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Recommended Citation

Thomas, Kevin D.; Davis, Judy Foster; Wilson, Jonathan A.J.; and Sobande, Francesca, "Repetition Or Reckoning: Confronting Racism and Racial Dynamics In 2020" (2020). *College of Communication Faculty Research and Publications*. 563.

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Journal of Marketing Management, Vol. 36, No. 13-14 (2020): 1153-1168. [DOI](#). This article is © Taylor & Francis (Routledge) and permission has been granted for this version to appear in [e-Publications@Marquette](#). Taylor & Francis (Routledge) does not grant permission for this article to be further copied/distributed or hosted elsewhere without express permission from Taylor & Francis (Routledge).

Repetition Or Reckoning: Confronting Racism and Racial Dynamics In 2020

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The timing of this special issue on marketing and managing racial dynamics could not be more befitting. The world finds itself amid a public health crisis that is disproportionately killing minoritised populations. Even though the novel coronavirus inherently infects indiscriminately, marketplace practices rooted in white supremacist ideology, like retail redlining and profiling, have moulded a world

where quality of life and life expectancy are fettered to racialisation, and as a consequence, populations of colour are far more likely to contract and die from COVID-19 (Crockett & Grier, 2020).

We also find ourselves at yet another flashpoint concerning police brutality. Instances of police killing unarmed Black people and other people of colour in the United States and Canada have resulted in ongoing peaceful protests and civil unrest across the globe. As largely a municipal function, policing is not typically situated within the confines of the marketplace, yet like many social practices, policing discourse stands at odds with its felt experience. Modern policing in the United States emerged concurrently with urbanisation and vast expansions of industrialisation during the nineteenth century. Through the financial clout and influence of affluent merchants, over the course of the Industrial Revolution, decentralised and privatised policing was transformed into a taxpayer-funded centralised municipal system, enabling the merchant class to financially benefit as the cost associated with protecting their property and goods shifted to local governing entities (Spitzer & Scull, 1977; Hassett-Walker, 2019).

Yet it is not just the form of modern-day policing that emerged from the marketplace, so too did its function. During US antebellum, groups of armed and organised White men known as slave patrols were established ‘to chase down, apprehend, and return to their owners, runaway slaves; to provide a form of organised terror to deter slave revolts; and, to maintain a form of discipline for slave-workers who were subject to summary’ (Potter, 2013, p. 2). In short, the purpose of these makeshift militias was to safeguard the financial interests of slaveholders by surveilling and policing Black people with impunity (Hadden 2001). While slave patrols were technically disbanded upon ratification of the Thirteenth Amendment, their tactics and ideological underpinnings endure. The history of law enforcement’s brutal interactions with Black and other minoritised communities demonstrates that the methods and logic associated with slave patrols undergird modern policing.

This brief historicising of policing in the United States illustrates two key points. One, the reach of markets into our daily social lives is broader and deeper than contemporary rhetoric suggests, and two, issues of race and racism are not merely injected into marketplace practices, they fundamentally inform them. That is to say, the processes by which markets are constructed and communities racialised are unmistakably intertwined. Our principal goal in cultivating this special issue was to foreground these two underappreciated actualities by assembling a methodologically diverse collection of scholarship that critically examines how history, social hierarchies, power, privilege and peoples’ actions shape markets and impact the lives of people as consumers.

Our introduction begins with a brief narrative by each of the guest editors. We each lay bare the import and impact of studying the relationship between racial dynamics and marketing management from our respective positionalities and lived experiences. The aim of these short commentaries is to both further articulate the pervasive presence of racism and racial dynamics in marketing management and trouble the normalised belief that objectivity is a prerequisite of rigorous and insightful scholarship. For while our vignettes are distinguishable by their uniquely astute subject matter, they share the commonality of an authorial voice that figuratively and literally has skin in the game. Our testimonials are followed by a brief overview of the special issue’s content, which is inclusive of conceptual, empirical, and arts-based research. Lastly, we close with a few reflections and future

considerations related to how marketing scholars can continue to deepen our understanding of racism and racial dynamics in marketing management.

Our guest editorial team is immensely grateful to the *Journal of Marketing Management* for offering us the opportunity to develop this race-focused issue well before such explorations became trendy in the field of marketing. We also acknowledge the Race in the Marketplace (RIM) research network and its international assemblage of researchers, activists, and practitioners that have long been dedicated to advancing knowledge, innovation, and social justice by investigating the role of race, racism and intersecting forms of oppression in the marketplace. Much of the content of this special issue originates from RIM scholars. While we are deeply appreciative of all our contributors, we send a special thank you to each of you. Lastly, we take a moment to acknowledge our dear friend, Dr. Geraldine (Gerri) Henderson who died on 23 November 2019. In addition to being an amazing colleague and mentor, Gerri's trailblazing scholarship helped pave the way for this special issue to manifest – we dedicate it to her loving memory.

