sup>^</sup>

■ Black ■ White



Overall



Men



Women

SOURCE: "Being Black in Corporate America", Center for Talent Innovation, December 2019

## Visa: Employing allyship

Allyship has become enough of a buzzword that it can obscure how helpful it is to have allies in positions of power.

Visa has a detailed strategy for addressing racial injustice in the US, including robust internal goals for providing meaningful opportunities for Black employees.

## Visa's plans for more meaningful internal opportunity

*With an initial emphasis on the Black community, and later rollout to other under-served groups, here is Visa's roadmap for increasing opportunity*

**WARC**<sup>^</sup>

### Expand

under-represented employees, VP level and above, by 50% in three years

### Boost

under-represented employee levels by 50% in five years

### Create

a career-development program for Black talent

### Ensure

diverse candidate slates for new roles

### Introduce

enhanced mentorship and sponsorship programs

### Establish

a dedicated team to attract diverse talent

### Review

progress on diversity and inclusion quarterly

### Invest

\$10 million in a Visa Black Scholars and Jobs Program

**SOURCE:** [How Visa is helping tackle racial injustice with marketing, transparency and powerful conversations, WARC Exclusive, September 2020](#)

**“I would say allyship really comes (down to) being able to use your privilege and your capital – whether that’s actual financial capital, it’s political capital, social capital – on behalf of another group that doesn’t have that opportunity.”**

Matt Story

*Senior Director, Global Innovation Strategy, Visa*

**WE MUST DO BETTER.**

## Levi's: Transparency is painful but necessary

**Even brands that pride themselves on their progressivism often fall short on diversity. Levi's is being transparent about its progress, and vows to do better.**

In the wake of George Floyd's death, Levi's joined #stopphateforprofit and released a statement in support of BLM. It also took a close look at its diversity and it revealed an ugly truth: what looked like a representative organization on the surface – White (37%), Hispanic or LatinX (28%), Black (18%) – was actually skewed heavily toward White people.

In a blog post revealing those statistics, the clothing manufacturer said: "... a cursory examination reveals a tiered system within our company: Black people make up only 5% of our corporate staff, and Black representation plummets at each level of our corporate structure." Black people mostly work in retail, distribution centers and lower-level corporate jobs.

"Our ultimate goal is for the racial makeup of our US corporate employees and leadership at least match that of the United States," the blog post said.

**“Teams should reflect  
the society they create  
messaging for, period.”**

Husani Oakley

*Chief Technology Officer, Deutsch*

Brand activism in the Black Lives Matter era

## **4. Internal work inspires external work**



# The outcome is more relevant marketing

Social media has revealed that communities are rich, alive, dynamic, and thriving all around brands. Strong brands acknowledge and engage their communities, elevating the relationship beyond transactions and media placements. To do that, advertisers and agencies need to internally reflect the world around them.

According to the 2018 US Census, between 2020 and 2050, 90% of the growth in the US will come from three communities: Asian-American, Black/African-American, and Hispanic. As the US moves to a majority-minority culture, brands need to stop defaulting to White – in culture, images and even sound – and dispel stereotypes. Marketing to Black people should cease to be an afterthought.

**“It is not just the representation of diverse individuals working on a brand or project that’s critical; it’s how the cultural identity (e.g. race/ethnicity) and perspectives are valued, respected and leveraged in the marketing communications process.”**

