

CORPORATE SOCIAL ADVOCACY BEST PRACTICES:

ADDRESSING THE BLACK LIVES MATTER MOVEMENT



JULIANA CURTIN
UNIVERSITY OF COLORADO BOULDER

TABLE OF CONTENTS

01	/ Project Overview
02	/ Case Study: Ben & Jerry's
03	/ Case Study: Nike
04	/ Case Study: Popeyes
05	/ Live Case Study: Boston Red Sox & Red Sox Foundation
06	/ Best Practices & Final Takeaways

"We should think about **internally** what we need to do to make sure we're on the right side of this, supporting our people. This is an incredibly emotional time, especially for employees of color, particularly for our Black employees. We've got to make space for both them and us to process what's happening culturally and nationally, and we've got to figure out how to **leverage our brand in a way that's going to benefit everyone**; most importantly, our own people."

–Bekah Salwasser, Vice President, Social Impact of the
Boston Red Sox

PROJECT OVERVIEW

For my undergraduate honors thesis, I studied how major corporations have implemented the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement into its corporate social advocacy (CSA) efforts after the murder of George Floyd in 2020.

In efforts to “do the right thing,” CSA has become a crucial aspect of many businesses’ public relations tactics to appear “woke,” or socially aware. However, these efforts are often a series of performative activism, with no established initiatives for social change beyond vocalized support.

Findings from my conducted case studies on various CSA efforts have served as the rationale in determining the best practices for brands and PR professionals to use when addressing racial injustices from a place of authenticity— both in and outside the office.

This best practices guide is the creative manifestation of my research and case studies methodologies, analyzing real world CSA strategies, public perceptions, and outcomes to craft results-driven, equitable CSA approaches and recommendations.

As a public relations student soon to enter the professional world, I feel personally obligated to do the right thing and learn how to properly advocate for social movements and ethical business practices, especially when both justice and reputations are on the line.

THESIS STATEMENT

By conducting research on various corporations’ social advocacy efforts in the past year, I have created a “best practices” guide for public relations professionals on how to effectively implement political and social justice movements, specifically BLM and racial equality, into the internal and external advocacy strategies of corporations.

BRAND VALUES

- Human Rights & Dignity
- Social & Economic Justice
- Environmental Protection, Restoration, & Regeneration

MISSION STATEMENT

"Ben & Jerry's is founded on and dedicated to a sustainable corporate concept of linked prosperity. Central to the Mission of Ben & Jerry's is the belief that all three parts [product, economic, & social] of its mission must thrive equally in a manner that commands deep respect for individuals inside and outside the Company and supports the communities of which they are a part."

INITIAL BLM STATEMENT*

June 2, 2020: "The murder of George Floyd was the result of inhumane police brutality that is perpetuated by a culture of white supremacy. <https://benjerrys.co/2XXle5J>."



Source: @benandjerrys via Twitter.

BLM CSA EFFORTS*

- 4-step, detailed call to action [strategy plan](#).
- Extensive BLM information & resources thread via social media pages and company website.
- Increased funding for social change grants through the Ben & Jerry's Foundation.
- Colin Kaepernick "Change the Whirled" ice cream flavor, with portion of proceeds donated towards Know Your Rights Camp (racial justice organization).
- "Change is Brewing" ice cream flavor.
- "Into the Mix" podcast (focused on art, activism, & social change).
- George Floyd Policing Act, People's Response Act, & Defund the Police petitions.
- Honoring Black holidays.

PUBLIC PERCEPTIONS & FEEDBACK

- "Received a massive response— mostly of overwhelming support, but also mixed with misunderstanding, sincere questions and sadly, some hatred. But one thing became clear: it started a conversation." – Ben & Jerry's via benjerry.com.
- "Thank you for your steadfast, unwavering, and dogged commitment to equality, inclusion, fairness, and justice. Your pinned statement is a constant reminder of our state of affairs. While others have forgotten, you have not. We cannot let up!" – @wonderwomanninny via Twitter.
- "You should sign your business over to the Black community then. You are the epitome of White supremacy." – @marianneb75 via Instagram.
- "Imagine saying you're not gonna eat Ben and Jerry's because they're anti-White supremacy." – @thisischristis_86 via Twitter.

OVERALL ASSESSMENT



Perception:
Positive CSA

EVALUATION OF CSA EFFORTS

With public support dating back to 2016, Ben & Jerry's has consistently advocated for BLM, especially in the summer of 2020. With vast external efforts reflecting the internal core values of both the brand and BLM movement, Ben & Jerry's has successfully implemented many efforts that have helped progress social change, especially in regards to racial inequality and the Black community.

*After the death of George Floyd.