Critical reflections

Musings on a Black childhood | a semi-autobiographical fable on marketing management – Dr. Kevin D. Thomas

For the first few years of my life my family lived in the South Los Angeles region of Southern California, back then known as South Central LA. Our house, like most others found on this stretch of South Van Ness Avenue, was modest but well maintained, with a small manicured yard neatly nuzzled against a serviceable sidewalk that seemed to go on for miles among the methodically placed citrus trees. Aesthetically, the neighbourhood we called home looked like most other middle-class communities located on the west coast, with the exception that its residents were predominately Black. Each week my siblings and I would join fellow Black children from neighbouring homes and spend hours joyfully traversing that sidewalk on our bikes (mine with training wheels), but never beyond the boundary collectively agreed upon by our mothers. In summers, we'd ride it with purpose. Clandestinely picking the fruits of those citrus trees for our own enjoyment and as raw materials to support the pop-up lemonade stands erected in our respective driveways. The profits from which we would use to buy sugary treats from the corner store, whose Black shopkeeper also lived in the neighbourhood. When my family moved to a primarily White enclave well beyond the city limits, that stretch of South Van Ness Avenue was still predominately Black, but its middle-class aesthetics had given way to those affiliated with disinvestment and economic oppression and the sidewalk we once took for granted had amassed cracks so deep it was now unserviceable.

This new White enclave tucked at the feet of the Puente Hills, about 25 miles east of Los Angeles is where I would spend my formative years. While its landscape looked relatively familiar – citrus trees, serviceable sidewalks, and well-maintained homes were all present, the ease with which I could traverse and consume these delights was not. Playtime with neighbouring children was rare, as most were given a hard directive to avoid all contact with me. On one such rare occasion while comparing Micro Machine playsets with a White boy about my age in his room, his father stormed in with eyes of rage and demanded that I return the 20 USD bill I had stolen from his wallet located on the breakfast nook atop several weeks of unopened mail. I, unlike the true culprit had seen his clearly visible wallet

on the nook but had not given it a second thought after it caught my eye. Despite my best efforts, he held steadfast to his baseless allegation. As a result, our playdate abruptly ended, I was banned from their home, and for the first time, I became intimately aware of my racialised body and the anti-Blackness it inspires. Years later that same White boy, now a young man, would disclose to me that he surreptitiously took the money from his father's wallet moments before my arrival knowing that I would be blamed for the deed should his father take notice of the discrepancy. It would seem his knowledge of anti-Blackness preceded my own.

I may not have been a fast learner, but rarely did I need to learn the same lesson twice. Like many, my teen years were marked with rebellion. Nothing too grandiose, school yard fights, classroom pranks, and missing curfew to get in just a few more rounds of Street Fighter II at the local arcade mainly filled the bill. However, from time to time, petty theft would make the menu. Actually, to be more exacting, my role consisted of aiding and abetting. My close friend at the time, Jacob, was a second-generation Korean American. Jacob was exceedingly smart but not at all studious. However, his slender frame, bifocal lens, and bowl haircut consistently communicated to others that both were true. Every so often, we would use this social knowledge to our mutual benefit by executing the following scheme at the neighbourhood Thrifty Drug Store.

- Step 1: Enter store approximately two minutes apart from one another
- Step 2: Jacob casually hangs out at in the school supplies aisle while Kevin aimlessly wonders the store
- Step 3: Jacob makes his way to the snack aisle and stealthily stuffs his pockets while Kevin is followed and questioned by the clerk on duty
- Step 4: Jacob leaves store while Kevin feigns shock and disgust over the clerk's blatant racial profiling
- Step 5: Kevin leaves store and meets Jacob several blocks away to jointly partake in the day's bounty

Our plan worked flawlessly every time. Regardless of the clerk's race, it was only a matter of time before my performance in aimlessness required their intervention. Conversely, every clerk read Jacob as a 'model minority' – someone far too upstanding and inoffensive to warrant their concern. Our periodic adventures in larceny went on for a good while, however at some point the feigning of shock and disgust called for in Step 4 became all too real and painful. Eventually, no day's bounty, irrespective of its abundance, could assuage the abject hurt of my unseen humanity.

