

From the moment we wake up until we go to sleep, it's estimated that we are exposed to between 2,000 and 5,000 advertising messages *daily*. This includes ads we see on TV, hear on the radio, see on billboards, on the Internet, in magazines we pick up while waiting for a doctor's appointment, on display at stores we frequent, on Facebook and other social media, and in conversations between friends, family and coworkers.

Whether this is subliminal or overt selling, the point is, we're inundated with advertising and messages in multiple forms that seek to influence our decision-making. A huge part of that messaging is to instill the belief that White is right. These advertisements tell us that straight hair is beautiful while curly and coily hair should be "tamed and controlled," that White skin and features are more beautiful than Black and Brown skin and features, that White people are smarter and more accomplished, that White history is more important and that White lives, not Black lives, are the ones that really matter.

And it's not only advertising. The moment we leave neighborhoods where Black and Brown people comprise the majority, we're barraged with endless reminders of White supremacy.

Schools, sports teams, highways, streets, museums and monuments named after segregationists like George Wallace and Woodrow Wilson, members of the KKK, Confederate Army "heroes," the early settlers, slave owners and/or that dehumanize Black, Brown and Indigenous people are everywhere in the U.S. and Puerto Rico (where I live).

TaRessa Stovall is an activist and writer in Atlanta, Georgia. [Stovall](#) is Black and Jewish (Blewish) and the author of [Swirl Girl: Coming of Race in the USA.](#), and has some definite feelings on these reminders.

"If you are a Black transplant to Atlanta, particularly a northerner, you are quickly taught 'If you leave Atlanta to travel through the state of Georgia, you don't want it to be in a car.' Because while Atlanta is not in any way immune from racism, since the 1970s beginning with Mayor Maynard Jackson and continuing until today with an unbroken string of smart, savvy Black mayors at the helm, it has had a good deal of Black political power. The recently departed Congressman John R. Lewis was preceded in his seat by the late Congressman Julian Bond, for instance. However, there is an unmistakable undercurrent of good-old Southern-fried racism that keeps the major economic power in the capital city and throughout the state concentrated among White people. That undercurrent is the driving force between the lack of widespread public transportation throughout the Metro Atlanta area, for instance.

"That undercurrent is grounded in the Confederacy. The symbols of Confederacy are everywhere—official symbols such as flags and statues of their heroes. And unofficial symbols such as large red pickup trucks, which often include rifles made visible to send the message about the kind of racism that is simply a part of everyday life."

Kristen Chandler is a White Alabamian writer and social media marketer who concurs with Stovall. “To me, it’s a constant reminder of how much our state has not evolved. Every city has a street or road named after Martin Luther King Jr., but for each one named after him, there are three more named after Robert E. Lee and others in the Confederate Army.

“And still, even with the removal of statues and such throughout the state, there hasn’t been much improvement. The mayor of Birmingham boarded up the Confederate statue there after it was vandalized and said that it would be removed. He was then fined by the state because there is actually a [state law against removing Confederate statues](#).

“And it’s all over social media how other Alabamians and southerners feel about the removal of these statues and other things such as [The Chicks’ name change](#). Most are angry and complain that all of this Confederate stuff that they’re taking down and removing is a part of the south’s history.

“And it is.” Kristin concludes. “But I feel like the constant need to want to cling to this history has kept them in a mindset that won’t adapt to change. It’s okay to say, “yes this was a part of our history and no we can’t change history, but what can we do to be better right now?”

Are We Really Dismantling Racism One Name at a Time?

In the wake of the #JusticeforGeorge protests, we’re seeing countless outward displays of racism being called out and action finally being taken. Companies, states, cities, schools, brands, etc. around the world are, for the first time ever, addressing what can be anything from being blinkered to blatant racism. We’re seeing a shift from names that paid homage to White and male supremacy to names that are more inclusive and reflective of the collective consciousness.

However...

While it feels more like a trend or perhaps just smart business decisions—versus actually giving a shit about people of color—I admit I never imagined I’d live to see the day when there was no more Washington Redskins, Aunt Jemima, Fair & Lovely, Sambo’s restaurants and the myriad odes to the Confederate army, segregationists, slave owners, etc. I also never expected the [world to join in](#).

The list of name changes in light of the protests is now pretty [large and climbing](#). Some speak to the country and the world’s ugly history and some are more obscure brand name changes. [Coon cheese](#) of Australia and [Darlie toothpaste](#) of China (originally called Darkie) stuck out. (Check out this clip of [Eddie Murphy and Dick Cavett on the David Letterman show](#) from 1985. They’re discussing Darkie toothpaste. The entire segment is great, but if you just want to see the part about Darkie toothpaste, fast forward to 9:47.)

Performative or Real and Lasting Change? You Make the Call.

Whereas I support changing names that glorify White supremacy, in many cases it feels performative or tied to fears of lost revenue. In the case of the Washington Redskins, residents and politicians in D.C., Maryland and Virginia have long protested the team's obvious anti-Indigenous racism. Between 1972 and 2017, there have been numerous lawsuits challenging the trademark of the name, but it wasn't until the recent protests that team owner [Daniel Snyder caved to pressure by FedEx](#). It's difficult for me to believe this recent change of heart is indicative of anything other than fear of backlash that will affect their bottom line. I feel the same way about Aunt Jemima, Uncle Ben's rice, Land 'O Lakes butter and many more.