BRAND VALUES

- Sports Innovation
- Sustainable Product Development
- Creative & Diverse Global Team
- Social Impact on Communities

MISSION STATEMENT

"Bring inspiration and innovation to every athlete* in the world.

*If you have a body, you are an athlete."

INITIAL BLM STATEMENT*

May 29, 2020: "For once, Don't Do It" campaign launch.

Ad Copy: "For once, Don't Do It. Don't pretend there's not a problem in America. Don't turn your back on racism. Don't accept innocent lives being taken from us. Don't make any more excuses. Don't think this doesn't affect you. Don't sit back and be silent. Don't think you can't be part of the change. Let's all be part of the change."

Description: "We will continue to stand up for equality and work to break down barriers for athletes* all over the world. We will do and invest more to uphold longstanding commitment in supporting the Black community and partnering with world-class organizations dedicated to ensuring racial equality, social justice, and greater access to education."

PUBLIC PERCEPTIONS & FEEDBACK

- "Despite some variation across demographic groups, the net sentiment related to this post was positive. In fact, the sentiment was positive across almost all key demographic groups." – Lindsey Roeschke, Director Analyst at Gartner. Her research incorporated the factors of income, age, and ethnicity.
- "\$6 billion increase in sales and an all-time high stock price of \$85 per share in mid-September of that year." – Jo-Yun Li in "6 Months later: Activist marketing takeaways from Nike, Ben & Jerry's calls for racial justice" by P. Adams via ProQuest.
- "Nike publicly supported @Kaepernick7 during his kneeling in the NFL. They spoke proudly of losing hundreds of thousands of racist followers. And yet again they've stepped up and publicly spoken out against the treatment of Black people #BlackLivesMatter." – @CurtisObeng via Twitter.
- "Don't turn your back on racism" yet you still have your logo on thousands of jerseys that says Redskins on them. Smh." – @ClayHumphries11 via Twitter.
- "So we making ads about this now with the Nike symbol at the end smh. If Nike actually was pushing for real change they would support bills for legislation to help end this systematic racism; not just put up ads." – @Dylan_DMB1220 via Twitter.
- "You realize they relayed a message to the 8.4 million followers they have. They end the message with the Nike symbol to say that Nike as a company supports BLM. Just because someone isn't doing everything, does not mean they are doing nothing." – @s3nd_memes via Twitter in response to @Dylan_DMB1220 above.

OVERALL ASSESSMENT



Perception:
Controversial,
leaning more
towards positive,
CSA.



CASE STUDY

BLM CSA EFFORTS*

- 4-year \$40 million dollar commitment towards supporting the Black community.
- "For Once, Don't Do It" Campaign
- Building a more diverse team: 8% increase in race & minority representation at Vice President levels.
- \$125 million dollar investment to support various organizations' addressing and initiating change for racial inequality by 2025.
- Continued partnerships with Colin Kaepernick.
- \$10 million dollar investment towards HBCUs & HSIs.

For once,
Don't Do It.

Source: @Nike via Twitter.

EVALUATION OF CSA EFFORTS

As Nike demonstrated early support for BLM in a 2018 campaign with Colin Kaepernick, Nike continued to stand for racial equality in campaigns, donations, partnerships, and call to building a more diverse global team and communities in 2020. After Floyd's passing, the "Don't Do It" campaign sparked controversy, calling out the brand for not making enough strides towards progressive change. While Nike still has some work to do, the brand is headed towards the right direction in practicing authentic CSA.

*After the death of George Floyd.

BRAND VALUES

- Louisiana Heritage & Cultural Appreciation
- Flavorful, Quality Products
- Employment Diversity

MISSION STATEMENT

"Our vision is to become the most loved restaurant brand in the world."

INITIAL BLM STATEMENT*

June 2, 2020: "Popeyes is nothing without Black lives." –@Popeyes via Twitter.

Shortly after, Popeyes deleted the statement and released a new one that same day.

June 2, 2020: "We are nothing without Black lives. There's no room for injustice. We commit to strengthening every facet of our culture and policies to foster an environment where equality for Black people is a priority. We'll use our platform to support this movement. #BlackLivesMatter." –@Popeyes via Twitter.

PUBLIC PERCEPTIONS & FEEDBACK

- "Besides the fact that it's stereotyping, which in other circumstances would anger people, & the fact that people are up in arms about Wendy's; Popeyes is a company, so by saying that, they mean they're nothing without the money from Black lives. Companies don't care about lives." –@KyleO95 via Twitter.
- "Think it was the stereotype of Black people eating chicken, I believe they had the right intentions but they worded it awfully." @User16636366 via Twitter.
- "You don't see anything wrong with a fried chicken place saying they depend on black people?" –@Dantheman_916 via Twitter.
- "Imma act like the original tweet don't exist." –@901JustinJ via Twitter.
- "Use your platform and power to hire Blacks in your upper management positions." –@DOKing via Twitter.
- "Then pay them more than minimum wage in your restaurants. Put your money where your mouth is." –@Dyermkr4 via Twitter.

