

Fashion Industry's #1 Problem: Lack of Diversity

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Intro

We are almost through the second decade of the twenty first century. Social media is the biggest news outlet, and even our cars send text messages on our behalf. Why is all of this important? These are just a few indicators on how advanced we are as a society. Information is readily accessible with just a tap on our smartphones or even a voice command. It also isn't a secret that life isn't fair. People get certain positions based on who they know, not what they know and in some cases it's based on where a person is from or the color of their skin. This is the case for various businesses around the world, especially in the fashion industry. Somehow, despite all of this, major fashion brands and retailers still manage to release designs that are obviously racist, sexist, and distasteful. The people who are at the upper echelon of the fashion business make decisions on who to pick for certain positions based on who they know, where they're from, and/or the color of their skin. This type of decision making leads to people being in lead positions that they're not ready or best suited for and an unbalanced scale of diversity in boardrooms where decisions are made. It's very sad that people are still facing these types of barriers and dilemmas in the 21st century. Why is racism on such a professional scale still prevalent today? A lack of diversity within the fashion industry

Gucci Black Face

Because of the lack of diversity in the fashion industry, Gucci thought it was okay to make a design on a turtleneck that resembled black faces. For those that don't know, The portrayal of blackface is when people darken their skin with shoe polish, greasepaint or burnt cork and paint on enlarged lips and other exaggerated features. Black Faces began in the US after

the Civil War as white performers played characters that demeaned and dehumanized African Americans. Gucci basically modified this on their black turtleneck by having the neck part of the sweater come all the way up to just about under the nose and cutting out the mouth in the shape of a smile with red lining on the smile. This caused a national outcry on social media and according to fashionista.com, Dapper Dan (Black designer who works for Gucci) called them out via instagram saying "I am a Black man before I am a brand," he wrote. "Another fashion house has gotten it outrageously wrong. There is no excuse nor apology that can erase this kind of insult. The CEO of Gucci has agreed to come from Italy to Harlem this week to meet with me, along with members of the community and other industry leaders. There cannot be inclusivity without accountability. I will hold everyone accountable." Dapper Dan was extremely upset and even had the CEO of Gucci come all the way from Italy just to speak to him. He made it very clear to them that he was a black man before a brand and that the Black Face turtle neck hurt him. According to Fashionista.com, Gucci apologized saying "Gucci deeply apologizes for the offense caused by the wool balaclava jumper ... We consider diversity to be a fundamental value to be fully upheld, respected and at the forefront of every decision we make. We are fully committed to increasing diversity throughout our organization and turning this incident into a powerful learning moment for the Gucci team and beyond." The brand themselves even pointed out that they had to increase the diversity throughout their organization. This just shows how the fashion industry is lacking diversity and they need to have it in their organizations so that things like this won't happen again. These are the type of things that can really hurt a company's reputation and lead to sales going down. Brands like Gucci are starting to realize that even though it took a national outcry for that to happen.

H&M Monkey Scandal

Like Gucci, H&M needed some diversity within their company as well. They thought it was okay to have an African American little boy wearing a sweatshirt that stated “coolest monkey in the jungle” was okay. The scandal drew public accusations of racism all over social media, including from the Weeknd and G-Eazy (Famous Musicians), who both cut ties with the company. According to Washingtonpost.com, “since the scandal, the parents of the child featured in the image have publicly stated that they don’t believe the ad was racist.” Although they may have felt that way, African Americans around the world didn’t feel that way. According to usatoday.com, “...there were protests at some H&M stores” in South Africa. These chain of events led to H&M appointing a diversity leader. According to USA Today, “the retailer said Global Manager for Employee Relations Annie Wu, a company veteran, would be the new global leader for diversity and inclusiveness.” Just like Gucci, this is another case that proves that the fashion industry lacks diversity. These companies just have people that don’t have cultural views making decision on what clothes should be put out and it’s leading to national outcries. Once that happens these companies finally find the need to hire diversity leaders. It shouldn’t take a big mistake for these companies to hire diverse people, but granted it happened and it’s leading to more doors opening up. The case highlights how important it has become for multinationals to consider the different cultural views and sensitivities in their sales markets. That's especially true as social media makes it possible for an ad posted in one country to be shared and viewed around the world.

Tyler Mitchell: First African American to Ever Shoot Cover of Vogue Magazine

Lack of Diversity within the fashion community leads to the lack of diverse mentorship of the industry. A good example of this is that there has only been one black photographer to ever shoot the cover of Vogue in its 126 year history. What is vogue? Vogue is a fashion lifestyle magazine covering many topics including fashion, beauty, culture, living, and runway. The black photographer's name is Tyler Mitchel and he was 23 years old when he shot the cover. Can you believe that? Vogue has taken a lot of pictures of famous black people over the years, but has only had one black photographer ever doing the actual shoot, this is insane. He actually took the pictures of the one and only Beyonce. According to thecut.com, Beyonce said "Until there is a mosaic of perspectives coming from different ethnicities behind the lens, we will continue to have a narrow approach and view of what the world actually looks like,...That is why I wanted to work with this brilliant 23-year-old photographer Tyler Mitchel." Beyonce had to even speak for the kid to do the shoot, this just shows how people are sick of the unfair treatment and until people of Beyonce speak up, it will never change.

CFDA

Another reason proving that the Lack of Diversity within the fashion community leads to the lack of diverse mentorship of the industry is that only 15 of the 495 CFDA members are black. What is the CFDA? The CFDA is The Council of Fashion Designers of America. Their membership consists of more than 500 of America's foremost womenswear, menswear, jewelry and accessory designers. Yet only 15 of their members are of African American descent? This is totally wrong and needs to be changed. To their credit, the CFDA has finally recognized this and are trying to push for change. In a statement on CFDA.com, it was stated that "The American fashion industry – or for that matter, the industry worldwide – has so far struggled to reflect the

diversity of its constituents and incorporate the inclusion it requires. It's crucial for our industry to understand that diversity and inclusion are not a trend, but the way every company should operate...In late October, we gathered top industry executives at a half-day conference to talk through the issues our industry is facing...The conference became the foundation of an industry briefing on diversity and inclusion." Although it's clear that the fashion industry isn't quite diverse and all open arms as most people would like, it is great to know that people who are in the upper echelon of the business like the CFDA members are starting to have conversations and meetings about making the fashion industry more diverse and complex. I personally believe that the conversation is long overdue, but as they say, better late than never.

Conclusion

There is a serious lack of Diversity in the Fashion Industry and that isn't a secret. Scandals such as the Gucci Black Face sweater and the African American little boy wearing a sweater that said 'coolest monkey in the jungle' are all the events that occurred because of the lack of diversity and mentorship within the business of fashion. I personally believe that if these major companies hadn't made such big mistakes, they wouldn't even try to diversify their companies, but they're all seeing how important it is for them to go the route of hiring people that come from different walks of life. Also the amount of attention that the subject of diversity is getting is giving them no choice. Important people of the Fashion Business such as the CFDA members are even having discussions about diversifying the industry. It's about time that this subject came to light, and people of minority groups get a fair chance to express their ideas within the fashion culture.

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