

Selfridges reflects on racial inequality, aims to drive diversity

May 26, 2021



Selfridges is committed to driving diversity and inclusion. Image credit: Selfridges

By NORA HOWE

British department store chain Selfridges has invited its team members to share their thoughts on how the company has changed its business since the murder of George Floyd, and subsequent racial reckoning, one year ago.

Subscribe to **Luxury Daily**
Plus: Just released
State of Luxury 2019 **Save \$246 ▶**

On May 25, 2020, Mr. Floyd was murdered by a Minneapolis police officer, an incident that sparked international outrage, and for many individuals and companies, served as a catalyst for systemic change. In a contemplative and emotional short film, Selfridges looks back on a year of social consciousness and looks forward to new diversity and inclusion agendas.

One year later

In June 2020, Selfridges prompted employees to suggest ways the company could effectively and appropriately support diversity and inclusion.

One employee suggested not making a token gesture in response to the events of the previous few weeks, but rather a genuine shift rooted within changing the mindset and actions of people.

As businesses discuss sustainability and future-proofing, another employee made the point that people are an integral part of that, and questioned whether Selfridges is sustainable in how it treats and recognizes people of color, queer people and those of different religions.

In discussing diversity, one team member insisted companies go beyond simply hitting diversity quotas, and suggested helping people unlearn unconscious biases that perpetuate systemic racism in the home, at work and in society.

Another individual recounts friends and colleagues asking him what they could do to foster diversity and inclusion in the workplace, and he recommended educating oneself, employing people of diverse backgrounds and elevating them.

Selfridges employees share how the company has implemented change and what it can still do

One year later, the same employees were asked to share their thoughts on the progress Selfridges has made since

the events of 2020, and what it can do to continue driving positive change.

Across the board, the team members in the film believe that Selfridges has made progress, specifically in its willingness to engage in difficult conversations surrounding racism and discrimination.

Following Mr. Floyd's murder, Selfridges made an effort to speak with its team members about what the company could do, and made a commitment to fostering growth through open conversation. In doing that, employees seem to feel freer to voice their opinions without consequences and to be heard.

Employees featured in the film still believe that Selfridges has a responsibility to set a tone for change, considering its vast influence on the retail world. One individual pointed out that once a person or company is in a position of influence, they must use that influence to be as positive towards change as possible.

Another member of the Selfridges team suggested more concrete steps the company can take, such as more Black leadership.

"We are not doing our Black team members or team members of color any justice by having an all-white leadership team," said Shelby Southall, internal communications advisor for Selfridges Birmingham, in the film.

Some would like to see Selfridges purchasing more Black-owned brands, bringing representation and diversity to its product offerings.



Farai London is a Black-owned fashion brand offered at Selfridges. Image credit: Farai London

As consumers continue seeking companies and brands who align with their values and offer transparency, especially in the current social climate, Selfridges' spotlight on their own employees illustrates a sense of authenticity.

Committing to diversity

While the journey to equality has merely just begun for some, companies in various sectors have made positive strides toward diversity and inclusivity beyond posting a black square on Instagram.

British online retailer Matchesfashion recently became the first U.K.-based company to join the 15 Percent Pledge commitment which encourages companies to give Black-owned businesses at least 15 percent of their shelf space.

The retailer stated that, by 2026, 15 percent of its purchasing budget will be allocated to Black-owned, Black-founded and Black-fronted brands. At the moment, Black-owned businesses make up only 3 percent of the designers Matchesfashion carries.

Founded by **Brother Vellies** creative director Aurora James after the murder of Mr. Floyd, the 15 Percent Pledge has also recruited LVMH-owned retailer Sephora and U.S. retailer Bloomingdale's ([see story](#)).

Beauty brand Este Lauder gave their platform to Black women in a special series, inviting them to share their perspectives on the beauty industry. Rather than turning to celebrities, models or influencers, the brand tapped its own employees for the project.

Each woman spoke candidly about the beauty of diversity and offered their perspectives on various aspects of the topic. For example, director of consumer engagement Maiah Martin admitted how challenging it is to be underrepresented in corporate settings and be seen as a representative for an entire community.

Through corporate initiatives, Ms. Martin works to uplift the Black community and other underrepresented groups ([see story](#)).

© 2021 Napean LLC. All rights reserved.

Luxury Daily is published each business day. Thank you for reading us. Your **feedback** is welcome.