OVERALL ASSESSMENT



Perception:
Weak/Negative
CSA

POPEYES

CASE STUDY

BLM CSA EFFORTS*

- Popeyes' Diversity Scorecard released to public in May 2021 to show transparency and efforts to increase diversity in its team.
- 6-step mandate towards diversity focused in its reporting, recruitment, production, creative, media alignment, and minority-owned media.
- Mandated to have at least 50% of employee candidates be ethnically diverse or female.
- Partnership with The One Club for Creativity in the development of food stylist training for BIPOC youth.



Popeyes is nothing without Black lives.

10:51 AM · 6/2/20 · [Twitter Web App](#)

Source: @popeyeschicken (handle later switched to @popeyes) via Twitter.

EVALUATION OF CSA EFFORTS

As it took a few attempts to get on the right track towards authentic CSA, Popeyes' record of problematic Tweets and slow-paced initiatives racked a negative reputation from its publics. Condemning the brand for feeding into racist stereotypes, lack of diversity, and insufficient support for its minimum wage workers, Popeyes' publics pushed for more change. While every corporation uses a different approach in its CSA efforts, I believe that Popeyes could be more transparent and make stronger strides to support the Black community as the franchise once said it is "nothing" without Black lives– even though there is a lack of representation with its internal business employees.

*After the death of George Floyd.

BRAND VALUES

- Social Justice, Equity, & Inclusion
- Family, Youth, Veteran, & Community Engagement/Support
- Accessible Health, Recreation, & Education Opportunities

MISSION STATEMENT

Red Sox Foundation: "Our mission is to use the power of Red Sox Nation to make a difference in the lives of youth, families, Veterans, and communities in need by improving health, educational, and recreational opportunities."

Social Justice, Equity, & Inclusion Advisory Committee: "While we continue to use Red Sox and Red Sox Foundation public platforms to promote racial and social justice causes that align with our core values, the bulk of our work is focused on ways to promote diversity, equity and inclusion within our ballpark, front office, and with our field staff."

INITIAL BLM STATEMENT*

June 1, 2020: "I have been struggling to find the right words to express the profound anguish, outrage and confusion we are all feeling in the wake of the heartbreaking incidents that have occurred across the country over the past few months. The senseless killings of George Floyd, Ahmaud Arbery, and Breonna Taylor are stark reminders that racism and police brutality continue to be pervasive in America. I am proud of our teammates who peacefully protested Sunday. Each of you helped shine a spotlight on injustice, and used your voice to advocate for change. Please know we stand with you." –Sam Kennedy, CEO and President of the Red Sox.

PUBLIC PERCEPTIONS & FEEDBACK

- "I think it's been good, I will say this has always been and everybody's always recognized that this is sort of evolution work, and you'll never get everything right. But the goal is to always be moving forward and making progress, and learning from the past and the journey. I think we've done a great job at that. Obviously, we put on the BLM billboard on the Mass Pike, that created a lot of negative response from certain people that didn't want to see us align with this movement of BLM." – Bekah Salwasser via my personal interview with her.
- "Oftentimes you can recognize progress by making waves. To know, it was validating in some ways to say it was the right thing to do, because clearly it made some people upset. You don't get change without upsetting some people, because people can be adverse to change" – Bekah Salwasser via my personal interview with her.
- "Agreed! Black lives need to matter before all lives can matter with the history this country has. Looks like there is a lot of racists replying. They don't need to be fans anymore and they certainly don't matter! This is coming from a non Red Sox fan." –@NorthStarsNHL via Twitter.
- "Thank you– I'm proud to be a Sox fan. BUT I'm not proud about a lot of these comments. I wish this account didn't get hate for simply supporting those suffering– thank you for defying Boston stereotypes and standing strong." –@taripecevic via Instagram.
- "I'm appalled at the response some fans have to this. Thank you for standing up for a wonderful cause, and have an awesome season." –@ThrashMetalix via Twitter.
- "Props to the Red Sox for actually saying the words "police brutality" instead of more general phrasing." –@bobandre via Instagram.
- "That seals the deal. I am no longer a Red Sox fan. I've been a fan since 1972 and a season ticket holder since 1976. I officially will not be renewing my plan next season nor will I watch on TV ever again. Henry is officially the worst owner in history." @JayLeRay via Twitter.
- "Good to know @redsox supports Marxism and the eradication of the western nuclear family." –@Tim_Bode via Twitter.
- "Pull up as an official team to the front row in your baseball uniform to take a stand, pay your game day teams higher wages, your city needs y'all in the street as a unified front or else this is all talk." –@julia_sheehan52 via Instagram.