Judy's reflections on marketing and managing racial dynamics – Dr. Judy Foster Davis
Years ago, I stumbled across a classic advertisement on the Internet which stunned me. Staring at the image for a long time – repelled, yet mesmerised – I was unable to turn away. This was a marketing poster for a brand of breakfast cereal that had always been in my mother's kitchen. This ad, from the early 1920s, showed a stooped, elderly Black man rendered as a tethered mule pulling a cart where a young White boy sat, gleefully brandishing a whip and shouting 'Giddap!' at the man. Carved into the side of the wooden cart was the name of the brand: Cream of Wheat. Given my experience teaching advertising courses and having worked in advertising agencies, I understood how such images are created and approved. My repulsion soon gave way to inquiry: Who created such a vile image? Who

approved it? What prompted this design? My research into the origins of the ad, titled 'Giddap Uncle', revealed that it was created by a White artist, Edward Brewer (1883–1971) for Cream of Wheat, and was one of many advertisements he produced for the brand using similar positioning. The overt racism conveyed through 'Giddap Uncle' not only portrayed a Black man as subservient but illustrated that he was subhuman and subject to abuse – even by a White child.

Historically, Cream of Wheat and other popular brands routinely relied upon highly derogatory images of people of colour to sell 'everyday' products like food staples, bath soap and laundry powder, often rendering them as servile, inarticulate, criminal, savage, animalistic, and otherwise inferior (Davis, 2018). The insidious nature of such portrayals in popular media and marketing materials helped reinforce popular stereotypes which were often used to justify the dehumanisation, exploitation, segregation, deportation, mistreatment, incarceration and murders of people of colour and other racialised groups. It was not until African-Americans, Latinxs and Asians were recognised by mainstream marketers as lucrative consumer markets that pejorative marketing images diminished. To that end, the counsel and participation of marketing professionals of colour after World War II were instrumental in improving how people of colour are addressed and portrayed in the marketplace. Although problems still remain, trailblazing marketers of colour like David Sullivan, Clarence Holte, Moss Kendrix, Tom Burrell, Barbara Proctor, Caroline Jones, Carol H. Williams, Tere Zubizarreta, Daisy Expósito-Ulla, Imada Wong and others helped change the face of marketing.

I share these observations to emphasise a keen awareness based on my experiences and research: those who influence and control decisions and resources in the marketing industry wield tremendous power in the marketplace, with substantial impacts concerning race and markets. As one of few African-American female marketing professors with industry and academic experience, I believe it my duty to bring forth topics concerning race, racism and marketing at the institutional level. I often engage in archival and qualitative research which uncovers hidden gems and provides contexts which tell stories about the histories, people and cultures within marketing organisations while attempting to discern why certain practices occur. Much of my work explores the experiences of marketing professionals of colour and issues concerning race and advertising. To that end, my research indicates how Structural Oppression in the marketing industry shapes marketing practices and outcomes. What is Structural Oppression? Simply put, it is bias + power, operating at an institutional level. Sometimes called institutional oppression, Structural Oppression privileges, prioritises and empowers the ideologies of a dominant social group and is embedded in organisational principles and operational norms. As such, organisations' histories, cultures, policies and practices interact to maintain a power hierarchy for the dominant group while restricting opportunities for those lower down the hierarchy. In most Western society marketing organisations, the dominant, privileged group usually consists of able-bodied White Christian heterosexual upper/upper-middle class men – and women to a lesser extent – of European descent. Structural Oppression is certainly not limited to the marketing industry and permeates institutions throughout society in ways that make it appear 'normal'. In marketing, Structural Oppression can manifest in ways which are overt (such as the derogatory Cream of Wheat ad), but in modern times is far more likely to exhibit in ways which are covert, often unrecognised or unintentional. A few examples are (Davis, 2018):

- Emphasising Eurocentric beauty standards and centring whiteness in marketing efforts

- Engaging in cultural appropriation without acknowledgement or compensation
- Aggressively promoting harmful and low-nutrition products in communities of colour
- Developing discriminatory and predatory lending and real estate marketing practices
- Limiting the employment and promotion of people of colour in mainstream advertising/marketing firms
- Marginalising opportunities for marketing professionals and entrepreneurs of colour such that they are limited to catering to customers of similar ethnic backgrounds
- Limiting the inclusion of diverse peoples in marketing research
- Excluding diverse peoples from decision-making opportunities concerning the content of advertising/marketing campaigns