Carol Watson

*Chief Inclusion Officer, BCW*

## Response to diversity in ads

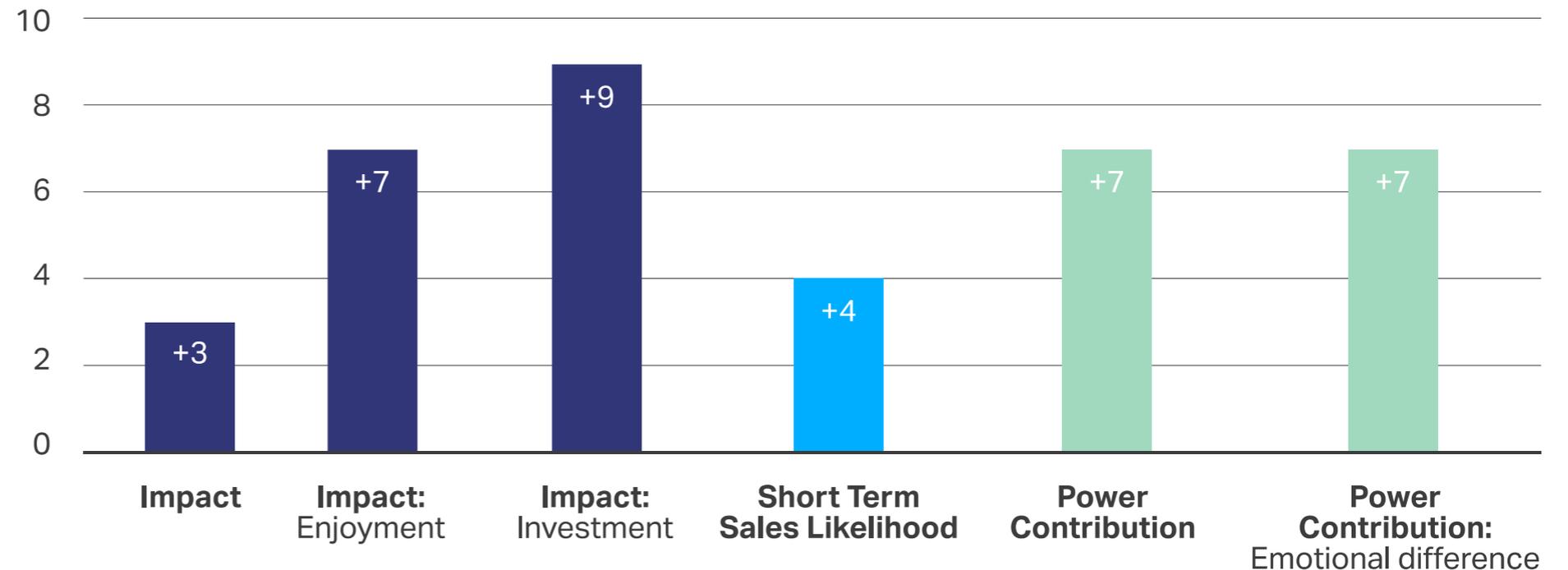
A global analysis of over 11,000 ads on Kantar's Link platform showed ads perform better when they feature people from more diverse backgrounds. It doesn't matter whether they are in leading or supporting roles.

These ads are more likely to get viewers' attention and be remembered: they are more enjoyable and involving. This improves potential impact and can have a multiplier effect: they make spend more efficient, improve media ROI, and also show a short-term sales benefit.

## On a global basis, diversity in ads makes them more enjoyable

*Ads with diverse portrayals also have greater impact on short-term sales*

**WARC**<sup>^</sup>



**SOURCE:** [A global look at racial representation in advertising, WARC Exclusive, October 2020](#)

# Lessons of other movements do – and don't – apply

**With so much work to be done by brands in combatting racial injustice, it's worth exploring whether they can draw on learnings from other movements, such as actions concerning gender equality.**

To a degree, they can. But no two movements are alike.

In 2019, Mars set benchmarks around gender representation, promising transparency, leadership, training and measurement, some of which could apply to racial diversity.

