

# Why Racism Went Viral and What It Means For Diversity and Inclusion?

Carmen Morris | *I help leaders to build diversity and inclusion strategy and equity.* | Forbes.com | Jun 12, 2020



Racism is nothing new. It has been pervasive within western society for centuries, steadily tainting the lives of black people, like a malignant virus. It is evident within conversations, in our classrooms, our workplaces and impacts the potential of growth within our society.

Recently, racism went viral. The covert and overt nature of it, capturing the consciousness of the world, with speed and veracity that has rarely, if ever, been seen before, in relation to race.

Racism went viral because it is finding itself increasingly difficult to hide. The images of the horrendous circumstances of the death George Floyd could not be denied. The images started the world talking, in a way it has never done before.

Racism went viral because people have had enough. People of all races, backgrounds and creeds have taken to the streets in protests all over the world.



GETTY

## **Racism has a long and entrenched history**

Racism towards black people has a long history. Initiated at the onset of the Trans-Atlantic slave trade, and perpetuated against black people for centuries, it is an institutional and systematic insult, on people of African heritage.

Black lives matter. Plain and simple. The issue is that within a system that appears resolved on preserving dominance, acts of racism, both covert and overt have been allowed to flourish.

Racism can no longer be swept under the carpet. In a technologically advanced world, we all are all able to capture real live events, as they happen.

## **The New World is Technologically Based**

The prevalence of social media in our daily lives, has changed the game. The death of George Floyd, captured in real time, was a 'wake up moment' for the world. The manner in which he died, was captured live, for all the world to see.

The speed at which the video spread across the world, would make the most seasoned marketing campaign executive blush.



GETTY

The increasing use of technology allows issues around racism to trend.

The video, shared through every medium of technology, put racism in a place where it has rarely been before. Front, center and live in our living rooms, on our phones, computers and tablets and the world is talking.

People are openly asking questions of their leaders, those who govern our societies and workplaces. They are taking action through protests, to condemn the pervasive and insidious racism, that taints the existence and experiences of people who were born in black skins.

Racism went viral because it can no longer hide. The people have had enough. They are calling for the systems that create, and maintain, racism to be disbanded.

## **Demand for Change**

The viral nature of protests around the world, has led to demands for a change to traditional diversity and inclusion workplace initiatives. The very nature of the protests and the anger that black people and their allies feel, speak to the fact that many of these workplace initiatives are not working.

Diversity and inclusion initiatives have, for some time now, been a part of the agenda for organizations—but the issue of race, risks being overshadowed by other concerns if it's not addressed specifically

Venture within the walls of the C-Suite of most organizations and they are strikingly lacking in black people and other of color. These areas of organizations, where key decisions are made, are visibly dominated by white people.

It is true, and the numbers attest to this, that in the United Kingdom and in the United States, there are huge deficits in the number of black people, at executive levels. If black people are not part of the decision-making process at this level, then how can black communities own decisions, in which they have had no realistic part in making?

Both social pressure, and legislative instruments, have demanded that organizations work to become more representative. But the status quo remains largely unchanged, as statistics year after year continue to indicate a prevalence of white male dominance at the executive level.

Leaders must communicate the value of people from different races, across their organizations.



GETTY

## **Towards Racial Inclusion**

Organizations also need to realize that simply increasing their headcount of black people without adopting meaningful actions to elevate them through their company ranks, is akin to window-dressing rather than truly becoming diverse.

The Black Lives Matter protests, which are a constant trending story across social media, and our television screens, is a wake-up call.

The empty rhetoric from leadership on matters of race equality, is being called out question by black people and their allies.

Organizations that have rushed to make public statements against racism should consider first and foremost whether they are part of the problem. Rhetoric doesn't work anymore. Only tangible actions will.

Authentic actions, and accountability are the drivers that will ensure equality of opportunity for black employees.

Structural racism will no longer be tolerated and has the potential to become a trending story. Dismantling the policies and processes that processes facilitate structural racism, is a tangible step towards race equality.

Racism went viral. Racism is trending. It is the duty of organizational leaders to address the imbalances, caused by racism, that serve to hold back the progress of black people in our society.