Nearly 100 years after 'Giddap Uncle' was published, Structural Oppression in marketing institutions continues to affect what kinds of issues and projects are addressed and funded; who is hired/not hired; what kind of consumer research is conducted; who is given sign-off authority on advertising content; how certain consumers are targeted; and who has a seat at the table concerning marketing decisions. On that note, the lack of participation in decision-making by non-White professionals in marketing organisations has been associated with a number of recent high-profile marketing gaffes, resulting in backlash and damage to brands' reputations. For example, a global controversy erupted in 2017 when the Dove brand posted a social media ad showing a Black woman who appears to morph into a White woman after using its body wash (Shirbon, 2017). Shortly thereafter, the H&M retail brand drew criticism when it promoted a hooded sweatshirt, modelled by a Black boy, with the phrase 'Coolest Monkey in the Jungle' (Stack, 2018). Luxury brands Gucci and Prada were involved in promoting a sweater and store display, respectively, which evoked offensive Blackface imagery (Held, 2019; Miller, 2020). These blunders and other examples of Structural Oppression in action underscore the need for sustained scholarly inquiry which addresses marketing thought and practice regarding racial dynamics in the marketplace. Interestingly, 2020 ushered in a period of unprecedented self-reflection where managers of classic brands like Aunt Jemima, Fair & Lovely, and Cream of Wheat publicly committed to changing the faces of their branding such that representations of white superiority ideologies are diminished on store shelves and in advertising (Alcorn, 2020; Frayer, 2020; Selyukh 2020). Yet, the broader implications of these managerial actions lend itself to future examination and analysis.

The curse of ham, blaxploitation, the empire strikes black, blackademia, blackonomics, and black to the future – the riddle of race – Professor Jonathan A.J. Wilson

None of us could have imagined how crucial and timely this special issue would be when we first planned it, which is a bittersweet feeling. I would like to tease out the knots in a number of milestones, in a very anecdotal and psychoanalytical manner – and therefore as I do, this in no way is a taxonomy. Rather, they are representative of my current mood as we put this special issue to bed and I ponder over my twenty years or so career in an induced contemplative state – fuelled by lockdown, isolation, rolling news feeds, and Zoom fatigue.

Hip-hop and comedy – wheels on a juggernaut cultural phenomenon

Entertainment, art form, cultural expression, escapism, fetish, fantasy, social commentary, therapy, way of life, weapon, bridge builder, or money maker: US hip hop and comedy have been instrumental

in presenting ethnoracial issues explicitly at the doorstep of mainstream audiences and rolling with the punches – as the rest of the world watched and was inspired.

In homage, we began to see surrogate ethnoracial, hybridised and localised innovations overseas from other nationalities and diaspora. A fusing of regional cultures and languages has arisen – the newly found global currency of post-colonial US counterculture bonded with expressions, under a sense of shared traits and comparable narratives.

What can be contested though, are whether these expressions are undertaken as appreciation or appropriation; and furthermore, whether these are tactical, entrepreneurial, shallow, or deep-rooted affirmations and affiliations. As an illustrative case in practice, perhaps there is no more incendiary example than that which the *N-word* presents. Its usage, ownership, permission, quicksilver contextuality, oxymoronic and paradoxical nature are complicated.

Indonesian rapper of Chinese descent, Brian Imanuel Soewarno began his career in 2015 under the name Rich Chigga. His native tongue is Bahasa Indonesia and he learned English listening to US Hip-hop and watching comedy videos on YouTube. His name *Chigga*, a portmanteau of *Chinese* and the *N-word*, and his use of the N-word attracted criticism from the African-American community, when his songs attracting millions of views went viral on YouTube. Brian later stated that his use and understanding of the N-word was an honest mistake from an avid fan – and it resulted finally in him changing his stage name to Rich Brian (Wang, 2016).

We can reflect on the long-standing feud between film directors Quentin Tarantino and Spike Lee concerning use of the N-word. Tarantino responded to Lee's criticisms by saying,

As a writer, I demand the right to write any character in the world that I want to write. And to say that I can't do that because I'm white ... that is racist. (Blumson, 2015; Walker, 2012)

Or more recently in 2018, Italian cosmetics firm Wycon came under fire for its black nail polish, carrying the slogan 'Thick as a Nigga' (Eytan, 2018). Their response:

We're sorry that this post has triggered these types of reactions: every color from our Gel On collection is inspired, with a cheerful attitude and a pinch of naivety, by famous song titles, many of which derive from the landscape of hip hop. For example, "Drop it like it's hot" by Snoop Dogg, "Bootilicious" (sic) by Beyoncé (sic), "Candy Shop" by 50 Cent, Lollipop, Lady Marmalade etc ... The reference here is "Thick Nigga" (sic) by DBangz. Wycon is the brand for everybody #nobodyexcluded is our motto and we didn't mean to offend anybody!

These examples hopefully highlight firstly, why representation and platforms for discussion are so important and secondly, why branding, advertising, and marketing are part and parcel of popular culture – aspiring to become attention-grabbing iconic art forms, zeitgeist expressions of authentic creativity and engineers of consent, with socio-economic impact. Furthermore, I would argue that where art and design interact with real lived-experiences, creating uncomfortable tensions, they go beyond offence – creating an *uncanny valley*, especially for the disenfranchised, misunderstood and excluded (Hsu, 2012; Lay, 2015).

