



RACE AND BRANDING IN THE 21ST CENTURY

“Building Brand Momentum and Loyalty Through Racial Sensitivity”

EXECUTIVE VOICE

LIVE EVENT

Race and Branding in 2020:
A turning point or a step back?

Host

Speaker

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August 22, 2020

Nairobi, Kenya (EAT) - 1700hrs | Cambridge, MA, USA (GMT-4) - 1000hrs

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On Saturday, 22nd August 2020, **Gilbert Manirakiza**, Passionate Afro-optimist and The CEO of the Newmark Group held a conversation with **Darold Cuba**, a social innovator, disruptor and a Center for Public Leadership Fellow at the Harvard Kennedy School engaged in a mind stimulating conversation on race and branding.

HERE ARE FIVE TAKEAWAY MESSAGES FROM THE SESSION

- There is no scientific basis for race. It is a social construct that was historically developed by European elites in order to further slavery, colonization and invasion campaigns and activities, as well as perpetuate a class division that makes poorer members of their then society feel superior to other non-white humans.
- Dehumanizing people of other skin tones became a key tool that facilitated and authorized the creation of racialized social systems that prevails until modern times. The multiple cases of police brutality are a remnant of this dehumanizing culture that is built along racial profiles.
- The eminent skin color coding meant that whites had more privileges than non-whites. The mentality of systemic racism has survived the efforts of the civil rights movement as evidenced by the recent murder of George Floyd.

EXPLORING GAPS IN CIVIL RIGHTS

- Since race doesn't exist, it has a cultural foundation of systems and institutions which serve to benefit a few. Poor Europeans identifying as white could have more privileges than those branded “non-white”. Value systems were entrenched and now Jews, Italians among others considered “not white” initially are now considered “white”.
- Black people fighting in the civil war still did not have any human rights and were treated as second class citizens in the 1950S and 60s occasioned by the political, social and economic situation worsened with the coming of Europeans to the US.
- The COVID-19 pandemic has exposed the devastating effects of the problem, Black & Indigenous Americans experience highest death tolls from the pandemic relative to Whites, who experience the lowest age-adjusted rates nationally.

HOW THE NEWS MEDIA FRAMES RACE

- The mainstream news industry in the US was founded and evolved in a context of racial injustice and exploitation, hence it was not optimized to cover stories portraying positive blackness. Black stories that didn't fit white editor's view of black people was turned down. Today, the same systems are still being enforced by certain mainstream media houses who sieve and choose only stories that only fit this mold.
- In the 2018 polling results on the Coverage of Race in the News Media, the Kerner Commission found out that hiring more racial minorities in the news media as reporters and editors would improve the quality of the news. Moreover, people of all races agree that African Americans are more negatively portrayed in the media than in reality. 62% of African Americans think this, as do about half of Hispanic, Asian, and White Americans.

THE RISE OF THE BLACK LIVES MATTER MOVEMENT

- The BLM is a decentralized movement declaring black lives matter in a country where they never have. The BLM movement was founded by three Black community organizers; Patrisse Khan-Cullors, Alicia Garza, and Opal Tometi. Today, the movement is led by activists organizing campaigns with the hashtag #Blacklivesmatter. This hashtag has been used to take action against racial injustices towards people of color. This became an extension of the civil rights movement.
- This movement has gained momentum and gained a global phenomenon since 2013 following the acquittal of George Zimmerman on the murder of Trayvon Martin. It is only recently that the murder of George Floyd has allowed the BLM to grow into perhaps one of the most fabled movements in US history.

WHAT IS THE ROLE OF BRANDS IN MATTERS OF RACE?

- A number of brands have openly come out to take a stance against racism with some yet to do so stand on racism citing that such content does not appeal to their target market.
- In addressing the question on morality of brands; those brands that accept wrongdoing and are racially sensitive and actively set up mechanisms for change will survive.
- Why are we still allowing brands to be racist? This is the question that needs a conclusive answer. To overcome this, brands cannot play middle ground but rather must side with the right side of history to succeed. This is further edified by a July 2020 research showing that 65% of people want brands to take a stand against racism. The study further indicates that 31% of consumers want brands to eliminate racial bias from their own organizations. With consumers being the primary target market, brands which actively condemn racism position themselves as catalysts of change in a society marred with racist undertones.