For example, Nestlé is among the many companies changing the name of their brands. Their chocolate-coated marshmallow called Beso de Negra is marketed mostly in Colombia. Beso de negra in English means kiss from a Black woman. While it's lovely Nestlé recognizes this is racist, when [they, Hershey's, M&M Mars and myriad other chocolate companies still use child slaves](#) to pick their chocolate, at the end of the day, do we really think they give a shit about Black and Brown people?

Dismantling Racism Takes Real Work, Not Name Changing

I spent 20-plus years in the corporate world, starting with WCBS Radio and culminating with biotech giant Amgen. I started at CBS when I was in journalism school, which was more years ago than this writer can count. I was hired to be a peon in the very busy newsroom. I had to file a lawsuit against CBS because, despite scoring a 98 percent on the writing test, the White intern's score of 56 percent got her promoted to writer, while I was not. This was in the late 1980s, so one can reasonably agree this is how things were back then. However, when my last boss at Amgen threatened to send me home and take me to human resources because I refused to chemically straighten my very curly, obviously ethnic hair, I knew things hadn't changed much between 1988 and 2007.

What I learned from my time at Amgen was that, despite the requirement for all in the company to take [diversity classes every year](#), once we left the class, everyone was free to move about the racist cabin. On top of that, of the 27 people in senior management (senior vice president and above), [only one is African American](#) and she doesn't appear to even run a department, like the others. So what was the purpose of a class that's required annually, except to have a facilitator be paid to talk *at* (not with) people for upwards of three hours?

Stephen Young, senior partner of [Insight Education Systems](#) and author of [Micromessaging: Why Great Leadership is Beyond Words](#), agrees, but he doesn't see this just as a necessity arising from the protests. Prior to joining Insight Education Systems in 2002, he was the senior vice president and chief diversity officer at JPMorgan Chase.

“I’m proud to say that under my leadership, JPMorgan Chase was recognized for its many diversity inclusion initiatives, including the Catalyst Award, Fortune Magazine’s Top 50 Companies for Minorities Award, the Best Companies Award from Working Mother Magazine, and DiversityInc Magazine’s designation as the #1 company for diversity. I also know how much work it takes to ensure inclusion in the corporate setting.”

Young continues, “At Insight Education Systems, the goal with seminars and webinars is to [identify and address the inextricable link between workplace inclusion and effective leadership](#). Our programs provide insight and direction on how to send messages that unlock the performance of all those within a leader’s sphere of influence. Without identifying these links, without companies doing the work to address them, from the hourly worker to the CEO, nobody in the company is performing to their potential.”

Young and his team’s approach to addressing [microinequities and managing unconscious](#) bias in the workplace is pretty unique and has been featured in O Magazine, Time, GoodHousekeeping, The San Francisco Bee and others.

The premise is simple: human beings in general, although White people in particular, have both implicit and unconscious bias that cause them to do some of the following in the workplace:

- When a White coworker is presenting, other White coworkers will engage them by asking questions that imply they’ve been paying attention. Conversely when a woman, Black or Brown coworker presents, White coworkers will often zero in on the one typo in the entire presentation and make a point to “ask, you know, for clarification,” making no other comments about the presentation before returning to their smartphones.
- When a woman presents, particularly a Black or Brown woman, she’ll be interrupted frequently and have her methods questioned.
- When resumes are discussed in recruiting meetings, ones with ethnic-sounding names will be examined under a microscope, whereas ones with names that “sound White” are often pushed through and candidates are invited to interview. Oftentimes, candidates with ethnic-sounding names will be asked to interview only *after* the first round of White candidates have failed to yield a hire.
- When meeting a Black or Brown person at the same time as meeting a White person, the White coworker will make strange references to the Black or Brown person’s accomplishments, such as “you’ve achieved a lot,” but with the White coworker they’ll find something in common to discuss. Sometimes White men will assume a certain intimacy with a Black man by using expressions like, “Hey Brother!”
- Of course, there’s the dreaded “you’re so articulate” comment that White people would never say to other White people.

I spoke with Young for over two hours and audited one of his seminars, and while I didn't learn anything new about how implicit bias works (in my experience all people of color and women are well versed in this concept), I did learn how my responses to these biases have been mostly unproductive. I learned new ways to address what many of us refer to as microaggressions (Young calls them microinequities) and blatant racism. His approach is the cornerstone of the seminars he teaches, and why they're popular with Fortune 500 companies and small companies, both in the U.S. and around the world. I wish I could say I was excited to try out my newfound responses.

Dismantling racism, sexism and all the other isms takes work. It's not something that can be achieved by *finally* giving in to societal pressures and changing your name from something that upholds White supremacy to something that implies inclusion. The U.S. and all White-led nations have a 500-year history of dehumanizing Black and Brown people and women. It doesn't go away overnight simply because of the protests.

As with all change, it starts with the admission there's a problem. If companies, state, local and federal governments aren't even willing to address the problem, but immediately jump to changing names, removing racist statues and making speeches that say a whole lot of nothing, they're not ready and don't want real and lasting change.

In order to really dismantle all the isms, it [requires dismantling capitalism](#) and I don't see this happening in my lifetime. Until then, I continue to quote one of my heroes, [Fred Hampton](#): "You can kill the revolutionary, but you can't kill the revolution." While the revolution continues, it's anybody's guess how things will turn out. I remain cautiously optimistic.

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