Therefore, we should reflect carefully and iteratively upon who owns words, who has the right to use them, who should police them, who holds the power, who benefits, what is the context, what is the intention, and what are the implications.

The 11th September 2001 attacks (9/11) and the global war on truth(s)

Tracing a pop-cultural thread from the rise of the MTV generation in the 80s and 90s: we witnessed the global marketability of gritty consumable angst (Wilson, 2011).

Then in the aftermath of 9/11 resulting in the Global War on Terrorism (GWOT), a chain of events were the catalyst for a new wave of wider, more diverse, and deeper transnational introspections and proselytisation that coloured the race imperative. Race, ethnicity, religion and ideology appeared to be used interchangeably in many scenarios, depending on the agenda. A notable example being the Arab Spring (Wilson, 2018).

These narratives were accelerated with the advent of social media – bringing a level playing field and creating evangelical consumers, citizen journalists and content creators. The reductive element of this process: sharpening our gaze towards humans as avatars, followers and bio straplines are both tribal and animalistic. Almost like a card game of *Top Trumps* [pun intended], the lens of scrutiny is trained on us with mixed consequences in a Darwinian ‘Survival of the fittest’ scenario.

The challenges we face in the academic community are particularly grim also. *The Guardian* reports that UK universities employ 217,000 academic staff. Within this figure, out of the 21,000 full-professors, nearly 18,000 identified as White, 1,360 as Asian, nearly 2,000 as unidentified or from other ethnic backgrounds, and only 140 identified as Black (Adams, 2020). Similarly, the *Financial Times* reports that out of 19,285 professors in UK universities, 12,795 are White men, 4,560 are White women, 90 are Black men and 35 are Black women (Jacobs, 2020). The BBC also reports on an ethnicity pay gap in academia (Croxford, 2018). In the Russell Group of highly selective research-based UK universities surveyed, Croxford (2018) reports that the average salaries were:

- £52,000 for White academics
- £38,000 for Black academics
- £37,000 for academics from an Arab background

And on average, compared with White men:

- White women got 15% less
- Asian women, 22% less
- Black women, 39% less

As marketing scholars, if we are to make inroads into investigating the *Global War on Truth(s)*, it is not simply a case of campaigning for more research into corporations, markets, marketing, and consumption patterns – we need to take a long hard look at the representation, health, well-being, and survival of our academic peers.

Magical and Super Negroes

The *Magical Negro* trope has been popularised by Spike Lee in interviews, and has received scholarly analysis (Glenn & Cunningham, 2009). The term explains the occurrence in literature and film of a particular Black supporting character with special powers, who comes to the assistance of White protagonists.

As an extension of the term Magical Negro, I would also like to present the term *Super Negro*: those individuals who against all odds rise above the struggles shackling and disadvantaging their ethnoracial communities – and then are cited in equal weighting as inspirational examples, or evidence of equality and change.

We cannot simply focus on the success stories, or even the failures – we need a much more representative picture of the full pyramid of individuals and experiences. Also as I type, I would like to point to how people who are demonstrating for indigenous Aboriginal Australians and Māoris are performing the Haka, under the Black Lives Matter banner – a further indicator of how context, circumstance, and sentiment surround terms such as *Black*.

During lockdown, I watched the Netflix film *The Rachel Divide* on Rachel Dolezal. Beyond tackling the controversy and aftermath concerning her alleged racial identity, it brings an interesting debate to the field: of nature versus nurture, or biology versus psychology. The argument presented was that if we can accept gender fluidity and self-classification, then why not for race? As we search for more accurate, authentic, ethically and morally superior, or even lucrative classifiers and practices: I believe that marketing scholars should focus more attention on investigating these ontological positions and the implications.

Finally, as I round off this editorial with growing public consciousness, polarising views, and droves of companies joining the *brandwagon* with messages of solidarity, I want to offer a suggestion as to why there is such an outpouring. There are significant numbers of people around the world who have waited patiently for the permission or opportunity to share their experiences and feelings, knowing full well that in polite society these moments are not around all of the time. Furthermore, COVID19 has affected BAME individuals disproportionately – and collectively these health, economic and societal factors have made so many more people inescapably think seriously about race and future implications.