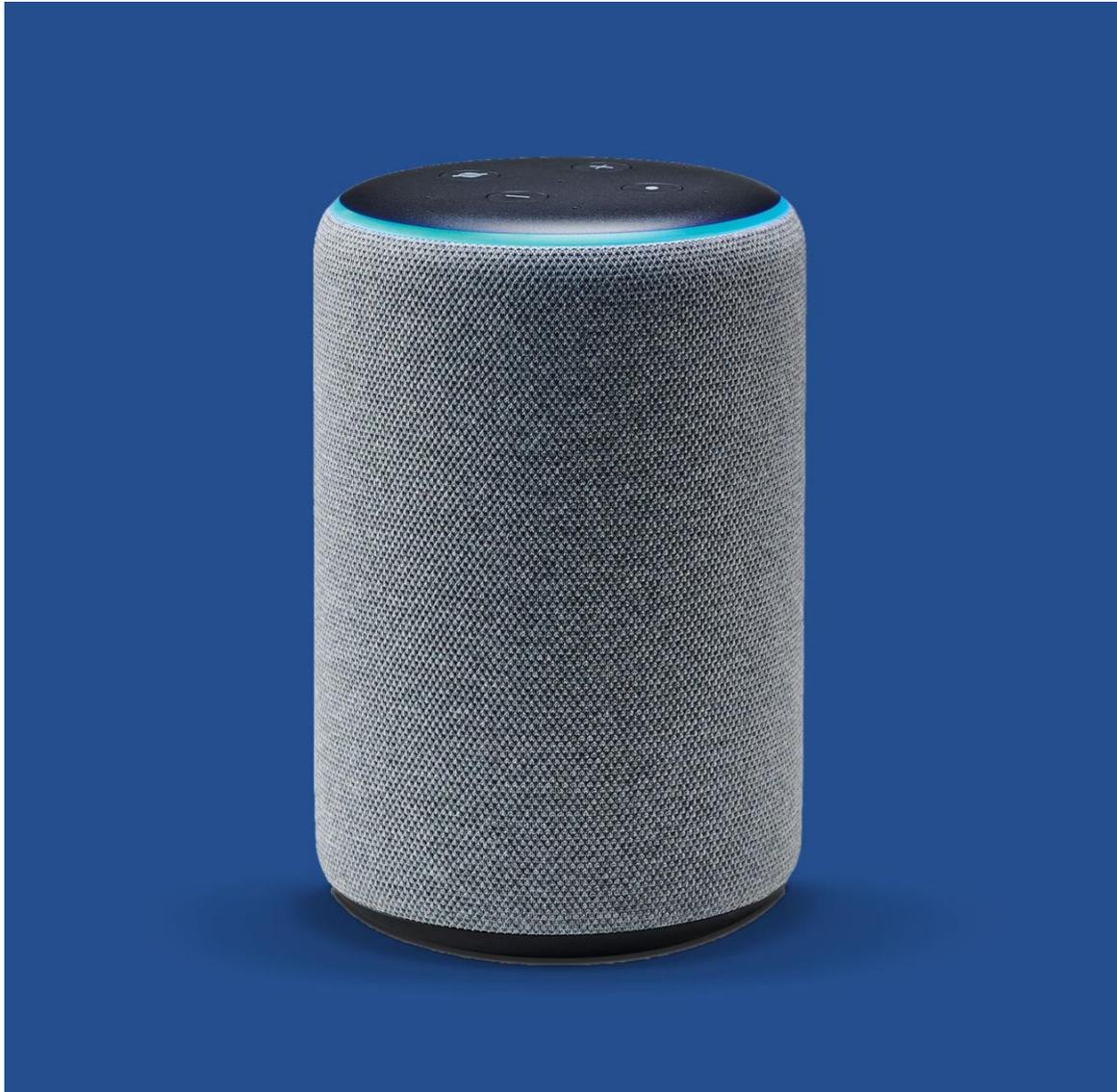
Much of the language sounds

familiar, dealing with issues such as unseen bias, portrayals of women in advertising and a need to train employees about these issues.

But women are extremely well-represented at all levels of marketing organizations, and as we've seen earlier, that is not true of Black people.

The ANA's 2019 diversity report shows that 64% of employees are female, and there are slightly more women at senior levels (52%) than men. The two movements can be compared, but not conflated.





## Pandora: Crossing the sonic color line

**Studio Resonate, the audio consultancy for brands at Pandora, has been working to cross “the sonic color line.”**

The phrase, coined by Binghamton University professor Jennifer Stoeber, came from research she conducted finding a hierarchical division between the perceived “whiteness” and “blackness” of sounds. Even voice tech is biased towards “hearing” White voices better.

As the Studio’s Sonic Strategy Director, Steve Keller, has pointed out, this is pervasive. His analysis showed Black voices accounted for just 8%

of narrators in ads made in response to COVID-19, even though Black Americans are much more likely than Whites to contract the virus. The studio has begun to alter its casting practices, addressing the tendency to default to White voices for general market advertising.

The focus has worked: in the first half of 2020, almost 93% of the voices it cast were White. By September, they accounted for only 38%; 24% were Black, and 38%, LatinX. The Studio has also changed its approach to strategy and copywriting to focus on diversity.