OVERALL ASSESSMENT



Perception:
Positive CSA



RED SOX FOUNDATION™

LIVE CASE STUDY

SPECIAL ACKNOWLEDGMENT

I was fortunate enough to have the opportunity to meet with Bekah Salwasser, Executive Vice President, Social Impact of the Red Sox. Prior to this position, Salwasser joined the Red Sox Foundation in 2018 as Executive Director and still continues to hold this position in addition to serving as Chair of the Red Sox's Social Justice, Equity, and Inclusion Advisory Committee that formed in 2020 as a result of the racial injustices and police brutality observed in the United States, specifically after the death of George Floyd. Through this live case study, I was able to hear Salwasser's personal experience of navigating CSA efforts for the BLM movement through the Red Sox platform. While I am not basing my insights directly through this case study, I was able to observe CSA patterns that other corporations like Ben & Jerry's and Nike have in common with the Red Sox. This was a unique opportunity to hear the firsthand account of an executive in position during a major turning point in American history.

BLM CSA EFFORTS*

- Formation of Red Sox Social Justice, Equity, & Inclusion Advisory Committee June 2020.
- Delegating 10 subcommittees to specialize in goal-specific social justice objectives.
- Unbiased listening tour to gain feedback from employees to better its internal community.
- 250 foot-long BLM billboard on Massachusetts Turnpike.
- Accessible resources, guides, & information on BLM.
- Social media posts on @redsox and @redsoxfoundation pages.
- Honoring and amplifying Black voices and holidays through acknowledgment, resources, & social media campaigns.
- Supporting players' social justice initiatives.
- Transparency reports.
- Red Sox Scholars program
- Highlighting BLM signage throughout the franchise.

EVALUATION OF CSA EFFORTS

As the Red Sox, including the Red Sox Foundation and its Social Justice, Equity, and Inclusion Advisory Committee, continue to make diligent, striking CSA initiatives towards racial justice and the BLM movement, I have evaluated this franchise as one that genuinely cares about Black lives, especially during a time of hardship. While some of the feedback was profane and bigoted, Bekah Salwasser measured that as some indication of progress towards positive social impact and necessary conversations. I applaud the immense authentic CSA efforts that the Red Sox hit a home run on.

*After the death of George Floyd.

CSA BEST PRACTICES

Reflected in case study/CSA efforts?

- **Be Authentic.**

- Without it, efforts are likely acts of performative activism as there is no foundation for genuine support and/or reasoning. Walk the talk.

- **Efforts should be reflective of both your organizational culture & BLM values.**

- Understanding your business internally will allow you to progress in external success in CSA efforts that benefit brand perception, and more importantly, Black lives.

- **Listen to what others have to say.**

- Utilizing feedback allows for further insights and ideas that you may not have even realized or thought about. People will also feel part of the process and feel heard. Social change cannot occur without speaking up.

- **Think before you speak.**

- Prevent regret and have a logical, well thought-out strategy plan that practices what you preach. Before making a statement that is almost impossible to take back, take the time to reflect on its potential implications that could do more harm than good.

- **Stay consistent.**

- Let your publics know that you consistently care about, and advocate for racial justice and supporting Black lives, especially when others aren't talking about it as much. Generation Z holds many brands to this accountable standard, so stay true to your vow/support, or else get ready to be called out– or even canceled.

- **Backlash ≠ Failure.**

- Progressive change cannot exist if everyone is on the same page. Conversations, even if controversial, are the building blocks of revolution.



My biggest takeaway from these case studies analyzing CSA is the key of authenticity.

Authenticity must be present in the corporations' organizational culture, from its values to internal policies to its mission. Without establishing this basis, authentic efforts cannot be produced if there is no basis of it. A corporation should use its own culture and values to craft its best tactics regarding CSA, while also maintaining authenticity to itself, target market, BLM movement, and communities.

Acknowledging past mistakes and making changes to avoid them again has also been deemed somewhat successful when corporations reassess their purpose and contribution to society. This allows a corporation to move its position on the wide "spectrum" of CSA perception– positive, controversial, and negative. To avoid performative activism that's often the root of many CSA failures, I advise public relations professionals and corporations to take a stand, only when it is right for them and the movement they are supporting.

From this project, I can conclude that corporations' publics responded best to CSA efforts that showed and exercised legitimate, authentic support and initiatives for the BLM movement and the Black community, more than beyond a haphazard social media post. When your actions reflect your words, all stakeholders, including the brand, BLM advocates, BIPOC identities, and publics, should prosper from positive CSA outcomes that lead to progressive social change.



For once,
Don't Do It.



BLACK LIVES MATTER.