Brand attempts to (re)present Black social justice activism – Dr. Francesca Sobande
As is discussed in this special issue, branding and marketing strategies have been shaped by racial and racist marketplace dynamics for a long time. However, the rise of social media in the twenty-first century, such as Twitter, Instagram, and YouTube, has complicated how brands respond to and (re)present issues regarding race. In addition, the significant role that social media plays in the everyday lives of many people has shaped how individuals voice their critiques of brands and try to hold brands accountable when they deploy cynical marketing strategies that ultimately sustain structural racism.

For example, Pepsi's 2017 'Live for Now' film commercial featuring American model and television personality Kendall Jenner, was quickly withdrawn following impactful online critiques (Henry, 2020) –

mainly commentaries led and developed by Black people on Twitter. The commercial crudely attempted to invoke images and ideas associated with Black social justice activism, specifically, protesting and police stand-offs which were depicted in the commercial as being diffused by merely exchanging a can of Pepsi. As such, the commercial has been referred to as a prime example of what has been termed, 'woke-washing' (Sobande, 2019). Years later, from May–June in 2020, many brands attempted to produce a public statement and social media content that was sensitive to the Black Lives Matter movement that galvanised globally in response to fatal police brutality inflicted upon Black people in the US, such as George Floyd, Tony McDade, Breonna Taylor and Ahmaud Arbery.

From Danish toy production company, Lego, to US educational children's television series, Sesame Street, in the Spring and Summer of 2020 and aided by social media, brands endeavoured to say and do something to suggest their investment in tackling structural anti-Blackness and racism in society (McLymore, 2020). The related statements of many brands were critiqued online (Blackmon, 2020), especially the words of brands that neither specifically referred to Black people or had any intention to financially support Black-led grassroots work. In some cases, such online critiques contributed to brands finally committing to financially supporting specific activist efforts. In other cases, such critiques on social media put a dent in the reputation of brands and was highlighted by high-profile media and industry outlets.

Why is reflecting on this relevant to a *Journal of Marketing Management* special issue? Put briefly, because how and why brands respond to grassroots and global movements intended to tackle anti-Black violence and police brutality is indicative of the strategic ways that brands attempt to opportunistically manage and, even, market societal issues concerning race, structural racism and the lives of Black people. Various scholarly discussions featured in this special issue deal with the different ways that racial capitalism functions amidst consumer culture contexts. There is nothing new about brands performing their proximity to social and political struggles as a means of seeking economic leverage in the marketplace. Nevertheless, the expanding media and market influence of individuals' social media comments concerning the perceived disingenuous and inadequate actions of brands have altered such institutions' ability to manage and mitigate backlash against them.

Brands are not activists, contrary to what is sometimes suggested. Still, as part of their public relations and corporate social responsibility strategies, some brands position themselves as contributing to Black social justice activism, because associated 'gestures of moral responsibility by corporations and other institutions are occurring at a moment when taking up such charges is fashionable and convenient' (Race in the Marketplace Network, 2020). In the months and years that follow this special issue, many brands may continue to make use of marketing practices that yield little more than potentially profitable forms of optical allyship, repackaged as critical interventions. Thus, robust examinations of the racial and racist dynamics of marketplace activity will remain necessary and a crucial part of efforts to hold brands accountable for their (in)action.

Overview of special issue contributions

Race and racism are far more than mere social constructs. While global in impact, their felt experience is often personal, material, and deeply visceral. To quote Coates (2015, p. 10), racism 'dislodges brains, blocks airways, rips muscle, extracts organs, cracks bones, breaks teeth. You must never look away

from this. You must always remember that the sociology, the history, the economics, the graphs, the charts, the regressions all land, with great violence, upon the body.’ Communicating the meaning, purpose, and implications – in theory and practice – of such embodied concepts requires more than well-articulated abstract thought exercises. As such, the contributions featured in this special issue embrace a sense of urgency, trouble the assumptive value of objectivity, and grapple with the materiality of marketing and managing racial dynamics. While each contribution is grounded in critical theoretical traditions, they employ a diverse cross-section of contextual and methodological perspectives, including arts-based approaches.

In their invited commentary, Hill and Sobande (2020) collaboratively share insights, personal experiences, and conceptual considerations about race and identity in British marketplaces. They draw on the power of photography to illuminate racial dynamics in marketing management, inaccessible solely through the written word. Utilising critical reflexivity, the two observe and (re)view the myriad ways in which the practice of photography – the framing of the lens as well as the (re)production and distribution of photos – captures, capitulates, and counters hegemonic understandings of themselves and other racialised people in spaces of consumption.