## Procter & Gamble: Imagery and “The Look”

**Keith Cartwright, who created “The Look” for P&G with his partners while at SATURDAY MORNING, explains how marketers miss the mark when creating advertising, and its imagery, for Black audiences.**

“There is a clear omission by marketers in how they market to Black audiences. Their approach has been, for years, to build brands for White people first, and then figure out how to adapt and talk to other markets later.

“The next misstep, or evolution if you will, was to use casting as a way to say, ‘we see you.’

When in fact all it does is remind people of color that we are a ‘fish out of water’ in so-called “White society.”

“The Look” is something people of color deal with every day. We wanted to establish the historical context of what bias looks like from the point of view of an African American man.

“Scenes at a lunch counter, a swimming pool and in a high-end retailer are familiar moments from racial clashes experienced during the Civil Rights Movement.”





## Ford: Cultural insights connect with Black women

**Between 2020 and 2050, 90% of the growth in the US will come from three groups: Asian American, Black/African- American, and Hispanics. Marketers can't think of these communities as an afterthought.**

UWG's recent campaign for the redesigned Ford Explorer is an example of why adapting White work for Black audiences doesn't work.

Monique Nelson, CEO, UWG: "Black consumers are a major source of growth in its large utility category, so the company has committed to authentically

engaging the Black consumer with culturally insightful, impactful storytelling that demonstrates intention and commitment to the consumer from the brand."

For this campaign, the brand found a spokeswoman who channeled Black women's achievements and aspirations: adventure journalist Kellee Edwards, a licensed pilot and scuba diver.

The insights-driven approach reaps results. In the last six years, 29% of Ford's SUV customers have been African-American women.

**Strong Black Lead**  @strongblacklead · Sep 9

## Minority media spend falls short

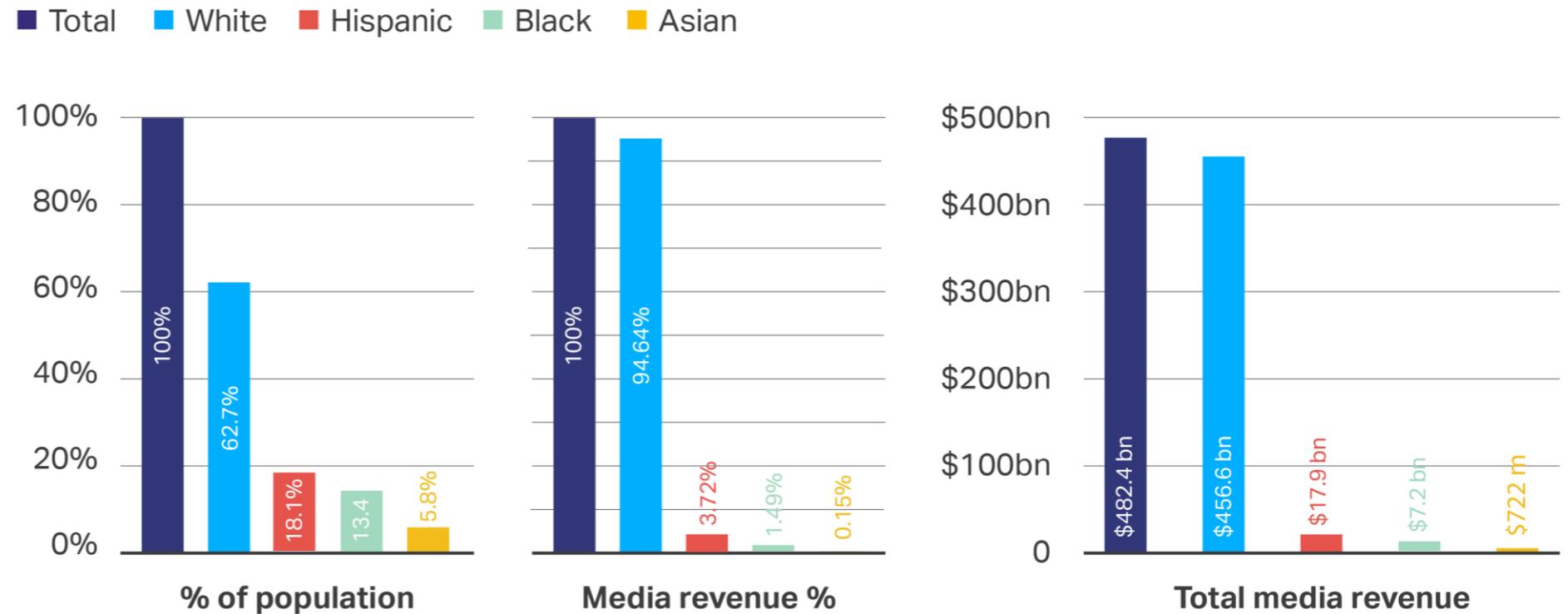
One indicator of how systemic racism plays out in the advertising business is how little media budget is focused on ethnic or multicultural consumers.

Data from PQ Media and AIMM illustrates that although corporate America spends more than \$480 billion annually on marketing and comms services, less than 6% of those dollars are attributed to non-White marketing and communications agencies or service providers – even though minority groups make up close to 40% of the population.

## US Media Revenue by ethnicity

*Almost all media spending is geared toward the majority population, with little budget left for minority groups*

WARC<sup>^</sup>



**SOURCE:** Will corporate America ever change to reflect the new America?, WARC Exclusive, October 2020; data from PQ Media and AIMM

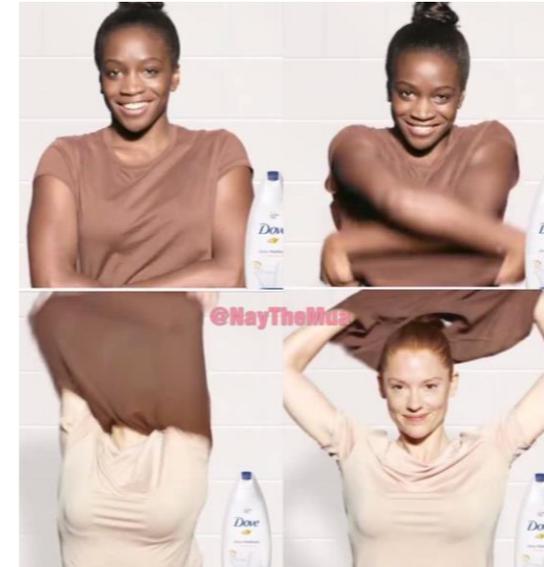
# How not to get it wrong

**Few missteps carry as much outrage as when ads are insensitive or reinforce racial stereotypes. The gaffes gallery includes Pepsi's misbegotten commercial starring Kendall Jenner that used a protest to sell Pepsi; Dove's body wash ad that seemed to show a Black woman being "cleaned up" into a White woman, and Gucci's blackface sweater.**

One piece of advice from Black ad executives: when decisions are made, make sure the right people are in the room, and that they feel empowered to speak up and address issues.

Brands also need to test their advertising with diverse audiences. Researching among a wider group makes it more likely that potential alternative interpretations of brand narrative and advertising scenarios are picked up.

But as Kai D. Wright's "Culture-Ethics Test" shows, these actions are ultimately about empathy, and ensuring your brand teams are immersed enough in a culture to understand it.



## Addressing diversity in the work

*Five recommendations for creating marketing that resonates with Black consumers*

WARC<sup>^</sup>

### Diverse teams only

Simply put, the only way to truly reflect any market you're trying to reach is to **build teams that accurately reflect it.**

### Look for unseen bias

Bias exists everywhere, especially in White dominant organizations and industries, like marketing. **Train you and your teams to see and hear the biases that exist in the world, both in sounds and images.**

### It's not only casting

Casting Black talent is not a panacea, when it simply puts a Black person in a White person's world. **Don't cast in an anti-Black way.**

### Insight, not stereotype

Never re-appropriate a brief for other markets and adapt it for a Black audience, or any other group for that matter. **Effective work calls for insights, not stereotypes.**

### Ask who is in the room

When it comes to making decisions, **ensure the right people are in the room**, reflecting a diversity of perspectives and cultures – and **make sure everyone feels empowered to speak up.**

SOURCE: WARC

# #LetsGetToWork

**As shown in the research in this WARC Guide, consumers, especially younger ones, say they will vote with their wallets and voices in terms of what brands they purchase.**

Brands such as Visa, Levi's, P&G and Ben & Jerry's are taking steps towards being more diverse, equitable and inclusive. And for all brands, consumers and employees are reframing the question from "if you support #blacklivesmatter to "what" you are doing.