In our second invited contribution, Wilson (2020) contemplates on the racial dynamics of present-day branding utilising spoken word RAP (Rhyme And Poetry) as a methodology and as a homage to the BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and People of Colour) global Hip-hop community. Grounded in rhetoric, analogies, and allegories, the aim of his poetic intervention is to present a didactic passage for discussion and reflection. Mirroring the logic held by branding practitioners, Wilson deploys a host of popular culture symbolism in a gestalt method to create a memorable cultural artefact. Wilson’s piece opens with an introductory essay that provides context and rationale and closes with a glossary that explicates the array of cultural references found within his prose.

Using Critical Race Theory (CRT) as an analytic framework, Grier and Poole (2020) examine the role of race in faculty hiring within the ever-increasing commercialised and corporatised sphere of higher education. Through a close examination of the faculty search practices of business schools, the two analyse the ways that racial injustice is systemically and institutionally normalised and reproduced. Based on depth interviews conducted with 24 underrepresented minority faculty, Grier and Poole identify persistent and pervasive barriers that hinder racial diversity among faculty hires. Their data analysis reveals consistent themes across diverse institutions and draws attention to aspects of the business school recruiting process that may be modified to enhance the recruitment of racially diverse faculty in business schools.

In ‘Producing Beauty the “Hard Way:” Involuntary Prosumption in a Stigmatising Context,’ Rocha et al. (2020) unpack sociological and economic issues surrounding hair styles and textures among Black women in Brazil, where Eurocentric beauty standards are revered and African-textured hair is stigmatised. Delving into a topic of significant concern among Black women around the world, the authors examine how Black women are compelled to produce the hair care products and processes that they consume, given a lack of suitable products and services available in the local marketplace. Based on interviews with Brazilian women, prosumption behaviour is necessitated by the need to attain an appearance which is socially acceptable and essential to the maintenance of their livelihoods.

In their article, Wei and Bunjun (2020) utilise a critical race perspective to examine how and why consumers use social networks to counter racist brand associations by promoting claims of diversity. Employing a netnographic case study approach, the two detail three specific modes of consumer responses: punishing, advising, and defending. Their findings deepen our understanding of multiculturalism in marketing by extending ideas of impact beyond questions of personal cognitive change and offering a more dynamic view of race and racism. Further, by connecting issues of race to the larger project of nation-building, their work also complements psychological and identity-based accounts of how consumers engage with brands on social networks as they work to take up diversity.

Takhar's (2020) prose (*Shopkeeping*) poetically captures the social and commercial mood in the Midlands region of the UK during the strife-ridden 1980s. Employing a collective autoethnographic framework, Takhar centres the experiences of South Asian corner shop owners and how they managed their spiritual and professional lives while having to confront oppressive political forces and widespread racism and xenophobia. Takhar concludes her contribution with a brief explanatory essay that expounds on the racial and market-based implications of her poetic intervention. In terms of contribution, Takhar's piece extends the work of Sherry and Schouten (2002), which demonstrated the communicatory limitations of traditional prose articles, by highlighting the liberatory potential of 'postcolonial poetic-based autoethnography'. She conceptualises postcolonial poetic-based autoethnography as an alternative form of ethnographic research which privileges and legitimates the subjectivities, narratives, and histories of subjugated populations.

The paper 'I Need the Hook-up: The Impact of Shared Race and Ethnic Identity on the Expectations of Service Quality' by Ferguson et al. (2020) shifts the empirical focus from the Black consumer to the far less examined Black business owner. The team of researchers investigate how race and level of ethnic identification impact service expectations when patronising Black-owned businesses. Their results suggest that all consumers generally expect fair treatment, but Black consumers have an expectation of 'preferential treatment' when frequenting Black-owned businesses. The strength of a Black consumer's ethnic identity accentuated this and other aspects of service quality expectations. Their findings contribute vital insights to Black-owned businesses in understanding and managing the service expectations of their patrons. While Black consumers have increased in scope and scale, Black-owned businesses have primarily remained small. The findings and implications detailed by the authors fill a critical theoretical gap as well as providing practical managerial recommendations to spur growth among Black-owned businesses.

Rosa-Salas and Flower (2020) dig deep into the world of nameplate jewellery, a style of customisable adornment in which names or words are crafted from gold or other metals and worn as necklaces, earrings, rings, belt buckles, or bracelets, to investigate the contentious intersection of fashion and identity politics. Based on their larger ongoing digital storytelling and photography project, *Documenting the Nameplate*, their article uncovers how minoritised people incorporate these fashion objects as part of their life narratives and family histories. Their findings illustrate that for a subset of this style's adoptees, their choice to wear nameplate jewellery is grounded in a conscious desire to oppose the cultural politics that marginalise them and their style of fashion in the broader public sphere. By examining the social implications of style on consumers' sense of positioning in

contemporary societal structures, Rosa-Salas and Flower extend and deepen our understanding of the role of fashion and style within consumer identity projects.

Doytcheva (2020) draws on a longitudinal qualitative approach to critically examine the rise of corporate 'raceless' diversity in France, a phenomenon she describes as 'white diversity'. Her investigation centres on the technologies of normalisation, particularly how they (dis)embody the law, uphold marketplace privilege and discrimination, and serve to justify social and racial hierarchies. Utilising a Foucauldian analytic lens to normalisation, the paper engages with the case study of the French Diversity Label. Doytcheva explores the ways in which market-based mechanisms of regulation have shaped the management of race difference. Her findings demonstrate how French organisations uphold whiteness by normalising antidiscrimination through voluntary social certification. Doytcheva's paper makes an original contribution to critical perspectives in both management and marketing literatures and adds to extant understanding of marketisation processes.

Mitchell's (2020) study makes a major contribution to the body of work on race and colourism by introducing an empirical method to assess skin tonality among Black models appearing in marketing communication materials. It also lays the groundwork for subsequent study investigating the alleged practice and prevalence of whitewashing in marketing and visual representations, with important implications for new scholarship and managerial approaches. This is an important topic, as global cultures have indicated a preference for fair skin tones in the United States, Europe, Latin America, Asia/South Asia and other parts of the globe at the same time that the marketing industry has been asked to examine its role in perpetuating systemic racism worldwide.

Concluding thoughts

We conclude by circling back to where we began, acknowledging the magnitude of the present moment. According to the Centres for Disease Control (COVID-19 in Racial and Ethnic Minority Groups, 2020), in the US, Black and Indigenous populations are five times more likely, and Latinx populations four times more likely, than non-Hispanic White individuals to be hospitalised. These glaring disparities cannot be explained away by genetics, cultural differences, or individual choices. Rather, they are the result of market logic rooted in racial capitalism (Robinson, 2000) and necropolitics (Mbembe, 2003). Robinson's concept of racial capitalism illuminates how capitalism and racism are conjoined – the latter delivering the underclass the former perpetually requires. While Mbembe's conceptualisation of necropolitics elucidates the literal life and death consequences that come along with existing within a racialised capitalistic paradigm.

We need only turn a critical eye to history to witness this theoretical framework in practice. For instance, it is estimated that between 1845 and 1849 a million Irish people suffered from starvation, not because of an act of God (potato famine), but as an aftereffect of racism and market forces (Kinealy, 1994). Under British rule, the Irish were characterised as monkey-like savages unfit to self-govern (Wigger, 2011) and lived within an economic structure designed to serve the interests of British merchants first and foremost. At the time of the potato blight, Ireland's agricultural output was considerably diverse. The assortment of crops that were still available could have nourished the starving population, but the vast majority of them were exported to England so that British merchants could monetarily profit from their sale (Thornton, 2017). Fast forward to the present and we find that

the landscape has changed but the ideology remains the same. Although the Irish would essentially assimilate into whiteness (Ignatiev, 2009) – demonstrating the versatility and constructedness of race, from global imperialism, the transatlantic slave trade and manifest destiny, racial capitalism would emerge anew with phenotype rather than nationhood serving as its backdrop.

The modern global agricultural market produces more than enough food to feed the world's population (Berners-Lee et al., 2018; Hiç et al., 2016), yet in the name of financial gain each year approximately 800 million people suffer from hunger and the current mode of racialisation looms as a leading predictor of who is and is not fed. As opposed to an anomaly, the racial disparities we are experiencing with COVID-19 are merely mirroring back the latest iteration of racial capitalism and its resulting necropolitics, but in this variant, and in true post-modern fashion, the underclass has been reconstituted as 'essential workers' – a phrase that at once exalts and condemns the predominantly racialised people it seeks to describe. Their denial of safe working conditions, a livable wage, and adequate healthcare demonstrate that it is not their life that is essential, but their continued ability to move markets forward by facing death.

It is yet to be seen whether this moment, wherein the pervasiveness of structural racism is in the global consciousness like never before, will constitute a racial reckoning or merely a repetition of the past. If a reckoning is to take place, marketing scholars must do their part. As opposed to representing a marginalised niche that mainly focuses on the United States, critical investigations of race and marketing practices must become commonplace, international in scope, and more methodologically diverse. In the wake of global calls for racial justice, a growing list of prominent marketers have explicitly denounced structural racism and expressed a commitment to bringing about more racially equitable markets. We call on marketing scholars to engage in scholarly work that will help hold these and other marketplace entities accountable so that current movements for racial justice are not coopted, rebranded, and commoditised into yet another revised form of racial capitalism. Our hope is that this special issue will honour the vanguard of scholars that have and continue to do such work as well as inspire and guide the next generation that will.

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