As we move towards a majority-minority nation, it is crucial to respect cultural

identities, make communities better off, and use brand platforms to advance equality. Showing solidarity needs to span representation and investments, so organizations can meet a growth imperative built on empathy, earnestness, and empowerment.

It is time for brands, agencies, and media companies to combine creativity, data, and technology for social justice. The time for racial equality, in marketing – and society – is long overdue.

#LetsGetToWork

**Kai D. Wright, Guest Editor**



# More from WARC

Access all of WARC's content related to Black Lives Matter at [this link](#).

**Here** are additional articles:

[Ben & Jerry's sparks purposeful marketing with employee-driven acts](#)

[Edelman Trust Barometer 2020: Brands and racial justice in America](#)

[Procter & Gamble steps up to tackle systemic racism with marketing action](#)

[For Nike and Colin Kaepernick, the backlash is the point](#)

[How Visa is helping tackle racial injustice with marketing, transparency and powerful conversations](#)

[Mars's strategy to achieve gender equality in advertising](#)

[How Ford found an audience of female African-American pick-up truck enthusiasts](#)

[UWG's advice for brands and agencies that are seeking to address racial injustice](#)

[Changing your brand for the better: Six lessons on diversity and inclusion from Lions Live](#)

[Let's pledge to stop anti-Black ad casting](#)

[Progressive advertising can build successful brands – and change the world](#)

[COVID conversations: Jason White, CMO of cannabis brand Curaleaf](#)

[Brands need to fight back against racism: UN Exec Director](#)

[McDonald's ad strategy in support of Black Lives Matter](#)

[Ad industry needs accountability on diversity problems](#)

[The Facebook ad boycott marks the end of the road for brand 'safety'](#)

## Our partnerships

**WARC and Cannes Lions have joined forces with the ANA Educational Foundation (AEF), 4A's Foundation and Advertising Research Foundation (ARF) in a partnership with the HBCU Business Deans Roundtable that will support future Black marketers.**

This initiative will provide students at over 100 Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) in the United States with access to WARC's digital platform, which houses over 100,000 pieces of content focused on marketing effectiveness.

Read more [here](#).

Additionally, [WARC has partnerships](#) with the Black Cultural Archives and Hidden Figures: A look at Black British Marketing & Design.

Thanks also to Wunderman Thompson ((Mark Truss, Diana Oricco, and E'lana Jordan) and Prodege, which provided the sample and Maddie Brown and real-time market research platform Suzy for partnering with WARC on exclusive research for this Guide.

## WARC's commitment to racial equality

**Our Organisation:** We are committed to being an anti-racist and inclusive organisation.

**Our Team:** We are committed to recruiting and developing talent from Black and diverse backgrounds.

**Our Content:** We are committed to building a network of contributors, content and insights from Black and other diverse communities, to be amplified on WARC platforms.

**Our Product:** We are committed to an ongoing review of the structure, language and tagging of our product, to accurately represent Black and diverse communities.

**Our Market Influence:** We are committed to educating and nurturing the marketers of tomorrow from Black and diverse backgrounds.

At the behest of the Guest Editor, WARC has donated \$5,000 to Black Lives Matter in the US.

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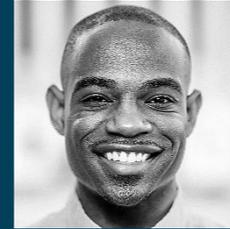
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Kai D. Wright helps executives, celebrities, and founders grow their brands by applying creativity strategically, specializing in the convergence of communication, digital, and culture. Kai has been a lecturer at Columbia University since 2012, and also serves as a global consulting partner at Ogilvy. His newest book, *Follow the Feeling* (Wiley, 2019), reveals branding secrets based on research from 1,500 companies from Aldi to Peloton. He has been named to 30 Under 30 list for *Forbes* and *Adweek*, and received the highest honors from the Advertising Research Foundation.



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